16.0 WILDFIRE

The 2010 HFRP Certified EIR considered the potential for construction and operation of the park to expose people and structures to wildfires. However, the State CEQA Guidelines were amended in 2019 to include new thresholds related to wildfire. Because the 2010 HFRP Certified EIR was prepared prior to adoption of the 2019 amendments and because the County is conducting a Subsequent EIR Analysis, evaluation of the potential for park operations to create wildfire related impacts is evaluated for both the existing HFRP and the proposed trails expansion areas.

This section describes wildfire conditions and wildfire behavior, identifies the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) fire hazard severity zones for the existing HFRP and proposed trail expansion areas, and describes the CAL FIRE battalion that would provide first response to wildfires in the project area. Impacts are evaluated relative to the potential for the proposed project to exacerbate wildfire risks or expose people or structures to significant risks.

16.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE 2010 HFRP CERTIFIED EIR

Chapter 13 of the 2010 HFRP Certified EIR included an analysis of wildfire impacts. Impact 13-3, “Public Services and Utilities – Increase in Demand for Fire Services” discussed the park environmental and regulatory setting, potential impacts associated with the risk of wildfire and a potential increase in demand for fire services as a result. Construction and use of the park facilities could cause an increase in the potential for wildfires. However, with the implementation of fire suppression measures, including the establishment and maintenance of 120 acres of shaded fuel breaks, helicopter landing zones, construction of emergency access bridges over Raccoon Creek, an emergency water storage tank with hydrant, advanced notice to CAL FIRE of any events having greater than 30 vehicles (or over 100 people), and consultation with CAL FIRE on local fire conditions, all of which would improve CAL FIRE’s ability to respond more quickly to fires and would reduce the severity and size of potential fires, the project was not expected to cause a significant increase in the demand for fire services, and the impact was considered to be less than significant.

16.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

16.2.1 CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION

The existing HFRP and proposed Trails Expansion area are within CAL FIRE’s Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit (CAL FIRE 2018a). The CAL FIRE Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit (Unit) encompasses all of Nevada, Yuba, Placer, Sierra, and Sutter counties and extends from the Sacramento Valley floor over the crest of the Sierra Nevada to the Nevada state line. The total acreage in the Unit is 2,911,086, with approximately 1,200,000 acres served by CAL FIRE. Of the total acres, approximately 65 percent is forested land. The balance of acres divides nearly equally between grass and brush (CAL FIRE 2018a). CAL FIRE strives to extinguish 95 percent of all wildland fires at 10 acres or less.

The Unit provides various levels of fire protection service through cooperative agreements with three counties and six fire districts. At peak season, the Unit staffs 18 fire stations, an air attack base, a conservation camp (with five year-round hand crews), five Registered Professional Foresters skilled in forest management, four lookouts, fire-prevention bureau, and a pre-fire planning office. In addition, the Unit maintains three bulldozer/transport
combinations, a road grader, front-loader and dump truck with numerous operators skilled in all aspects of equipment operations, including bulldozer firefighting operations (CAL FIRE 2018a).

The existing HFRP and proposed Trail Expansion areas are within Battalion 18 of CAL FIRE’s Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit (CAL FIRE 2018a). Battalion 18 is described below.

**BATTALION 18**

Battalion 18 includes unincorporated areas within Placer County and northwest Auburn. Highway 80 borders the eastern portion of the battalion and Highway 193 comprises the southern boundary. The topography is characteristic of the Sierra Nevada foothills containing gentle slopes in the flat valley areas to steep inner gorge canyons along upper watercourses. Fuels are a mosaic of grasses, mixed brush, oak woodlands and mixed hardwood-conifer (CAL FIRE 2018a).

Two staffed Placer County Fire Department/CAL FIRE stations are in the Battalion 18 response area. The Atwood Station (#180) houses two engines and a ladder truck – staffing at this station allows for two of the three vehicles to be used at one time; the Ophir Station (#182) houses one engine and a water tender – staffing at this station allows for one of the vehicles to be used at a time. In the Lincoln Battalion, Lincoln Station (#70) has one engine. CAL FIRE staffing levels are generally greater in the summer months (during fire season) and lower in winter months because of the reduced demand for fire services. Placer County Fire Department staffing levels remain consistent throughout the year.

