

Proposed Vegetation Management Plan for the Area between the ARRC Security Fence South of Northpointe Bluff Dr and the ARRC Anchorage Rail Yard on Government Hill (Revision 8/31/2023)



Project Overview

This is a proposal for a vegetation management plan on Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) property between the security fence south of Northpointe Bluff Dr and the ARRC rail yard in downtown Anchorage. The area south of the security fence also includes part of a MOA leased greenbelt. The project is driven and funded by a group of Northpointe Bluff Dr homeowners and has as its goal to maintain the expansive views of the Chugach and downtown Anchorage for the neighborhood and public from the upper bench of the greenbelt south of Northpointe Bluff Dr while providing screening and noise abatement from the railroad yard. This vegetation plan will be conducted by selectively cutting mostly cottonwood trees that interfere with the viewshed and invasive species of any size, and the planting of a variety of medium to short height native species to help restore the greenbelt.

Project Area

This vegetation plan covers the area south of the ARRC security fence immediately south of Northpointe Bluff Dr lots on the east side of Government Hill in Anchorage Alaska, see attachment 1. Part of the area south of the security fence is governed by Lease Contract 6332 between the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) and the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA), providing for “a greenbelt with low intensity park development and

trails for public use” (see section 1.06 of lease contract). The greenbelt south of Northpointe Bluff Drive has been partially dissected by an 8’ high chain link security fence. Anchorage Parks and Rec (P&R) has agreed to let ARRC manage the leased greenbelt south of the security fence. However, for purposes of access, the plan is divided into the area south of the security fence that is part of leased greenbelt and the area south of the security fence that is not leased. This plan does not cover the greenbelt north of the security fence.

Background

The lands in and around this greenbelt were part of a public/private neighborhood revitalization project that included the MOA, the ARRC, the Anchorage Community Development Authority (ACDA), and Jaguar Development Group. This project consisted of the demolition of the dilapidated Hollywood Vista apartment buildings and a plan to terrace the land, providing fill to the Port of Anchorage. Development of the Northpointe Bluff subdivision was completed by the MOA through the ACDA, taking advantage of the viewshed to attract homeowners to the neighborhood.

The ARRC land south of the Northpointe Bluff subdivision, including what is now the MOA leased greenbelt referenced in this vegetation plan, was graded to its current condition in approximately 2003, see Attachment 2. Much of the natural occurring tree growth in the area was mowed by Hydro-Axe in 2010. The current fence was installed, and spruce trees planted approximately every 30 feet along the south side of the fence the same year.

The planting of the spruce trees suggested that a vegetation plan already may have existed for the area as part of the development. Per P&R’s request, the MOA Planning Department, ARRC, and ACDA were all contacted to see if they had any record of a vegetation plan for the area. The only document found was a letter from the ARRC to the Government Hill Community Council stating that the ARRC had provided 89K to the Jaguar Group for fence relocation, landscaping, and trail grading, fulfilling its landscape commitment to the project, see attachment 3.

A social trail is used year-round by the neighborhood that roughly parallels the north side of the ARRC security fence. Further development of this trail is included as a neighborhood priority in the Government Hill Parks and Trail Plan.

Several public overlook opportunities exist in the greenbelt, see attachments 4.

Slope Stability Analysis

The Alaska Railroad requested professional review of potential impacts of tree clearing. Keith Mobley, P.E., president of Northern Geotechnical Engineering Inc. provided a professional review. See attachment 5. Mr. Mobley previously had performed a global slope stability analysis as part of the Northpointe Bluff redevelopment. Mr. Mobley accompanied ARRC and P&R personnel on a walk-through of the area on August 25, 2023. The tree cutting described in this vegetation plan is less intensive than what is allowed in attachment 5.

Current Vegetation

The location is currently in various stages of regrowth mostly by Cottonwood trees, varying from very little growth to densely packed cottonwoods with a trunk diameter ranging mostly between 1” to 12”. Vegetation near the man-made pond is more diverse. A few Prunus Padus saplings, a.k.a. Bird Cherry, were noted south

of the pond during the August 25, 2023 walk-through. The soil is mostly gravel with occasional pockets of clay. The location, in general, contains good ground cover in the form of grasses.

Vegetation Management Plan Strategy: Lease and Non-lease

Per the ARRC and Parks and Rec, the boundary of the MOA lease within this vegetation plan area shall be surveyed and marked. The leased and non-lease areas have different administrative controls. All work on or through the non-leased ARRC land must be permitted through the ARRC. Work on the leased greenbelt in this vegetation plan will be approved by letter or email of non-objection from Parks and Rec.

Any part of this plan may be executed at any time of the year provided that if heavy equipment is used in the plan area when the ground is not frozen, the equipment is tracked and does not leave ruts.

