# MEMO

CITY OF ASHLAND

TO: Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Chris Chambers, Forestry Officer (chris.chambers@ashland.or.us)

CC: Ashland Forest Lands Management Advisory Committee
Leslie Eldridge, Interim APRC Director

RE: Forestland Climate Change Adaptation—Siskiyou Mountain Park Follow-up Discussion

Since the commission was briefed in October on the state of forest health in Siskiyou Mountain Park (SMP), several events have unfolded:

1. A draft project plan has been posted to the City's website for public comment.
2. Two public field tours took place to discuss the issue of Douglas-fir mortality, and featured a retired forest entomologist who studied that topic.
3. A public meeting was held to gather input. Many trail users were concerned about shutting key mountain bike trails in May and June, though those trails are not at Siskiyou Mountain Park, we hope to avoid that timeframe if at all possible.
4. A Forest Committee volunteer staffed a booth for all of October (four days) at the Farmer's Market. During that time, there was only one person unsupportive of the proposed work, including the logging.
5. Trail postings at two locations since mid-September have created only two comments to the email listed on the posting. Both were thankful for the information and regretfully supportive of the need to more forward with tree removal for fire and trail safety.

Per local scientists, summer field research has further quantified estimates of dead and dying Douglas-fir (the dominant tree in SMP) that can't be counted from aerial surveys. The summer drone survey done at SMP in July showed 30% of Douglas-fir dead and dying (range of 12% to 72%) . Of trees categorized as healthy (green from above) in the summer aerial survey, an additional 10-60% (median of 25%) showed signs of beetle attack and symptoms of decline, per initial results from field research. We can expect to see the range of percent dead/dying in SMP rise substantially based on this new data. Infested and declining trees will likely be dead within six to eight months. This illustrates the ongoing "beetle pressure" or contagion effect we're experiencing as populations are very high and host trees are still abundant.

The draft project plan lays out the background science, "refugia" areas where we hope conditions are more favorable for sensitive species for longer timeframes, an assessment of snags and downed wood as habitat, and four strategies for addressing the die-off—both current and predicted. SMP is at a critical confluence of factors:

1. There are many homes bordering the park and many hundreds more within ember travel distance of it (a key measure of fire hazard)
2. Significant patches are already almost all dead---up to 5 acres in one case, but commonly 3-4 acres. There are other species present, though they don't make up the dominant canopy.

ASHLAND FIRE & RESCUE
455 Siskiyou Boulevard
Ashland, OR 97520
(541) 482-2770 • Fax (541) 488-5318
TTY: 800-735-2900

3. Expensive helicopter-based tree removal (desirable due to low ground impact) isn't an ongoing economic option i.e. we can't just cut some now and "wait and see" if we need to come back in a year or two. Current costs will rise considerably if trees dead/dying now are too rotten to help off-set helicopter costs this year. Estimated range of costs per acre for helicopter work are $2,234-$2,713 and costs incurred on City land to deal with similar levels of die-off by piling and burning were roughly $4,000 per acre three years ago.
4. Cutting green trees in areas of high risk (and green trees already infested with beetles) is socially challenging but most beneficial for forest health and fire safety.
5. Conservation values that lead to the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy easement on SMP are already degraded by the die-off. A fire in the park with the amount of developing dead and dying would further degrade ecological values, perhaps significantly.

The SMP project would have large areas of heavy tree removal where trees are already dead/dying. *The park is changing whether we do work there or not.* It will have areas that are significantly more open and we'll likely lose the vast majority of the overstory whether we do the project or not (per local research and predictive tools we've applied using GIS mapping).

A prudent course is to remove trees currently dead/dying and those that are predicted to die in the next five years, or "pre-capture" what will very likely be dead soon according to recent research and modeling. Areas with significant die-off should be replanted with pine, oak, and desirable understory plants as appropriate, working with SOLC on a species list that fits each site.

A critical component of this work is education and outreach to the public. The perception and aesthetic of a "healthy forest" must change as we adapt to present and future conditions being forced on us. More tours and outreach can be scheduled to see areas where trees are being marked, and as the project progresses through varying stages. This was done during the Ashland Forest Resiliency Project with success.

Lomakatsi Restoration Project has submitted a work proposal to the City that is on the Council agenda November 7th. We hope to have Lomakatsi help us with preparing this project, carrying out the tree marking, and collecting monitoring data at all phases of the work.

We are still working with SOLC staff to spell out site-specific plans, which will require more field visits and mapping, both of which are ongoing.

**ASHLAND FIRE & RESCUE**
455 Siskiyou Boulevard
Ashland, OR 97520
(541) 482-2770 • Fax (541) 488-5318
TTY: 800-735-2900