County of Ventura
Oak Dell Ballfield Inspection

SUBMITTED TO:

JERI COOPER
Parks Manager
Ventura County Parks

PREPARED BY:

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Summary

The County of Ventura contacted West Coast Arborists Inc. to assess a number of declining trees located throughout the Oak Dell Ballfields. Multiple dead oaks and several eucalyptus and pines were found to have died or to be in advanced stages of dieback and are not expected to recover. The County contracted with Fruit Growers Labs to have soil and foliar samples collected and submitted for analysis in an attempt to determine the cause of the tree's mortality. Results indicate the presence of Imazapyr and 0-Phenylphenol.

Introduction

Assignment

The assignment per the Scope of Work on Proforma 85107 was:

- Provide arborist services to assess and inventory all trees on the property via WCA Mobile. Upload at least one image of each tree.
- Submit one summary report with images and recommendations based on soil tests being performed by others.
- The deliverable is this report, which summarizes the inspection with images and maintenance recommendations.

Background and History

On September 14, 2023, I met with Jeri Cooper and Colter Chisum at the Oak Dell Ballfields to walk the site and discuss the condition of the trees. At the conclusion of our site walk, it was agreed upon that WCA Inc. would have a Data Collector return to the site and use our GIS equipment to inventory the trees, as my mobile device did not have enough battery power or a clear and consistent connection to accomplish this part of the work request (the number of trees involved was larger than anticipated). The County of Ventura will forward maps of the site outlining the exact areas to be inventoried and all test results once obtained.

Limits of the Assignment

The assignment, being a visual inspection of the subject trees, was limited to that which could be observed from the ground. Only exposed or easily exposed parts above ground level were inspected.

Subsurface soil conditions and tree parts below ground were not disturbed or observed. WCA Inc. performed no soil or plant tissue testing for fertility, nutrient deficiency, pathology, or chemical residue. However, this was done by another contractor for the County, Fruit Growers Labs. The results were forwarded to me and will be referenced in this report. No valuation appraisal was requested to be part of this report. This report is not intended to be legal advice and does not represent legal advice as such.

Purpose and Use of the Report

The purpose of this report is to provide the County of Ventura staff with my professional evaluation of the trees and site conditions, and its intent was to assist in the discovery of causation of the tree mortality and provide mitigation measures for the controlling authority.

Observations

The following observations are offered to provide County of Ventura staff with information to make tree maintenance decisions.

Site Description

The site is located on the outskirts of Ojai, northeast of the Oak View Community Center, in a narrow valley bordered by oak woodlands to the north, east, and south, with a residential neighborhood to the west. The Ojai Valley Baseball League leases the site, and people are frequently present at the location during baseball season. See map in Appendix A

Tree Conditions

Walking the site, we observed the trees from the entrance road up along the east side of the ball fields up to the gate adjacent to Hwy 33, then down along the hillside, and along the north and west sides of the ball fields. All species (including oaks, eucalyptus, pines, and various shrubs and ground cover) appear to have been impacted at some level, many severely. Most of the trees directly adjacent to access roads or the ballfields have either already died or have progressed to advanced levels of dieback and will most likely not recover.

Many mature Coast Live Oaks have been significantly impacted and display full canopy death. A few of the oaks have epicormic growth on their trunks; this is generally considered a stress response and not a sign of recovery. Some of the oaks near the parking lot have not declined to the point where death is likely. However, they do display distorted terminal growth, often called “witches’ broom,” knobbing, or tufting. This type of growth is a classic response to chemical

exposure via herbicide injury. Several pines in this same area display flagging (localized areas of dead branches) and were also most likely impacted by the same chemical exposure.

Inspection of the remnants of a fallen pine and the stump of a recently removed pine on the sloped area near the residential outbuilding showed evidence of bark beetle. However, no signs of insect presence were found on the symptomatic oaks or the dead eucalyptus.

Testing and Analysis

Multi-residue screening results obtained from Farm Growers Labs indicate that nutrient content is not a limiting factor in plant growth at the site. No root pathogens were isolated and are therefore ruled out as a causal agent. The herbicide Imazapyr was confirmed to be present in one of the samples provided to me by Count of Ventura staff. Another chemical, 0-Phenylphenol, was detected in the same sample and at a higher amount than the Imazapyr. This is a chemical I was not familiar with, but it appears to be present in pesticides (specifically fungicides) to control fungal and bacterial growth. It is also used as a disinfectant fungicide for industrial applications on ornamental plants and turf.