Most wildfires in the Battalion 18 service area have resulted from undetermined causes (35 percent). Other common fire causes within the Battalion 18 service area include debris escape (22 percent), miscellaneous ignitions (11 percent), and vehicles and equipment (18 percent) (CAL FIRE 2018a).

According to CAL FIRE, there have been 14 fires that burned over 20 acres within 10 miles of HFRP and the expansion area in the past 55 years. Causes included lightning strikes, downed power lines, and motor vehicles (DiMaggio, pers. comm., 2018). Since the opening of HFRP in 2006, there have been no known wildland fires originated by HFRP users.

**16.2.2 PLACER COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT**

Through a Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement with CAL FIRE, Placer County Fire Department integrates state and local firefighting resources, both career and volunteer, into an effective combination fire department. Through its contract with CAL FIRE, the County pays for 60 firefighters at eight, 24/7 fire stations, located in Alta, Colfax, Bowman, North Auburn, Ophir, Lincoln, Dry Creek and the Sunset Area in western Placer.

To reduce response times in North Auburn, Placer County Fire Department/CAL FIRE is seeking resources to staff the currently-closed fire station located on the northeast corner of the intersection of Lone Star Road and Highway 49 (Lone Star Station #184). Staffing and reopening Station #184 would improve response times to all the properties north of Dry Creek Road, including the expansion properties (see Section 13.0, “Public Services” for further discussion).
16.2.3 WILDFIRE CLASSIFICATIONS AND BEHAVIOR

Fires are classified by where in the fuel strata they burn: surface fires, understory fires, and crown fires (California Forest Stewardship Program 2015). Surface fires are the most common. Depending on the fuels, weather, and topography, these fires can be low to high intensity. Understory fires have flame lengths up to 10 feet. They consume surface fuels, small trees, brush, and lower branches of overstory trees. Crown fires reach into the crowns of trees with flame lengths more than 10 feet.

Fire season is the period when fires are expected to occur, based on knowledge of long-term climate patterns. The fire season in Placer County, including the existing HFRP and proposed Trails Expansion area, occurs generally in late May through November (CAL FIRE 2018a). Red Flag warnings are common throughout summer and are largely attributed to low relative humidity and unusually strong north winds (CAL FIRE 2018a).

Wildland fire behavior is based on three primary factors: topography, weather, and fuels. The following discussion briefly describes how each of these factors influences wildfire behavior within the existing HFRP and proposed Trail Expansion areas.

TOPOGRAPHY

Topographic features such as slope and aspect influence a fire’s intensity, direction, and rate of spread. Fires burning in flat or gently sloping areas tend to burn more slowly and spread in wider ellipses than fires on steep slopes. Streams, rivers, and canyons can channel local diurnal and general winds, which can accelerate the fire’s speed and affect its direction, especially during foehn (warm, dry, and unusually strong) wind events (California Forest Stewardship Program 2015).

The topography of the existing HFRP and proposed trail expansion area is characteristic of the Sierra Nevada foothills, containing gentle slopes in the flat valley areas to steep inner gorge canyons along upper watercourses. Elevations range in the Harvego Preserve from approximately 500 feet above mean sea level (amsl) in the northwestern portion (along the Bear River) to 1,694 feet at Bald Rock Mountain. Elevations in the Outman Preserve range from 800 to 1,480 feet. The majority of the Liberty Ranch extends north from the highest point on Big Hill with an elevation of 1,613 feet. The Taylor Ranch ranges from 1,000 to 1,400 feet amsl and the Kotomyan Preserve ranges from approximately 1,300 to 1,500 feet amsl. The Twilight Ride parcel varies from approximately 1,100 to 1,200 feet amsl. See Exhibit 16-1 for a map that depicts areas of steep slope.

WEATHER

Weather conditions influence the potential for fire ignition, rates of spread, intensity, and the direction(s) toward which a fire burns. Temperature, relative humidity, and wind are the variables used to predict fire behavior. The Mediterranean Climate of the project area is characterized by hot, dry summers and cool, rainy winters. The average yearly temperature is approximately 72 degrees Fahrenheit (°F). The average winter temperature is a moderate 49°F. During summer, average temperatures often exceed 90°F with extremely low humidity (Anchor Point 2012). The area’s mean annual precipitation is 45 inches, which falls entirely as rain mostly during the winter months (November–February) (NOAA 2019).
Exhibit 16-1. Site Topography
Wind plays a role in the flammability of fuels by removing moisture through evaporation, preheating fuels in a fire’s path, and increasing spotting distances (the distance at which a flying ember might ignite a spot fire). Fires during foehn events can result in extreme fire behavior because they are particularly strong and dry, thus reducing fuel moistures (California Forest Stewardship Program 2015). Prevailing winds are from the south and southwest with an average wind speed of 5 miles per hour (Placer County 2012).

