

**Federal Emergency Management Agency
PUBLIC NOTICE**

Notice of Availability of the Draft Environmental Assessment for the Bastrop County Pine Valley Estates Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, Texas, HMGP-FM-5288-TX Project #8

Interested persons are hereby notified that Bastrop County has applied to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), through the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding under Section 404 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act. FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program provides grants to states and local governments to implement long-term hazard mitigation measures that reduce the loss of life and property due to natural disasters and to enable mitigation measures to be implemented during the immediate recovery from a disaster. In accordance with 44 CFR Part 9.8(b)(2), this notice also serves as FEMA's initial public notice under Executive Order (EO) 11988 for Floodplain Management and EO 11990 for Protection of Wetlands, as the portion of the proposed action is taking place in the 100-year floodplain and wetlands.

FEMA proposes to provide funding to Bastrop County to conduct hazardous fuels treatment on approximately 250-300 acres within Pine Valley Estates to reduce wildfire hazards in central Bastrop County. In pine dominated sites, which tend to be areas of heavy fuel concentration, the treatment would include the removal of encroaching brush species such as yaupon holly and eastern red cedar. In these areas, dead vegetative material such as branches, standing loblolly pines, and debris would be removed. Trees targeted for retention would be pine and hardwood species; however, some trees of these species would be selectively removed only when necessary, to achieve the desired canopy cover. The lower limbs of larger and taller trees, including hardwoods and pines, would be removed up to 8 feet above the ground. The same techniques would be used to establish shaded fuel breaks. Shaded fuel breaks would be anchored on both ends to a less combustible fuel type or a natural or manmade barrier. This treatment prescription would result in a mosaic pattern consisting of areas of reduced fuels and areas of untreated or vacant lots throughout the community. This approach would reinforce the effectiveness of properties that have created defensible spaces around homes (within 30 feet of structures), as well as separate the built community from the large adjacent blocks of wildland fuels.

The focus of this project will be on private property, but some areas of Right of Way may undergo hazardous fuel reduction, where needed. Any areas of ROW requiring hazardous fuel reduction would be treated 15 feet from the edge of the roadway on both sides of the road or to the property line, whichever distance they reach first. Bastrop County will use a mechanical thinning process that uses skid steers with attached mulching heads. These low impact machines will grind up the undesirable vegetation, leaving mulch on the ground. All stumps will be left at ground level and will not be excavated or otherwise mechanically removed.

A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to assess the potential impacts of the proposed action and alternatives on the human and natural environment in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500 – 1508), FEMA's Instruction 108-1-1 for implementing NEPA, the National Historic Preservation Act, Executive Order 11988, Executive Order 11990, and 44 CFR Part 9. The draft EA evaluates alternatives that provide for compliance with applicable environmental laws. The alternatives evaluated include (1) no action; (2) the proposed action described above.

The draft EA is available for review and comment at the Bastrop County Development Services Office at 211 Jackson Street, Bastrop, Texas 78602, Monday-Friday, 8-5 pm. An electronic version of the draft EA can be requested from Subha Pandey, FEMA Region 6, at subha.pandey@fema.dhs.gov or viewed on FEMA's website at <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/environmental-historic/region/6>.

The comment period will end 30 days from the initial notice publication date on November X, 2021. Written comments on the draft EA can be mailed or emailed to Subha Pandey, Environmental protection Specialist, FEMA Region 6, FEMA Region 6, 800 N Loop 288, Denton, TX 76209; Email: subha.pandey@fema.dhs.gov. If no substantive comments are received, the draft EA will become final and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be issued for the project. Substantive comments will be addressed as appropriate in the final documents.