Discussion

Imazapyr is a common herbicide found in commercial and retail products used to control weeds and is known to be highly damaging to trees. The application instructions, depending on the manufacturer, state not to use the product within the dripline of trees. Imazapyr has three very significant characteristics that make it deadly to trees. 1) It is a very broad-spectrum herbicide, meaning it is non-plant specific and can potentially kill any plant that comes in contact with it. 2) It is soluble in and transported by water (often via drift, leaching through the soil, or via lateral movement by precipitation or irrigation). 3) It does not bind to sediment, so leaching through the soil into groundwater is very likely.

Herbicides are absorbed in two ways: 1) foliar herbicide, meaning the herbicide must be sprayed onto the foliage, and 2) soil active herbicides, which are absorbed by roots. Soil-active herbicides are either applied as a liquid spray or granular application, both of which are absorbed by plant roots. These products will affect any roots growing under the treated area. An application to kill weeds or grass will also result in trees or other plants absorbing the chemical. Because tree roots extend 2 to 3 times the distance of the canopy dripline, they can easily become the victim of unintentional chemical exposure. Symptoms of herbicide injury include twisted, deformed, discolored, or cupped leaves and defoliation of the entire tree or select branches. Resprouting leaves (if present) will often be tiny, chlorotic, tightly clustered, or distorted. There is generally no treatment once herbicide damage has occurred.

Conclusion

Depending on the level of damage, taking a "wait and see" position can sometimes help identify if a plant has been exposed to a deadly amount of chemicals. This would be the case where the plant shows some sign of "outgrowing" the damage or where canopy death has not already occurred. However, for those plants with poor vigor or obvious canopy death, it is not realistic to expect recovery. If damage is not severe and caught early enough, treatments such as irrigating to flush the soil may be beneficial. In addition, incorporating activated charcoal into the soil to help absorb and chemically bind the herbicide can possibly lessen the damage. However, these options only have the potential to aid the plant if done quickly after the herbicide has been applied.

Recommendation

Based on the level of dieback present on so many of the trees, the damage is believed to be too great to expect recovery for the majority of the trees affected. There are a few trees that have been damaged but appear to be stable, and these should be retained and monitored, pruning as needed to remove any dead material that could break out and possibly cause physical injury to site visitors. Ensure that affected trees are receiving adequate irrigation.

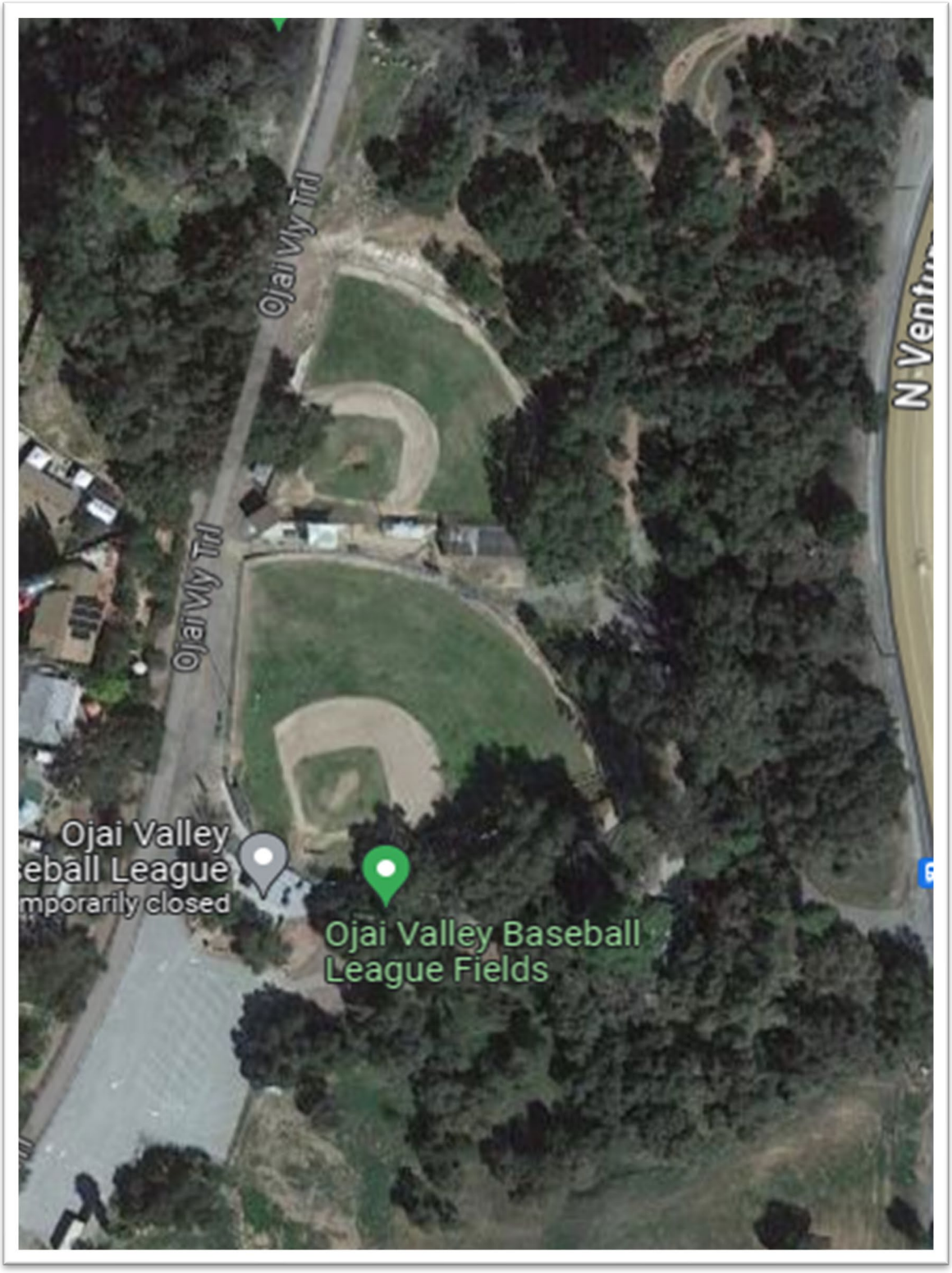
Removal is the recommended treatment for trees that show a full or high degree of canopy death, especially for those near the ball fields, walkways, parking lots, or other areas where people may congregate.