**FUELS**

Vegetation usually provides most of the fuel that feeds wildfire. The volume, character, distribution, and arrangement of vegetation all greatly influence fire behavior (California Forest Stewardship Program 2015). Fuels in the project area are composed of oak woodlands interspersed with annual grassland and riparian corridors (see Section 12.0, “Biological Resources,” for further discussion).

Within the existing HFRP, fuel reduction activities are conducted based on the *Hidden Falls Regional Park Vegetation, Fuels and Range Management Plan* (Placer 2007). This plan identifies methods for modifying vegetation to reduce existing fuel loads and lower the chance a fire would start in HFRP and move outside the HFRP boundary (see Section 13.0 “Public Services and Utilities”).

Shaded fuel breaks (SFB) are areas on the tops of hills where trees have been thinned, remaining trees have been trimmed of their lower branches, and shrubs and bushes have primarily been removed. SFB can be used by fire personnel to suppress the advancement of wildfires. The existing HFRP has 120 acres of SFB, and the Harvego Preserve has an additional 120 acres of SFB (see Exhibit 3.4 in Chapter 3.0, “Project Description”). The 120 acres of SFB at HFRP, and other key areas of this property, are mowed or grazed annually by goats and sheep to keep the lower vegetation maintained.

### 16.2.4 FIRE HAZARD SEVERITY ZONES

Fire hazard severity zones are measured qualitatively, based on vegetation, topography, weather, crown fire potential (a fire’s tendency to burn upward into trees and tall brush), and ember production and movement within the area in question.

Fire prevention areas considered to be under state jurisdiction are referred to as “State Responsibility Areas” or SRAs, and CAL FIRE is responsible for vegetation fires within SRA lands.¹ In general, SRA lands contain trees producing, or capable of producing, forest products; timber, brush, undergrowth, and grass, whether of commercial value or not, that provide watershed protection for irrigation or for domestic or industrial use; or lands in areas that are principally used, or are useful for, range or forage purposes.

CAL FIRE is required to define three fire hazard levels for SRAs: moderate, high, and very high. As shown in Exhibit 16-2, HFRP and the proposed expansion area are in CAL FIRE zones designated as Moderate and High Fire Severity Zones (CAL FIRE 2007).² Areas bordering the Bear River north of the Harvego Preserve are rated

---

¹ California Public Resources Code (PRC) Sections 4125–4127 define a State Responsibility Area as lands in which the financial responsibility for preventing and suppressing wildland fire resides with the State of California.

² CAL FIRE’s Online Fire Hazard Severity Zone viewer was accessed on April 23, 2019, to confirm the hazard severity zone rating for the project area (http://egis.fire.ca.gov/FHSZ/).
Exhibit 16-2. Fire Hazard Severity Map
as High and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, and areas to the immediate south, west, and east of the project area are rated as Moderate or High Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

16.3 REGULATORY SETTING

16.3.1 FEDERAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

No federal plans, policies, regulations, or laws related to wildfire hazards are applicable to the proposed project.

16.3.2 STATE PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

CALIFORNIA STRATEGIC FIRE PLAN

The 2018 California Strategic Fire Plan (CAL FIRE 2018b) is the statewide plan for reducing the risk of wildfire. The plan’s basic principles are as follows:

► Involve the community in the fire management planning process.
► Assess public and private resources that could be damaged by wildfires.
► Develop pre-fire management solutions and implement cooperative programs to reduce the community’s potential wildfire losses.

One of the more important objectives of the California Fire Plan pertains to pre-fire management solutions. Included within the realm of pre-fire management solutions are fuel breaks, the establishment of wildfire protection zones, and prescribed fires to reduce the availability of fire fuels. In addition, the plan recommends that clearance laws, zoning, and related fire safety requirements be implemented by state and local authorities to address fire-resistant construction standards, hazard reduction near structures, and infrastructure.

The California Fire Plan does not contain any specific requirements or regulations. It assesses current fire management practices and standards and recommends how best to improve the practices and standards in place.