Lease Area

- No mass clearing of vegetation except to provide the minimum access for equipment
- Cut cottonwoods >2" diameter and invasive species of any size at the base of the tree
- In some instances, trees of smaller diameter will need to be removed to access trees >2" diameter
- Cut trees of any size that are growing into the fence
- Spruce trees will not be cut.
- Trees other than spruce that significantly interfere with the viewshed may be cut
- Trees deemed by the arborist to be unhealthy may be cut
- Trees of smaller diameter may be cut to facilitate the growth of other native species.
- Chip or mulch downed trees as much as possible, broadcasting the chips/mulch on site
 - Trees may temporarily be neatly piled until a chipper/mulcher is available
- Plant seeds and/or seedlings of native bushes and medium height trees to help restore the greenbelt
 - Work with Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District subject matter experts to determine most viable species for the area
- Attempt to maintain moderately dense vegetation to provide noise abatement, visual screening of rail yard, and a wildlife corridor.
- When needed, access to the greenbelt south of the fence may be made available by temporarily opening the chain link fence.
- Log the tree cutting and seeding activity (i.e. species, quantity, conditions and location)
- Install a lockable access through the fence into the lease.
 - To provide access authorized by P&R for native tree/shrub planting on the lease
 - To provide access authorized by P&R, following the initial cutting, for annual neighborhood maintenance of trees between 2" and 3" diameter with loppers on the lease only
 - To provide access authorized by P&R on the lease for Government Hill Elementary science classes to obtain samples of the pond water

Non-leased Area

- No mass clearing of vegetation except to provide the minimum access for equipment
- Trees interfering or estimated to be interfering with the viewshed within 3 years from the upper bench and trail overlooks will be tagged for either cutting at the base or topping.

- Tagged Cottonwood trees within approximately 50' of running water will be topped at approximately 4' to 5' with the exception that invasive species or trees growing into the fence may be cut at the base
- Larger diameter tagged cottonwood trees (i.e., >12") and trees on a slope will be topped at approximately 4' to 5'.
- Other trees will generally be tagged for cutting at the base.
- Felled trees will generally be left in place except when they obstruct running water or pathways for equipment.
- Attempt to maintain moderately dense vegetation to provide noise abatement and visual screening of rail yard.
- Cut any tree growing into security fence
- Do not cut spruce trees and work to minimize cutting of native species other than cottonwoods
- Cut invasive species of any size
- Work with the ARRC to plant a double row of spruce trees lower down the slope, approximately 65' from the tracks, to provide future year-round screening.

Vegetation Management Plan: Initial Actions

Starting October 2023

Leased Area

- Survey and stake leased area boundary south of the security fence in plan area prior to tree cutting
- Commence tree cutting per strategy
- Spread seeds of native bushes and medium height tree species during cutting/chipping activity
- Install access through security fence to lease area

Non-leased Area

Survey and stake a line 65' from the centerline of nearest railroad track and the eastern border of the plan (i.e. A line south of fence, 180° from Monument 1 located at the point connecting Lot 28 Block 1 and Lot 1 Block 3 of the Northpointe Bluff Subdivision)