Schedule to have a WCA Inc. inventory specialist come to the site to complete the Work Order request of having the trees at this location added to the County of Ventura's inventory. This process will help identify all the trees within the area to track plant health better and plan future maintenance.

The **controlling authority** must determine which recommended maintenance option(s) to employ and is responsible for all scheduling of such work. All tree work shall comply with current industry standards and specifically the criteria provided in *ISA Best Management Practices, ANSI A300 Part 1: Tree, Shrub, and Other Woody Plant Maintenance, Standard Practices, Pruning. Third Edition.*

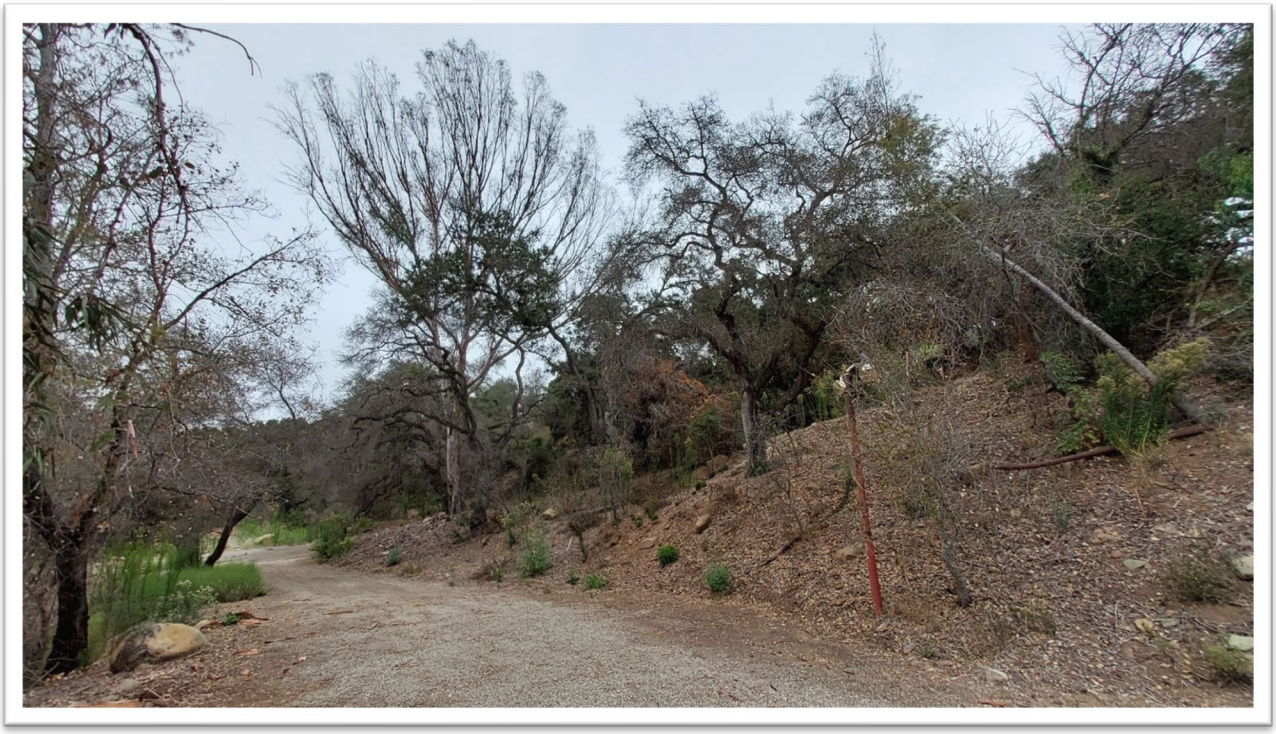
The intent of this report is to provide as complete and unbiased an opinion as possible with regard to the current health and condition of the trees discussed above. It is hoped that the information provided is sufficient to enable management staff to make necessary decisions regarding the future maintenance of these trees. However, should you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Appendix A: Map

