



Montara Water & Sanitary District

Serving the Communities of Montara and Moss Beach

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May 16, 2025

The Honorable Chair Lori D. Wilson
Chair, State of California Assembly Transportation Committee
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0011

Re: Caltrans' Failure to Respond regarding Extreme Fire Danger in the Unmaintained Caltrans Right of Way in Montara

Dear Chair Wilson,

As chair of the Assembly Transportation Committee, we appeal to you to assist our residents with resolving a persistent hazard that threatens homes and lives. For years, Montara Water and Sanitary District (MWSD) has worked diligently to engage Caltrans leadership to resolve dangerous vegetation on Caltrans owned land in Montara.

In March, we wrote to District 4 Director Dina El-Tawansy and Deputy District Director Mark L. Weaver to address fire hazards on Caltrans property in Montara. **To date, we have received no response.**

Caltrans owns the Montara Bypass Lands, locally known as the Caltrans Right of Way (ROW), in Montara, CA. These lands have been left vacant and untended for decades. The parcel is primarily forested sections consisting of Eucalyptus trees, shrubs, and heavy undergrowth. Some sections contain untended, unofficial trails that are used by locals and tourists. Other sections allow and even invite illegal dumping.

Over three years ago, in July 2021, MWSD contacted Mr. Weaver on behalf of our community regarding hazardous conditions on Caltrans property within Montara, California. Years of neglect yielded high fuel loads from vegetation and heavy tree growth. Minor clearance work was undertaken in September 2021, and absolutely nothing since. **Our community faces almost the exact same hazards today in 2025.**

The Montara Bypass Lands, originally planned for the Devils Slides Bypass, are unused, vacant, unmaintained, and a critical fire danger to adjacent homes and the critical local watershed which supplies all our community's water.

Further, this land abuts the beautiful wild 3,858-acre Golden Gate National Recreation Area Rancho Corral de Tierra, where uncontrolled fire ignitions could consume the entire coastal mountain range.

Caltrans has no documented plans for use of this property, and clearly no active maintenance, fuel reduction, or risk mitigation program in place to protect our community.

MWSD has long advocated for resolution of the hazard. In 2021, we proactively sought cost estimates for fire reduction work and in prior years, due to extreme fire danger, we actually cleaned the parcel at our community's expense. We are prepared to address the fire hazards on this parcel—as the owner and maintainer of the parcel.

We ask that Caltrans address the fire danger on this parcel and then transfer the property to MWSD.

Our community is frightened. We have seen the devastation of fires in Paradise, Santa Rosa, Lahaina, and now in Pacific Palisades and Altadena. We see evidence of extreme fire hazard in our backyards and our critical watershed.

A fire on this property will not only damage homes, but the storage and plumbing of our community owned water system. A fire here will introduce a toxic stew of debris, erosion, and toxins into critical coastal ecosystems, the watersheds that provide our drinking water. Fires like these poison and destroy community water distribution and sewer collection systems, as well as private and community groundwater wells. These impacts will also be felt on our coastline, and throughout the protected Montara State Marine and Fitzgerald Marine Reserves.

The State is putting up billions in emergency funding to address the impacts of the Los Angeles fires, but we cannot find the will or funding to address hazards in San Mateo County that can produce the same results.

We ask that you direct Caltrans to immediately address this fire hazard and appropriately plan for a permanent solution to this community hazard by placing responsibility in local hands.

We know how to keep our community safe. We ask Caltrans to address their neglect immediately, and then transfer this property to MWSD, a responsible land owner. We are ready to maintain this property and reduce this fire risk.

Sincerely,



President Scott Boyd

On behalf of the Montara Water and Sanitary District Board of Directors

Director Kathryn Slater-Carter

Director Bill Softky

Director Carlisle Ann (Cid) Young

Director Peter Dekker

cc: *Via electronic transmission*
State of California Assembly Transportation Committee
CA State Assemblymember Marc Berman

CA State Senator Josh Becker

Director Dina El-Tawansy, District 4 and Mark L. Weaver, Deputy District Director, California
Department of Transportation

County of San Mateo Board of Supervisors:

President David J. Canepa

Vice President Noelia Corzo

Supervisor Lisa Gauthier

Supervisor Ray Mueller

Supervisor Jackie Speier

Lennie Roberts, Committee for Green Foothills

Steve Monowitz, San Mateo County Planning

Dan Carl, Isobel Cooper, California Coastal Commission
Coastal Conservancy

Rob Bartoli, San Mateo Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo)

Midcoast Community Council

Red Alert Montara Moss Beach (RAMMB)