CALIFORNIA PUBLIC RESOURCES CODE

Section 4427

PRC Section 4427 limits the use of any motor, engine, boiler, stationary equipment, welding equipment, cutting torch, tarpot, or grinding device from which a spark, fire, or flame may originate, when the equipment is located on or near land covered by forest, brush, or grass. Before such equipment may be used, all flammable material, including snags, must be cleared away from the area around such operation for 10 feet. A serviceable round-point shovel with an overall length of not less than 46 inches and a backpack pump water-type fire extinguisher, fully equipped and ready for use, must be maintained in the immediate area during the operation.

Section 4431

PRC Section 4431 requires users of gasoline-fueled internal combustion–powered equipment operating within 25 feet of flammable material on or near land covered by forest, brush, or grass to have a tool for firefighting purposes at the immediate location of use. This requirement is limited to periods when burn permits are necessary. Under Section 4431, the Director of Forestry and Fire Protection specifies the type and size of fire extinguisher
necessary to provide at least a minimum assurance of controlling fire caused by use of portable power tools during various climatic and fuel conditions.

Section 4442

PRC Section 4442 prohibits the use of internal combustion engines running on hydrocarbon fuels on any land covered by forest, brush, or grass unless the engine is equipped with a spark arrestor and is constructed, equipped, and maintained in good working order when traveling on any such land. A

16.3.3 LOCAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND ORDINANCES

NEVADA-YUBA-PLACER UNIT STRATEGIC FIRE PLAN

The Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit Strategic Fire Plan implements the State Strategic Fire Plan and was developed based on the State Strategic Fire Plan goals. The Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit priorities and goals are as follows:

Priorities:

1. To reduce the risks to citizens and emergency responders from wildland fire.
2. Develop a “land stewardship” ethic in the residents of the Unit.

Goals:

1. Demonstrate methods that individuals and the community can use to properly manage their lands to improve forest health and reduce the ignitability of structures in the Wildland Urban Interface.
2. Raise citizen and stakeholder awareness of fire risks and enlist their help and participation in risk reduction.
3. Assist local government in developing standards, policies, and plans, which will result in local, and landscape level fuel modifications.
4. Implement local and landscape level projects and programs that decrease fire risk and increase the potential for success on initial attack.

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN (CWPP)

According to the County’s website, the Placer County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is the result of a community-wide planning effort that included extensive field data gathering, compilation of existing documents and geographic information system (GIS) data, and scientific analyses and recommendations designed to reduce the threat of wildfire-related damages to values at risk. Values at risk include people, property, ecological elements, and other human and intrinsic values within the project area. They are identified by inhabitants as important to the way of life in the study area, and are particularly susceptible to damage from

---

A spark arrester is a device constructed of nonflammable materials used specifically to remove and retain carbon and other flammable particles larger than 0.0232 inch from the exhaust flow of an internal combustion engine that uses hydrocarbon fuels or that is qualified and rated by the U.S. Forest Service.
wildfire. The CWPP works in conjunction with and is supported and guided by the Strategic Fire Plans as outlined by CAL FIRE.

**Placer County General Plan**

The following are the relevant goals and policies identified by the *Placer County General Plan* (General Plan) (Placer County 2013) for hazardous materials and hazards.

**GOAL 8.C:** To minimize the risk of loss of life, injury, and damage to property and watershed resources resulting from unwanted fires.

- **Policy 8.C.7.** The County shall work with local fire protection agencies, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and the U.S. Forest Service to promote the maintenance of existing fuel breaks and emergency access routes for effective fire suppression.

- **Policy 8.C.11.** The County shall continue to work cooperatively with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and local fire protection agencies in managing wildland fire hazards.

**Placer County Local Hazard Mitigation Plan**

Placer County and 21 other jurisdictions prepared a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) update to the 2010 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approved Placer County Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan. The LHMP assesses the likely effects of wildfire and other natural hazards to county residents and property and established updated goals and mitigation projects to reduce the impacts of natural disaster on people, property and critical infrastructure.

The LHMP identifies a variety of pre-fire mitigation actions to prevent or mitigate the potential for wildfire through creation and maintenance of shaded fuel breaks that slow speed and intensity of fires, public education programs to inform residents of actions to undertake or avoid, strategic planning to limit the Wildland Urban Interface, and vegetation management activity to reduce the amount of dry vegetation that serves as fuel to a wildfire (Placer County 2016).

