



COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION
DRIVE, ROOM 102A
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 12/12/2023

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, Sonoma County Water Agency Board of Directors, Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District Board of Directors, Community Development Commission Board of Commissioners

Department or Agency Name(s): Permit Sonoma, Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, Community Development Commission, Sonoma County Public Infrastructure, Regional Parks, Agriculture/Weights & Measures, and Sonoma County Water Agency

Staff Name and Phone Number: Sonoma County Water Agency - Kevin Booker (521-1865), Regional Parks - Hattie Brown (565-3220), Permit Sonoma - Alisa Keenan (565-2518), Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District - Catherine Iantosca (565-7262), Community Development Commission - Marc Chandler (565-7524), Sonoma Public Infrastructure - Greg Chiossi (565-7579), Agriculture/Weights & Measures - Sue Ostrom (565-3836), General Services - Mike Volatile (565-1957)

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

Annual Countywide Landscape Management Report FY 22/23

Recommended Action:

Accept the Countywide Annual Landscape Management Report FY 22/23-Informational Only

Executive Summary:

On June 4, 2019, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, the Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Water Agency (Sonoma Water), the Board of Directors of the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space), and the Board of Commissioners of the Sonoma County Community Development Commission (CDC) passed concurrent Resolution #19-0246, establishing pest management policies and prohibiting the use of synthetic pesticides, including herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides in sensitive areas. Among the goals of Resolution #19-0246 were to reduce human contact with synthetic herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides through the reduction of application and use in public spaces and to have a publicly available list of "no synthetic spray" zones to enhance transparency and accountability. Resolution #19-0246 directed Permit Sonoma staff to prepare an annual report on the pesticide use of the four agencies.

Pursuant to Resolution #19-0246, Regional Parks, Sonoma County Public Infrastructure, Permit Sonoma, Agriculture/Weights & Measures, Sonoma Water, Ag + Open Space, and the CDC are providing this annual report for the 2022/2023 fiscal year.

Of the 427 gallons of product applied in 2022/2023, 405 gallons were applied by Sonoma Public Infrastructure, in response to increased vegetation resulting from the heavy rainfall delivered during the 2022-2023 winter season.

Discussion:

2022/2023 Vegetation Management Summary

Since the adoption of Resolution 19-0246 in June 2019, use of herbicides, including glyphosate, has decreased by Sonoma County, Sonoma Water, Ag + Open Space, and the Community Development Commission. This is primarily due to the development and implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plans and related policies, emphasizing the use of physical, biological, and mechanical controls over the use of chemical controls and establishing a policy that using chemicals for vegetation management should be implemented on a limited basis and when no other alternative is deemed feasible.

Over the course of the past 15 years of data collection, fiscal years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 showed a historically low herbicide use. While some of this use can be attributed to effective IPM practices, unique circumstances and challenges presented during those two years resulted in an overall decrease of herbicide use. COVID restrictions were the primary challenge with vegetation management options. Due to social distancing requirements, crews could not implement proper protocols for herbicide application, which involves a two-person team in a vehicle. While there was not necessarily a decreased need for herbicides during COVID, crews opted for less effective practices to adhere to restrictions, such as mechanical removal methods.

Rainfall also plays a significant role in vegetation management needs. Rainy seasons with high rain fall will result in more vegetation removal needs, including the need to use herbicides for effective removal. Lower rain fall years will generally have less vegetation management activities. Additionally, short, intense rain events can also result in rapid and repetitive vegetation growth, keeping soils saturated for longer periods of time, resulting in frequent revegetation.

While the data shows there has been an uptick in herbicide usage in FY 22/23, the overall use of Glyphosate remains lower than prior to Resolution 19-0246 being adopted. Total Glyphosate use in 2018/2019 was 719 gallons. Since adopting IPM practices county-wide, use has decreased to 98 gallons in 2020/2021, 150 gallons during 2021/2022 and 427 gallons in 2022/2023. Of the 427 gallons applied in 2022/2023, 405 gallons were applied by SPI in response to increased vegetation resulting from the heavy rainfall delivered during the 2022-2023 winter season.

While IPM practices and related policies have reduced the overall use of herbicides, the use of herbicides continues to be a necessary practice, even on a limited and reduced basis. The amount of herbicide use will continue to vary year-to-year and between departments. Total rainfall will continue to play a primary factor on the need for herbicide use and account for future fluctuations.

Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

Ag + Open Space is committed to avoiding the use of synthetic pesticides in sensitive areas, and to support this commitment has compiled all known information regarding sensitive species and habitats that occur on its properties. Ag + Open Space implements an integrated approach in which synthetic pesticides are used conservatively and only as necessary, and will not use a synthetic pesticide unless: 1) there is no other option available to control an extreme infestation; 2) the environmental benefit is clear, and outweighs the negative impacts of continued weed infestation; 3) only licensed professionals are involved in the application; 4) there is minimal risk of harmful exposure to humans or to sensitive resources; and 5) the application is part of an intentional strategy to transition over time to alternative methods of invasive species control such as mechanical removal, grazing, or prescribed burning.

Community Development Commission

In addition to measures that ensure safe and sanitary housing, the CDC is responsible for weed and other fire abatement measures. CDC contracts with property management companies for landscape services. When practical, manual controls such as mowing and debris removal are employed. In certain cases, vendors used Round-Up, which was limited to small areas around the Russell Avenue property.

The CDC is committed to the responsible good stewardship of agency owned and managed properties while working to ensure it meets the obligations of providing safe and sanitary housing, employing best practices at commercial properties, and effectively mitigating weeds and other pest and fire hazards. CDC is fully engaged with vendors in monitoring their pesticide and herbicide use on CDC owned properties and in using the most suitable organic alternatives available and to further work on prevention measures to avoid issues from arising.

Regional Parks

Regional Parks is committed to reducing the risk of toxin exposure for both people and pets that use the parks. Regional Parks uses a range of techniques to manage vegetation including grazing, prescribed fire, mowing, weed whacking, and construction of shaded fuel breaks, as well as pesticides when necessary. Regional Parks is committed to eliminating the use of synthetic pesticides for routine, ongoing maintenance to control invasive weeds. Regional Parks maintains the use of synthetic pesticides to treat and control specific, targeted pest invasions when other means of control are inadequate. All pesticide use is reported to the California Department of Pesticide Regulation through the Sonoma County Department of Agriculture/ Weights & Measures. Regional Parks has decreased the use of pesticides over the last 10 years. Use of all pesticides, including glyphosate, are extremely low, while the acres of land Regional Parks owns and operates is at an all-time high.

Sonoma Water

Sonoma Water is responsible for maintaining buildings and facilities for water supply, flood control, and sanitation across Sonoma County. In addition, Sonoma Water manages approximately 75 miles of engineered flood control channels and 100 miles of modified or natural channels for flood water conveyance and habitat enhancement. Sonoma Water uses a range of methods to meet its ongoing flood management requirements, as well as safely maintaining vegetation around its various facilities, while also meeting multiple objectives such as resource protection and environmental sustainability. These methods include sediment removal, bank stabilization, and various vegetation management activities such as hand and mechanical removal, grazing, and prescribed burning. Sonoma Water uses the minimum amount of herbicide necessary to control invasive plant species that are problematic for its water supply, wastewater, and flood control facilities. Sonoma Water uses a blended outlook within the stream maintenance program. Herbicides are used only when necessary, and will not be used unless: a) there is no other reasonable option available; b) the environmental benefit is clear; c) only licensed professionals are involved in the application; d) there is minimal risk of harmful exposure to sensitive receptors; and e) the application is part of an overall strategy to reduce herbicide usage over time and to seek out alternative methods of invasive species control such as animal grazing.

Public Infrastructure

Sonoma County Public Infrastructure does not have any landscape management responsibilities involving the use of pesticides by County staff. The Department manages 1,368 miles of roadway, refuse sites, road yards,

and airport property utilizing mechanical control of vegetation as much as possible avoiding the use of synthetic herbicides in sensitive areas and makes herbicide applications in a manner that minimizes risk to human health and the environment. In fiscal year 2022/2023 the Department used only glyphosate and triclopyr registered for aquatic and terrestrial use as post-emergent herbicides, even though applicators do not spray into water.

Strategic Plan:

NA

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

No

INSTRUCTIONS: If 'Yes' to the above, or if equity analysis was conducted, include requisite information in this section staff's discussion, findings, and recommendations as it directly relates to this item's requested action(s).

Prior Board Actions:

- 12/06/2022 The Board approved the 2021/22 vegetation management annual report.
- 12/16/2021 The Board approved the 2020/21 vegetation management annual report.
- 12/15/2020: The Board approved the 2019/20 vegetation management annual report.
- 04/07/2020: The Board approved the 2018/19 vegetation management annual report.
- 01/14/2020: The Board approved the submitted maps of the designated "No Synthetic Spray" Zones.
- 06/04/2019: The Board approved by Resolution #19-0246 adopting countywide policies on pesticide use and reporting.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

There are no known fiscal impacts

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

There are no known staffing impacts

Attachments:

- Att 1: 22/23 Annual Vegetation Management Report
- Att 2: Board of Supervisors Resolution 19-0246

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

None