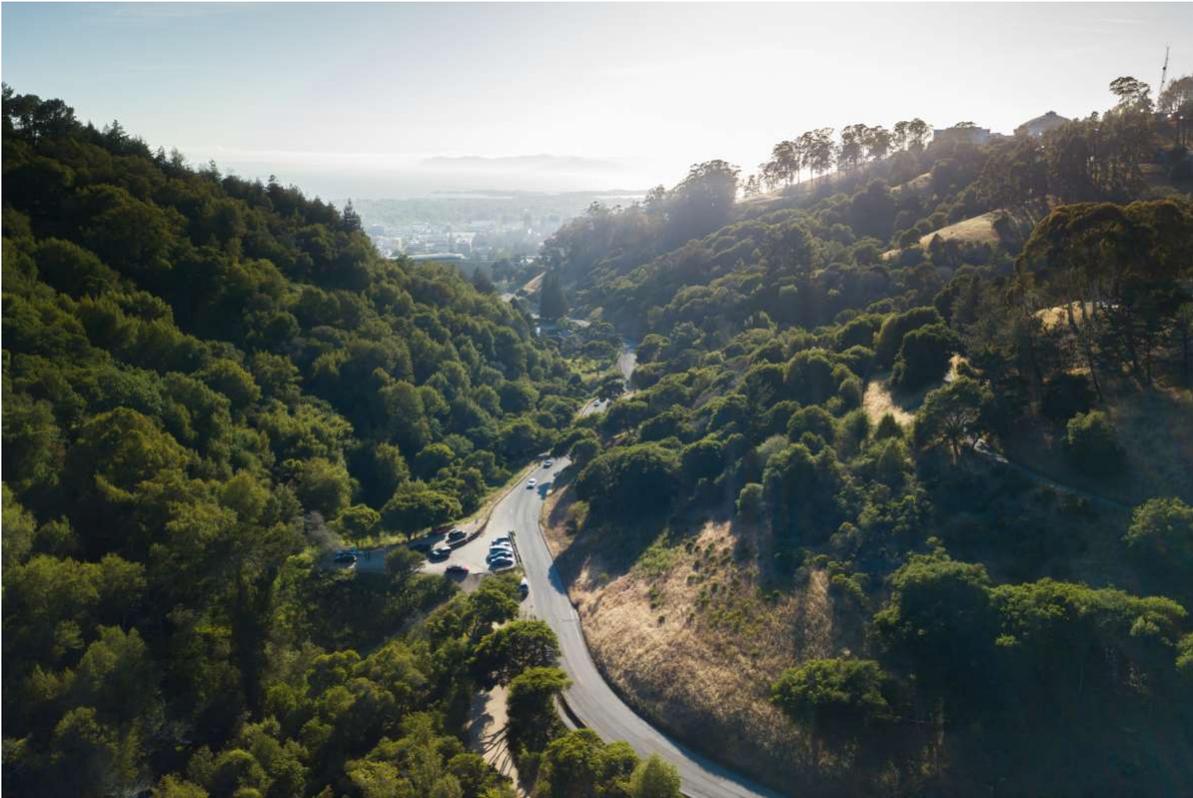

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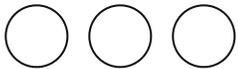
Shocking scene as a major tree die-off hits East Bay parks



Patricia Chang/Special to SFGATE

Katie Dowd, SFGATE

Updated: June 21, 2021 10:01 a.m.



It's noticeable enough to send a shiver of fear down your spine: the bone-dry East Bay hills dotted with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of dead trees.

At first, the hills look rather autumnal, with shades of parched yellow and orange normally seen in October. But those trees aren't just losing leaves; they're dead, root and stem.

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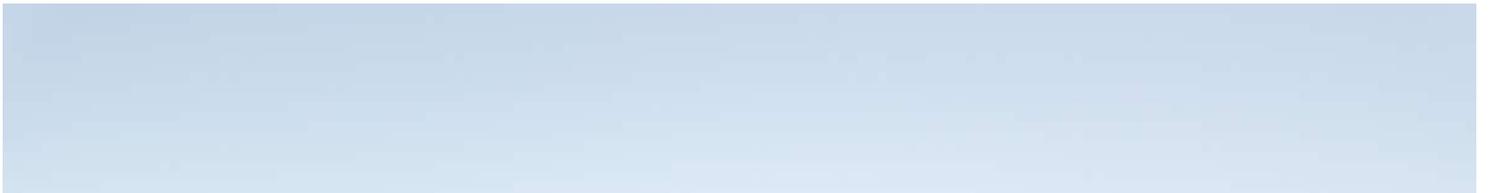


The East Bay Regional Park District said they began noticing "sudden tree mortality" in October 2020. Unlike years prior when certain species, like California oaks, were under siege, this year the die-off is affecting all kinds of trees. Eucalyptus, acacia, bay, pine and more are dying at alarming rates and filling the hills with dry tinder. In April, the park district said they've seen at least 1,000 acres of tree die-off, primarily in Redwood Regional Park, Tilden Park and Anthony Chabot Regional Park.





A dead tree in the middle of the Wurster Hall courtyard on the UC Berkeley campus in May 2021.
Patricia Chang/Special to SFGATE





Drone photos from the East Bay hills behind Berkeley show dead trees, a major concern for wildfire season going into the summer 2021.

Patricia Chang/Special to SFGATE



"Many of the areas impacted are in old eucalyptus groves, which have a very high

tree density," the district said in a statement. "The cause of tree mortality and dieback is not fully known but most likely has a direct correlation to drought caused by climate change. We are also working in partnership with the United States Forest Service (USFS), UC Berkeley, and CAL FIRE to determine the cause."

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Drought and parasites may be intersecting to exacerbate the crisis. A recent study by UC Berkeley Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management adjunct professor Matteo Garbelotto attempted to determine what is causing the "highly unusual" spate of deaths among acacia trees. Garbelotto found the presence of two fungi, *Diaporthe foeniculina* and *Dothiorella viticola*, at all the Bay Area sites he studied.

"They both start as endophytes, living inside trees without any obvious effect on tree health," the study found, "then often become pathogens – some relatively aggressive – in conjunction with the onset of predisposing stress factors (drought, heat stress, fewer foggy days, competition due to high stand density) and then survive as saprobes on the wood of the dead trees."

The problem is so bad there are huge swaths of the hills with no surviving acacias, as seen here in Oakland's Leona Heights Park.



Dead acacia trees cover Leona Heights Park in Oakland in October 2020.
U.S. Forest Service/Handout

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Dry, dead trees burn hot for more damaging wildfires. The only thing that can be done is clean-up and remove as many dead trees as they can.

... , creating the potential for more wildfires. For now, all that can be done is to clear as many dead trees as they can.

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"We can't do much," East Bay Municipal Utility District ranger Mark Silva told Bay Nature. "We can do stuff around the interfaces, remove dead fuels. But same with

sudden oak death, we just let it occur. Trees die all the time, it's sad and all that, but unless it's near neighborhoods we basically just live with it."

A dead tree in the middle of the Wurster Hall courtyard on the UC Berkeley campus in May 2021.
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Drone photos from the East Bay hills behind Berkeley show dead trees, a major concern for wildfire season going into the summer 2021.
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