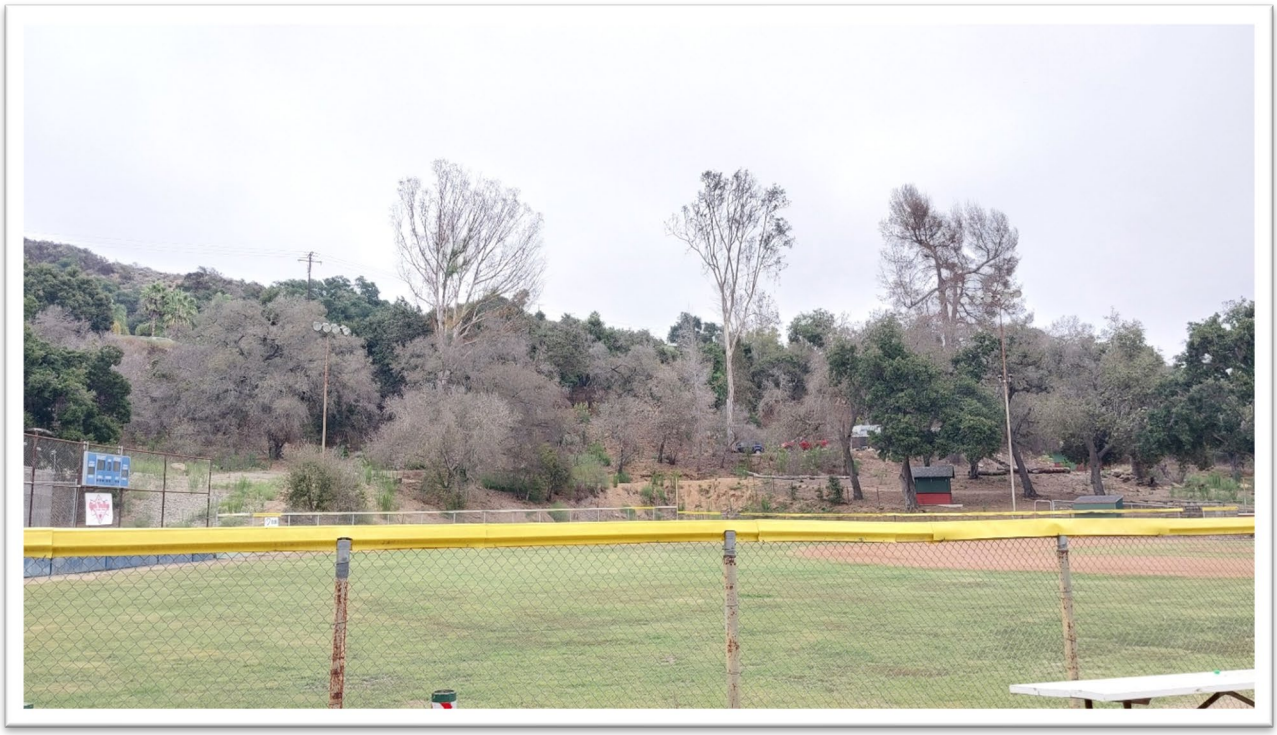


Appendix B: Images

Image 1 (top). Shows the access road easterly up from the parking lot, with the ball fields on the left and a private property on the right. Note the dead oaks, a dead pine, and a dead eucalyptus in the background. Image 2 (below) was taken walking up the access road to the east of the ball fields. Note the large degree of plant mortality of oaks, eucalyptus, pines, shrubs, and ground cover. There was hardly any plant not impacted.



