

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Schuster Slope is a steeply sloped, 31-acre open space area adjacent to the west shore of Commencement Bay in Tacoma (hereafter referred to as “project area”). Approximately 55 percent of the area is comprised of slopes greater than 60 percent that frequently experience soil creep, surficial sloughing, and debris flows. In 2014, the property management authority changed within the City of Tacoma (City) to the Environmental Services Department (ES). This change was also reflected in new rate-based funding that will enable the City to more effectively manage the vegetation. This twenty-year landscape management plan, hereafter referred to as “management plan” is built on the concept of achieving a target ecosystem composition in order to maximize the ecosystem services that this site can provide. ES’s vegetative management goals for the project area include: achieving a sustainable target ecosystem, improving slope stability, maximizing stormwater benefit and providing public safety and infrastructure protection.

Presently, the dominant species which are on the Schuster Slope are early successional species. Under naturally occurring forest successional processes, shade tolerant conifers and other longer lived woody species would have established, however, both the presence of invasive species and the lack of local parental material have precluded this opportunity. When restoring the target ecosystem vegetation palette, it is necessary to focus on forest composition targeting age diversity, species diversity, and forest health in order to achieve the management goals. For each management goal, both objectives and performance measures are presented. The management plan includes a prioritized list of areas where ES will focus their efforts as time, budgets and resources allow.

Due to the location and geographic nature of the slope, the project area lends itself to accommodating views of surrounding areas and iconic scenery. City Comprehensive Plan policies recognize public views as an asset to the community, and further project area planning and public outreach conducted by Metro Parks Tacoma (MPT) identified public and private views from nearby and/or adjacent properties as a desired vegetative management consideration. In that same regard, the City receives many requests from adjacent neighbors to prune or remove vegetation on City owned properties for the purposes of improving private views. Although Washington State law is clear that property owners have no common law right to a view across neighboring properties (*Asche v Bloomquist*, 2006), this plan will provide the opportunity and process for adjacent property owners to apply for approval to prune for private views on City property. Section 6.2 presents the process that a project proponent may follow in order to proceed with a vegetation modification request on City-owned lands covered by this management plan.

The entire project area is classified as a Critical Area under the Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) due to the presence of steep slopes, wetlands, streams, and WDFW priority habitat. The management plan is written with the intent that it be submitted to receive a long-term programmatic permit under TMC 13.11 Critical Areas Preservation code allowing ES to most efficiently move forward with restoration actions.

ES approached MPT to assist with the development of the plan due to MPT's expertise in developing similar plans for other open spaces throughout the City. In addition, two local environmental consulting firms were used, GeoEngineers and Landau Associates, in order to provide much of the scientific expertise and analysis needed to address the regulated Critical Areas and existing hazardous conditions. The analysis and recommendations include geologic hazard review (slope stability), and vegetation management prescription development within the constraints of best available science and applicable regulations.

The management plan's success depends on effective implementation and regular updates to incorporate the best available science and management techniques. This plan should be viewed as a living document to be updated as needed, with an in-depth analysis and reevaluation around year ten. Timelines and methods for plant pruning and specifications for planting are included as appendices to this management plan.