**16.4  IMPACTS**

**16.4.1  Analysis Methodology**

This analysis of impacts of the proposed project related to wildfire hazards is based on a review of CAL FIRE’s Fire Hazard Severity Zone map for Placer County (CAL FIRE 2007) and review of the *Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit Strategic Fire Plan* (CAL FIRE 2018a) and *Placer County Community Wildfire Protection Plan* (Anchor Point 2012). Additional background information on current services, staffing, and equipment was obtained through consultation with the Placer County Fire Department and CAL FIRE.
16.4.2 **Thresholds of Significance**

**CEQA Thresholds**

Based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines and the County’s Initial Study Checklist, the project would have a significant wildfire impact if it would be in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones and would:

- substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan;
- due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire;
- require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines, or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts on the environment; or
- expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, because of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes.

**Issues Not Analyzed Further**

- **Emergency Response/Emergency Evacuation Plans:** Project-related construction activities and expansion of the HFRP trail network system would not substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan, because emergency ingress and egress routes would remain open and unblocked during both construction and operation. Emergency access to the HFRP is in place and includes three helipads, three bridge crossings over Raccoon and Deadman Creeks, and an all-weather road. According to CAL FIRE, evacuation plans are incident-specific, so evacuation routes are determined based on the nature of a particular incident (ignition site, prevailing winds, fire movement, etc.) and are not pre-determined routes. The project will provide a mapped system of emergency access routes that will identify and maintain all available ingress/egress routes throughout the existing HFRP and expansion area. A copy of the emergency access map for the existing HFRP is included as Exhibit 16-3. Similar maps would be completed in consultation with Placer County Fire Department/CAL FIRE prior to the opening of each phase to the public for the areas affected by that phase.

Mitigation measure S13-1 calls for provision of a Light Duty Response Vehicle (LRV) for the Placer County Fire Department/CAL FIRE in order to assist with impacts to emergency response efforts. The LRV would provide enhanced access for fire and emergency medical response to the existing HFRP and Trail Expansion areas. The LRV would also be available for use throughout the North Auburn/Ophir portions of the Placer County Fire Department/CAL FIRE jurisdiction, thus enhancing emergency response to more remote areas throughout the community. (See Mitigation Measure S13-1 in Chapter 13.0) As discussed further in Chapter 3.0, “Project Description,” and Impact 8-6 in Chapter 8.0, “Transportation and Circulation,” proposed emergency access/maintenance roads would provide better emergency access to all portions of the project area than occurs now, including those across Raccoon Creek. Additional information on emergency response is provided in Chapter 13.0.
Exhibit 16-3. Existing HFRP Emergency Access Map

Vehicle Bridge Constraints

Salmon Run Bridge
- Vehicle Load Limit: 72,000 lbs
- Clear Width: 11'9" rail-to-rail
- Rail Height: 54"

Canyon View Bridge
- Vehicle Load Limit: 36,000 lbs
- Clear Width: 11'9" rail-to-rail
- Rail Height: 54"

Whiskey Diggins Bridge
- Vehicle Load Limit: 40,000 lbs
- Clear Width: 11'9" rail-to-rail
- Rail Height: 54"

Contact
Physical Address
Hidden Falls Regional Park
7587 Mears Place
Auburn, CA 95602

Emergency - Dial 911

Non-Emergency:
Placer County Department of Public Works
Parks Division
391 County Center Drive, Suite 220
Auburn, CA 95603
Office: (530) 686-4901
Email: parks@placer.ca.gov
**Downstream Runoff, Post-Fire Slope Instability, or Drainage Changes:** Construction and operation of the HFRP Trails Expansion project would not create conditions that cause runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes that would expose people or structures to significant risks. The County would implement construction-related and post-development best management practices in the expansion area and comply with regulatory requirements that manage stormwater runoff and erosion (see Mitigation Measure S5-1 in Section 5.0, “Soils, Geology, and Seismicity,” and Mitigation Measure 11-1 in Section 11.0, “Hydrology and Water Quality”). Standard trail design would follow the natural drainage patterns and contours as well as topography, soils, waterways, and natural vegetation. Construction on steep slopes would be avoided during final design of the alignment except at places such as the bridge overcrossings of Raccoon Creek. Further, there are no areas of shallow slope instability within the proposed expansion area. Section 5.0, “Soils, Geology, and Seismicity,” and Section 11.0, “Hydrology and Water Quality,” provide a detailed discussion of stormwater runoff, slope stability, and drainage changes.

