



Safe, Clean Water  
and Natural Flood Protection

PRIORITY F

## PROJECT F4: Vegetation Management for Access and Fire Safety

**PRIORITY F** Support public health and public safety for our community

YOUR TAX DOLLARS AT WORK



Valley Water

Safe,  
Clean  
Water

and Natural Flood Protection

## About the Project

This project supports Valley Water's ongoing vegetation management activities that reduce fire risk by maintaining creekside lands. These activities also ensure access for maintenance and emergency personnel and equipment.

The project includes vegetation management activities such as weed abatement, goat grazing, herbicide application and pruning to provide access and reduce fire risk. Before carrying out maintenance, Valley Water's personnel perform biological pre-construction surveys to minimize environmental impacts. Allocations for Project F4 also help fund future maintenance access of flood protection projects completed under the Safe, Clean Water Program.

Fire risk reduction will become a higher priority as the climate changes. This project will allow Valley Water to adapt to those changes.



Boom mowing on Thompson Creek, San José.

## Benefits

- Provides safe access for maintenance of creek channels
- Reduces fire risk along creek channels
- Addresses climate change by preparing for increased fire risk through vegetation management

## Key Performance Indicator

Provide vegetation management for access and fire risk reduction on an average of 495 acres per year, totaling 7,425 acres along levee, property lines and maintenance roads over a 15-year period.

## Valley Water Land Rights

As stewards of Santa Clara County's watersheds and hundreds of miles of streams, Valley Water maintains fuel breaks for public safety and to avoid property damage caused by fire. Valley Water performs various maintenance tasks on 275 miles, where Valley Water has land rights, of the 800 miles of creeks in Santa Clara County. Examples of these property rights include:

- Property owned by Valley Water is referred to as "in fee title." This property is managed with available resources consistent with federal, state and local laws and ordinances.
- Property where an exclusive easement is held, and the property owner is effectively excluded from actively using the property. This type of easement is typically managed similar to lands owned by Valley Water.
- Property where Valley Water has a limited easement for flood protection, storm drainage, or water conservation purposes. This type of easement typically provides the right but not the obligation to perform vegetation management and limits the purpose for which Valley Water can manage the vegetation.

## Mowing for Fuel Breaks

Valley Water complies with California Government Code section 51182 by maintaining fuel breaks within 30 feet of occupied structures on its property. However, the rules are different for land or water acquired or managed in a mostly natural state as habitat for wildlife, plant, or animal communities as described under California Government Code 51184. Valley Water also follows guidance recommended by the County Agricultural Commissioner's Office by clearing flammable vegetation on its property located within 30 feet of structures on neighboring properties.



Goats grazing along Coyote Creek, San José.

Valley Water routinely mows, in accordance with best practices, government code and applicable permits, along its property

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fence-lines, creek and levee slopes, floodplains, vacant parcels, percolation ponds, pipelines, dams and reservoirs, canals, open space areas, and other water utility facilities on its property. At its discretion, Valley Water may provide weed abatement on easements for access purposes but generally does not have the obligation to provide fuel breaks on private property.

Most trailside vegetation is maintained by the county or the city within whose jurisdiction it falls. Annual mowing work typically begins in March and continues through summer. Depending on growth and late spring rainfall, mowing may be repeated in some areas.

## Herbicide Use

Herbicide is another tool Valley Water uses selectively to help maintain fuel breaks and maintenance access. Valley Water has an integrated vegetation management program in which other weed control methods such as mowing, hand removal, mulching, and or grazing are utilized for efficiency and in consideration of biological resources. These methods are favored and used when cost-effective.

As part of the integrated vegetation management program, herbicides may be applied to Valley Water properties year-round at the appropriate season. Herbicides are used in a manner that is least disruptive to biological resources and only after the appropriate biological surveys and clearances have been conducted. The agencies that permit Valley Water to perform vegetation control work have vetted and approved the use of herbicides. These include the Regional Water Quality Control Board, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, National Marine Fisheries Service, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Valley Water employees are licensed to apply herbicides by the State of California Department of Pesticide Regulation, which has robust testing and training requirements. Valley Water employees are also trained in Best Management Practices and proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE). As safeguards, herbicide applications are not made within 24 hours of a half-inch of predicted rainfall, during high temperatures, or when wind conditions exceed 10 mph.

## Pruning & Trees

Valley Water's tree maintenance policy balances native plant preservation with the community's need for flood protection, maintenance access, fire prevention, safety, and avoidance of property damage. Maintenance roads are kept clear for vehicle access to allow for inspection and maintenance. This clearance also allows for access by other emergency services such as police and fire. At times, Valley Water will take the opportunity to remove invasive plants or trees growing near a fence line to maintain fire breaks, reduce fuel loads and improve access. Valley Water may also conduct tree work if a certified arborist or qualified Valley Water staff identifies a hazardous tree or limb with the potential to cause injury or significant property damage. Valley Water does not perform tree maintenance on easements for reasons other than as needed to facilitate the purpose of the easement (e.g., flood protection, storm drainage). The underlying property owner is responsible for managing live trees. Landowners next to Valley Water-owned property have the right to trim overhanging branches of trees or other vegetation crossing the property line. For tree pruning or removal along creeks, property owners may be required to secure permits from regulatory agencies such as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

## Funding

The project is funded in part by the voter-approved Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection (Safe, Clean Water) Program. The estimated total 15-year (FY2022-36) project cost is \$80 million, of which \$12 million is funded by the Safe, Clean Water Program.

## For Assistance

**Access Valley Water Hotline:**



Valleywater.org

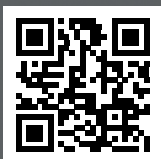


408-630-3863

A full list of projects in the **Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program** can be found at [valleywater.org/safe-clean-water-and-natural-flood-protection-program](https://valleywater.org/safe-clean-water-and-natural-flood-protection-program).

## CONTACT US

To find out the latest information on Valley Water projects or to submit questions or comments, use our Access Valley Water customer request system at [access.valleywater.org](https://access.valleywater.org).



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