Images 3 & 4 show the sloped area along the east side of the property as seen from the opposite side of the ball fields. Note the vast level of plant death, including mature oaks, eucalyptus, pines, and almost all shrubs and ground covers.



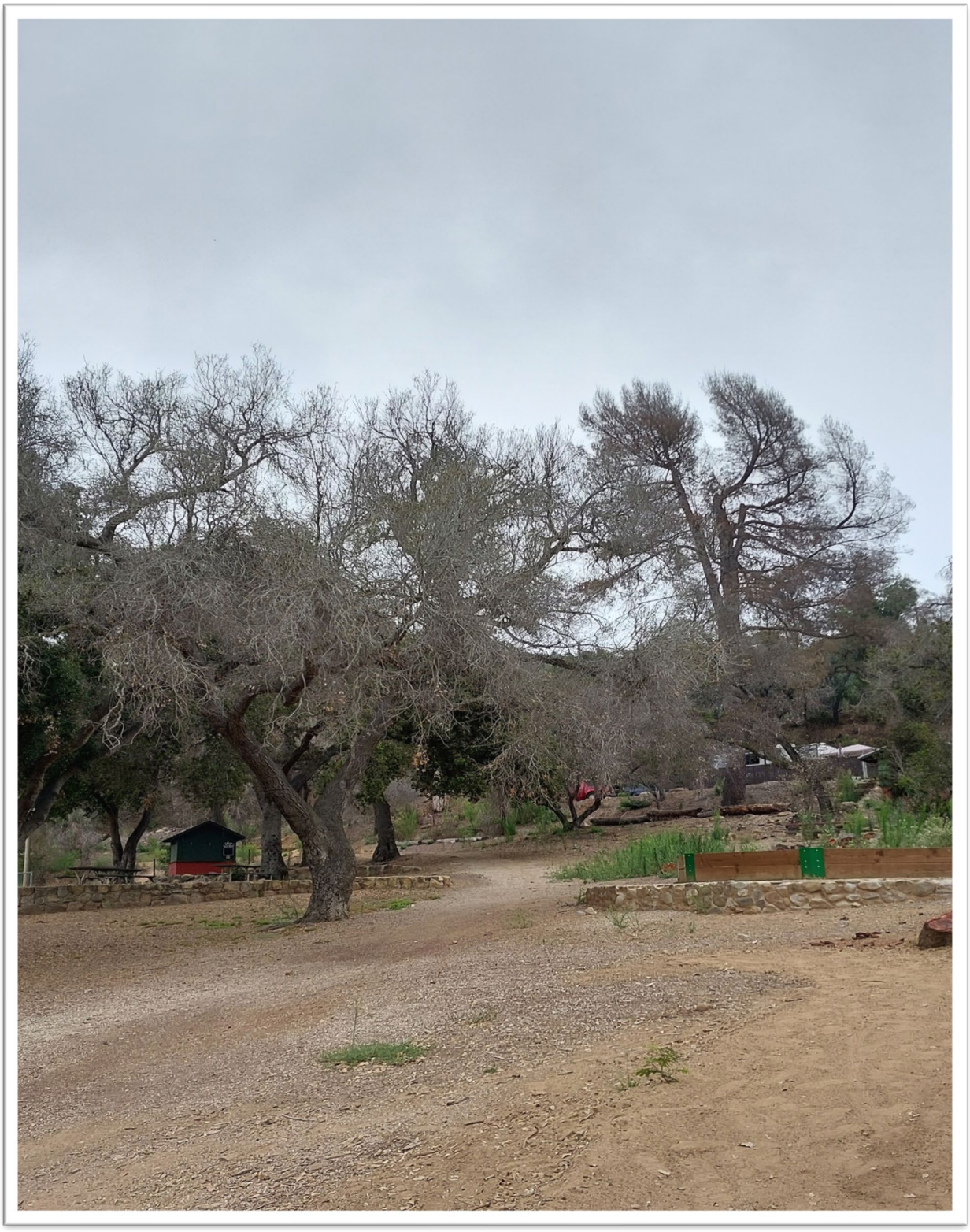


Image 5. Showing more of the dead and impacted trees along the sought side of the ball fields. Trees displaying full canopy death are not expected to recover and should be removed from the site if located where falling trees or their parts could damage people or property.