### 16.4.3 Impact Analysis

**IMPACT 16-1** Wildfire—Potential for increased risk to human health through exposure to uncontrolled wildfire or from construction and maintenance of infrastructure that could spark a wildfire. The potential exists for the project to expose people to an uncontrolled wildfire and to exacerbate risk of wildfire during construction, maintenance, and public use of the trail system. The County would construct beneficial improvements that would provide better emergency access than currently exists and would increase the ability of emergency responders to fight wildfire. The project promotes fire safety through construction of parking areas sufficiently sized to accommodate a helicopter landing zone and a 12,000-gallon water tank with hydrant for use in fire suppression at each trailhead entry. In addition, the County would comply with all laws, plans, policies, and regulations related to fire safety and wildfire suppression and would implement management actions and fire response facilities that would reduce the risk of wildfire. The County must also comply with mitigation measures intended to lower the risks from fires started during construction and maintenance activities, including purchase of a Light Rescue Vehicle for the Placer County Fire Department/CAL FIRE’s use. The vehicle would aid with potential wildfires not only within the existing HFRP and trails expansion areas, but also within the North Auburn/Ophir portions of the jurisdiction of the Placer County Fire Department/CAL FIRE. Implementation of these project-specific components along with the implementation of the mitigation measures would result in a less than significant impact from wildfires and other associated risks.

**Significance** Potentially Significant (New impact not previously considered in the prior analysis in the 2010 HFRP Certified EIR)

**Mitigation Proposed**

- Mitigation Measure S16-1a – Curtail certain construction and maintenance activities during high-risk wildfire periods
- Mitigation Measure S16-1b – Provide on-site source of water during certain construction and maintenance activities
- Mitigation Measure S13-1 - County shall purchase one Light Rescue Vehicle for use by the Placer County Fire Department/CAL FIRE

**Residual Significance** Less than Significant
**EXISTING HFRP**

HFRP is within a State Responsibility Area (SRA) where CAL FIRE’s Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit is primarily responsible for responding to wildland fires. CAL FIRE rated the overall fire danger for the park property as a Moderate to High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (CAL FIRE 2007). Depending on the equipment required for park maintenance, fire risks could result from vehicle mufflers, gasoline-powered tools, and other equipment could produce a spark, fire, or flame. Therefore, equipment use during high fire declaration may be restricted until the threat has lessened.

The Conditional Use Permit (CUP) approved in 2010 includes the Spears Ranch portion of HFRP. The CUP allows campfires in association with overnight educational or group camping at the ranch house site on the western end of the park. While neither camping nor campfires have occurred at HFRP, they would be restricted to designated fire pits in a developed campground area and allowed under restricted conditions and in consultation with CAL FIRE on local conditions. If a group camping area is developed, campfire restrictions would be consistent with other Placer County Campgrounds that restrict open fires during high fire risk portions of the year. Smoking is prohibited in HFRP.

HFRP facilities include a hydrant system attached to a 12,000-gallon emergency water storage system, three helicopter landing zones, and three emergency access bridges over Raccoon Creek and Deadman Creek. The existing HFRP has 120 acres of Shaded Fuel Breaks (SFB), as noted in Exhibit 16-3. The 120 acres of SFB and other key areas of HFRP are mowed or grazed annually by goats and sheep to keep the lower vegetation maintained. In addition, the County implements recommendations included in the *Hidden Falls Regional Park Vegetation, Fuels and Range Management Plan* and complies with all laws, plans, policies, and regulations related to fire safety and wildfire suppression identified in Section 16.3, “Regulatory Setting.”

Since the opening of HFRP in 2006, there have been no known wildland fires originated by HFRP users. The County complies with all state laws, plans, policies, and regulations regarding wildfire prevention and suppression. Placer County employs staff and rangers to patrol HFRP on a daily basis and provide observations and assistance to first responders through radio contact. Implementation of various measures included in the project would improve CAL FIRE and the Placer County Fire Department’s ability to respond more quickly to fires and would reduce the severity and size of potential fires. Therefore, the impact relevant to the existing HFRP area was considered *less than significant*.

**2019 HFRP TRAILS EXPANSION PROJECT IMPACT ANALYSIS**

The proposed expansion is within an SRA where CAL FIRE’s Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit is primarily responsible for responding to wildland fires. CAL FIRE identifies the proposed expansion area as being in both a Moderate Fire Hazard Severity Zone and a High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. The majority of the new trail system would be located in the Harvego Preserve, which is bordered by areas rated as Moderate, High, and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (CAL FIRE 2007).

**Construction Activities**

There is a potential for wildfire to occur during construction of new trails, bridges, overlooks, amenities, roads, and parking lots within the proposed expansion area. Construction activity associated with the proposed improvements ranges from hand held tools used to trim bushes and manipulate soil to heavy machinery required...
to grade land for creation of roadway/trail beds, parking lots, and cranes used to place bridge components (see Table 3-5 in Chapter 3, “Project Description”).

Construction activities could exacerbate the potential risk of wildfire by adding to ignition sources within the area if not properly controlled. Ignition sources include hot exhaust from a vehicle parked on dry grass or welding during high winds sending sparks that travel through the air and land igniting dry grass. Wildfire ignition from construction activity could increase the risk of exposure to pollutants and is considered a potentially significant impact. However, construction activities must comply with existing regulations discussed above and summarized below that restrict periods of activity to times that are not a high fire risk. The implementation of mitigation measures S16-1a “Curtail certain construction and maintenance activities during high risk wildfire periods” and S16-1b “Provide on-site source of water during certain construction and maintenance activities” will reduce the risks to less than significant.

Maintenance Activities

The proposed trail expansion system and recreational facilities would be designed to minimize on-going maintenance requirements; however, some regular maintenance of the trails and ancillary facilities would be required. Initial removal of excess fuels would be accomplished by some combination of mechanical equipment and hand tools. Ongoing maintenance to manage fuel loads and fire breaks/defensible space as well as other trail maintenance will require equipment that could exacerbate the risk of igniting a fire. Many of these activities are intended to reduce fire risks by managing fuel loads, creating fire breaks/defensible space or providing enhanced emergency vehicle access to increase the potential for success on the initial attack by CAL FIRE personnel aligned with the Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit Strategic Fire Plan. Depending on the equipment required for trail maintenance, equipment-related fire risks could persist, particularly during high-risk times. Motorized vehicles are to be prohibited on the trails on the Property, with the exception of the use by the landowner, County, contracted ranger services, PLT, and/or the trail easement holder, as needed for trail maintenance purposes, or access by emergency personnel for public health and safety, or as allowed under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Public Access

With increased public access, there is an increased potential for wildfire that is caused by human activities. Since the opening of HFRP in 2006, there have been no known wildland fires originated by HFRP users. As with the existing park, smoking would be prohibited within the Trail Expansion areas. Within the Trail Expansion areas, no campfires, stoves, or barbecues would be allowed. An educational campaign for park users would be implemented through the County’s website and via on-site information posted at all of the entrance areas. Public vehicles with combustion engines are prohibited within the trail expansion areas except for the parking areas, or as allowed under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Compliance with all state laws, plans, policies, and regulations regarding wildfire prevention and suppression, as well as the County’s incorporation of project components that would improve CAL FIRE’s ability to respond more quickly to wildfires would reduce the severity and size of potential wildfires. Project components that offset potential risk of wildfire include improved access to remote areas of the County, construction of helicopter landing zones, construction of multiple 12,000-gallon water tanks and hydrants, establishment and maintenance of defensible space, construction of bridges to improve access, and the daily presence of staff which provides improved situational awareness by reporting observations of smoke and providing assistance to first responders.
In addition to project elements, Mitigation Measure S13-1 requires that the County purchase one Light Rescue Vehicle (LRV) for use by the Placer County Fire Department/CAL FIRE. An LRV is comprised of a specialized vehicle body on a full-sized pickup truck chassis, which can reach more remote areas of rural property than full-sized fire engines can reach. The LRV would be equipped with apparatus for extinguishing wildfires in their early stages (including a water tank capacity of up to 500 gallons which can also carry fire retardant), and equipment for rescue and medical aid. Once put into service, the LRV would be available for emergency response not only for calls within HFRP and the trail expansion areas, but also for any call within the regional areas primarily served by the Placer County Fire Department/CAL FIRE, including greater North Auburn/Ophir, allowing faster and more versatile response to emergencies to areas around the project. Together, these elements will reduce wildfire risks and enhance the ability to respond to any potential wildfire event. For these reasons and the fact that smoking, fires, and public motorized vehicles will be prohibited in the expansion areas, the potential to exacerbate wildfire risks or expose people to significant other risks associated with public use would be reduced to less than significant.