Images 6-8 show examples of the epicormic growth seen on the trunks of a handful of the oaks. This is a stress response and does not indicate that the tree has enough energy reserves to recover. Overall, vigor is very poor, and vascular damage is considered too great.

Images 9-11 show examples of the abnormal, tufted, knobbed, "witches' broom" growth seen on some of the oaks just along the south side of the upper ball field parking lot. This is a classic symptom of chemical exposure.

Images 12-14 show parts of the pine tree that have evidence of borer activity. Two different sized holes are present.

Appendix C: Assumptions and Limiting Conditions

1. Care has been taken to obtain all information from reliable sources. All data has been verified insofar as possible; however, the Consultant can neither guarantee nor be responsible for the accuracy of information provided by others. Standard of Care has been met with regards to this project within reasonable and normal conditions.

2. The Consultant will not be required to give testimony or to attend court due to this report unless subsequent contractual arrangements are made, including payment of an additional fee for such services as described in the fee schedule and contract of engagement.

3. Loss or alteration of any part of this report invalidates the entire report.

4. Possession of this report or a copy thereof does not imply right of publication or use for any purpose by any other than the person to whom it is addressed, without the prior written consent of the Consultant.

5. This report and any values expressed herein represent the opinion of the Consultant, and the Consultant's fee is in no way contingent upon the reporting of a stipulated result, a specified value, the occurrence of a subsequent event, nor upon any finding to be reported.

6. Unless expressed otherwise: 1) information contained in this report covers only those items that were examined and reflects the condition of those items at the time of inspection; and 2) the inspection is limited to visual examination of accessible items without dissection, excavation, or coring, unless otherwise stated. There is no warranty or guarantee, expressed or implied, that problems or deficiencies of the tree(s) or property in question may not arise in the future.

7. Arborists are tree specialists who use their education, knowledge, training, and experience to examine trees, recommend measures to enhance the beauty and health of trees, and attempt to reduce the risk of living near trees. It is highly recommended that you follow the arborist recommendations; however, you may choose to accept or disregard the recommendations and/or seek additional advice.

8. Arborists cannot detect every condition that could possibly lead to the structural failure of a tree. Trees are living organisms that fail in ways we do not fully understand. Conditions are often hidden within trees and below ground. Arborists cannot guarantee that a tree will be healthy or safe under all circumstances, or for a specific period.

9. Any recommendations and/or performed treatments (including, but not limited to, pruning or removal) of trees may involve considerations beyond the scope of the arborist's services, such as property boundaries, property ownership, site lines, disputes between neighbors, and any other related issues. Arborists cannot take such considerations into account unless complete and accurate information is disclosed to the arborist. An arborist can then be expected to consider and reasonably rely on the completeness and accuracy of the information provided.

10. The author has no personal interest or bias with respect to the subject matter of this report or the parties involved. He/she has inspected the subject tree(s) and to the best of their knowledge and belief, all statements and information presented in the report are true and correct.

Appendix D Certificate of Performance

Premises: Oak Dell Ballfields, Ojai, California

I, Rebecca Mejia, certify that to the best of my knowledge and belief:

1. The statements of fact contained in this report are true and correct.
2. I have personally inspected the trees and property referenced in this report and accurately stated my findings.
3. I have no current or prospective interest in the trees or the property that is/are the subject of this report, and I have no personal interest or bias with respect to the parties involved.
4. The analysis, opinions, and conclusions were developed, and this report has been prepared according to commonly accepted arboricultural practices and standards.
5. No one provided significant professional assistance to me, except where may be noted within the report.
6. My compensation is not contingent upon the reporting of conclusions that favor the cause of my client or any other party nor upon the results of the assessment, the attainment of stipulated results, or the occurrence of any subsequent events.

I certify that I am a member of good standing with the International Society of Arboriculture, an ISA Board Certified Master Arborist, and an ISA Qualified Tree Risk Assessor. I hold a Bachelor of Science in Forestry and Natural Resources Management, with a minor in Urban Forestry. I have been a Certified Arborist since 1996 and have been in the practice of municipal arboriculture for over 27 years.

Signed:

Rebecca Mejia

Rebecca Mejia
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ISA Board Certified Master Arborist WE-2355B
Consulting Arborist, West Coast Arborists, Inc.

Date: October 6, 2023