**Project Benefits**

As with the existing HFRP, fire prevention activities would be conducted consistent with the *Hidden Falls Regional Park Vegetation, Fuels and Range Management Plan* (Placer 2007) for the expansion project trail network and park facilities. Vegetation management practices would be incorporated into the HFRP trails expansion project through thinning vegetation on regular basis around access roads, parking lots, along ridgelines, and around the perimeter of the trailheads. Pre-fire planning will be conducted in consultation with a registered professional forester as well as the PLT (for property it owns) and will be consistent with the CAL FIRE Nevada-Yuba-Placer Strategic Fire Plan.

The proposed project includes the construction of two new helicopter landing zones and installation of a 12,000-gallon water tank at each of the new park entrances. This would increase the potential for success during an initial attack on a wildfire. Consistent with the maintenance management plan for the existing HFRP, the water tanks would be inspected on a regular basis to ensure they are full and the distribution system to the hydrant is functional. Defensible spaces would be incorporated into the expansion area through thinning vegetation around parking lots and interior roads. Trails and bridges designed to accommodate emergency vehicles would be a minimum of 8–12 feet wide and would provide better emergency access (for fire suppression or emergency response) than exists today. Additionally, current ranger service would be expanded into new portions of the expansion area as they are opened to the public to provide public assistance and to have a presence at the park to monitor conditions.

The County would comply with all laws, plans, policies, and regulations related to fire safety and wildfire suppression identified in Section 16.3 above including the following requirements identified in the California Public Resources Code:

- PRC Section 4427, which identifies appropriate fire suppression equipment and stipulates removal of flammable materials to a distance of 10 feet from any equipment that could produce a spark, fire, or flame on days when burning permits are required;

- PRC Section 4428, which identifies additional firefighting equipment requirements during the period of highest fire danger (April 1–December 1); and
PRC Section 4431, which prohibits the use of portable tools powered by gasoline-fueled internal combustion engines within 25 feet of flammable materials when burning permits are required.

In addition to the items listed above, the following components are included in the project description in order to address CAL FIRE/Placer County Fire Department requirements and needs (see Tables 3-2, 3-3, and 3-4 in Chapter 3 for an overview of how expansion project phasing thresholds relate to the implementation of these components):

1. Emergency access to interior portions of the HFRP Trails Expansion area will be provided.

2. A 12-foot drivable fire access road reaching from each parking area into the Trails Expansion area as far as is reasonably possible (given topographic constraints and requirements of applicable conservation easements) will be provided.

3. All gates will have both Placer County Fire Department and CAL FIRE padlocks (state locks provided by CAL FIRE) and Knox padlocks (purchased by the County).

4. Parking areas will maintain clear fire access lanes of 20 feet, will meet fire truck turning radii, and will be able to support 75,000 pounds.

5. Vertical clearances along trails and fire access lanes shall provide a minimum of 15 feet of clearance.

6. Trails shall provide directional signage to guide HFRP Trails Expansion area users and emergency personnel to points of interest and escape routes.

7. Defensible space standards shall be met as they relate to any structures or neighbors’ structures.

8. CAL FIRE/Placer County Fire Department will be given room for a small information kiosk at each of the parking areas for use during peak fire season.

16.5 MITIGATION MEASURES

Mitigation Measure S16-1a - Curtail certain construction and maintenance activities during high risk wildfire periods

Construction and maintenance activities utilizing motorized equipment shall be curtailed during red-flag warning days and other high-risk periods characterized by low humidity and unusually windy conditions as determined by the Fire Department.

Mitigation Measure S16-1b - Provide on-site source of water during certain construction and maintenance activities

Construction and maintenance activities requiring motorized equipment will maintain a source of water on-site to address a potential ignition event caused by construction and maintenance activities.
Mitigation Measure S13-1 – County shall purchase one Light Rescue Vehicle for use by the Placer County Fire Department/CAL FIRE

The County shall fund the purchase of one light rescue vehicle (LRV) for use by Placer County Fire/CALFIRE. The LRV shall be purchased at the completion of the first phase of the Twilight Ride access and prior to opening of the parking area at Twilight Ride to the general public.