Commence tree cutting per strategy

Vegetation Management Plan: Continued Maintenance

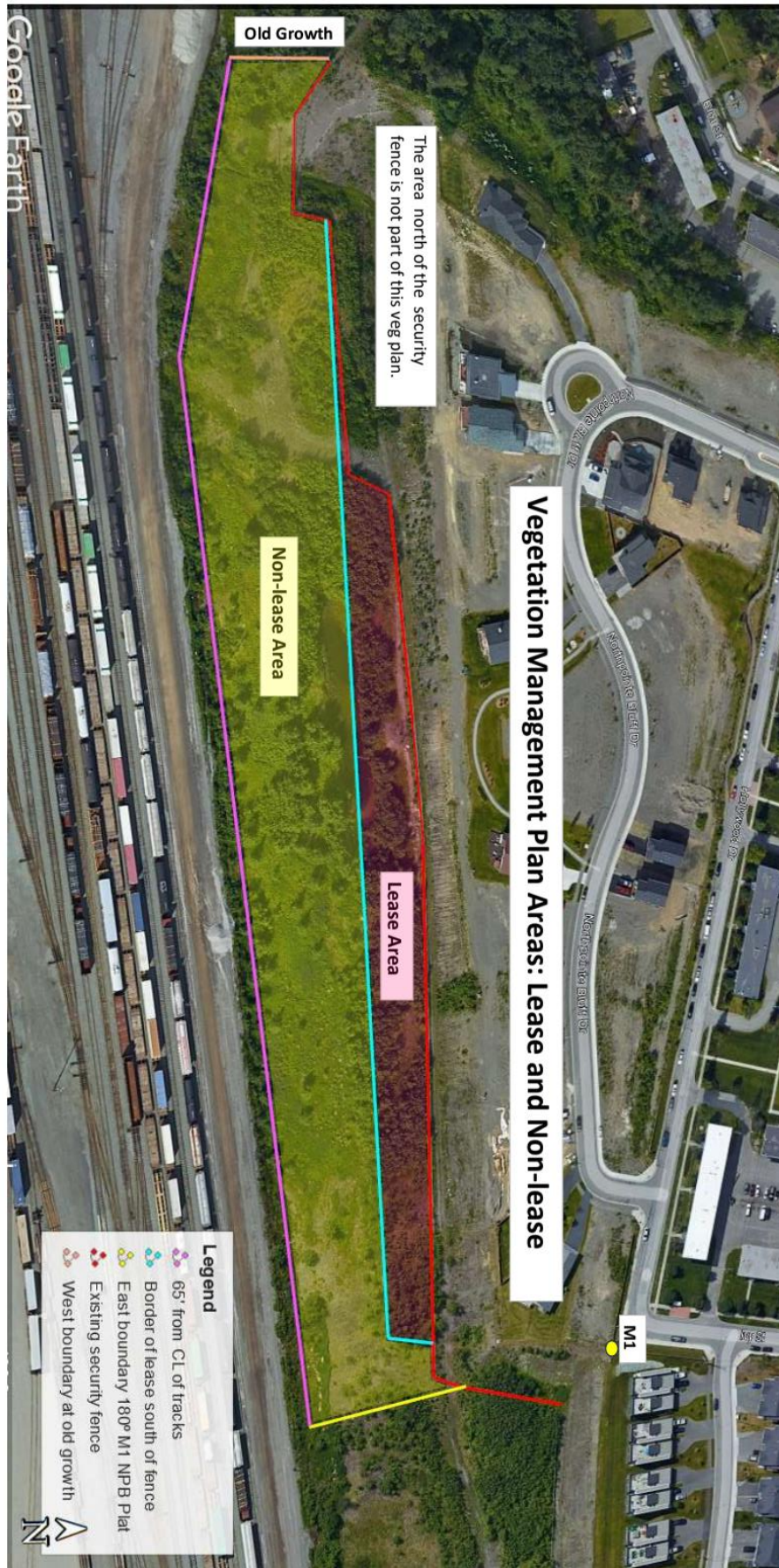
- The initial control actions will need to be repeated, but less intensive and less frequently as a more diverse selection of shorter or slower growing tree species are established.
- Annual neighborhood maintenance with loppers within the leased area
- Planting of native species within the leased area
- Planting of row of spruce seedlings at approximately 65' from the tracks in conjunction with ARRC
- Update existing conditions, including invasive species
- Log the establishment rate of planted seeds and the survival rate of planted trees and shrubs.
- Log any tree cutting and planting activity

Advantages of Vegetation Management Plan:

- In conformance with the Government Hill Neighborhood Plan, and--soon to be adopted—Government Hill Parks and Trails Plan, both of which emphasize the importance to the neighborhood of maintaining viewsheds and healthy greenbelts
- Help maintain some sound abatement and visual screening of the rail yard
- Restore greenbelt from a low biological value first-growth monoculture forest that has taken a foot hold in what was a former gravel mine to a sustainable diverse drought resistant woodland that is home to a multitude of south central native species of plants and trees which in turn support a wide variety of local wildlife species in their original habitat.
- Help maintain integrity of security fence by preventing growth within the fence and falling trees damaging fence
- Help to maintain a spirit of cooperation between ARRC and the neighborhood

Prepared by:

Steve Leider
1262 Northpointe Bluff Dr
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
Mobile 907-570-8204
Northpointe Bluff Homeowner
Member of the Cottonwood Committee



Attachment 2



Attachment 3



...
FYI

Executive Office
Telephone: 907-265-2403
Facsimile: 907-265-2312

May 12, 2008

Julie Jessel
President
Government Hill Community Council
P.O. Box 100018
Anchorage, AK 99510-0018

Dear Ms. Jessel:

This is to inform the Government Hill Community Council that on May 12, 2008 the Alaska Railroad provided \$89,000 (\$100,000 minus administrative fees and previous design costs) in funding to Jaguar Development Group LLC (Jaguar) to be used for fence relocation, landscaping and trail grading at the Hollywood Vista development site. As a result, the Alaska Railroad considers its commitment of providing \$100,000 in landscaping to the Hollywood Vista development site to be fulfilled.

In conversations last year with the Municipality of Anchorage and the community council, the Railroad was hoping to secure a commitment from all parties involved with the Hollywood Vista project for the use of this money. Unfortunately, another year has gone by with no progress on a coordinated effort and so we have moved the money on our own for the project's behalf. The fence will be placed between the railroad yard and the neighborhood and this funding will help ensure that Jaguar installs a more attractive fence than otherwise might be planned.

We trust the Hollywood Vista development will be an attractive and welcome addition to the Government Hill neighborhood. If you have any questions regarding the type of fence, trail and landscaping work scheduled, please contact Marc Marlow from Jaguar at 929-3433.

Thank you for your understanding.

Best regards,


James Kubitz
VP Real Estate and Facilities

CC:
Mary Jane Michael, Municipality of Anchorage
Ron Pollock, Anchorage Community Development Authority
Marc Marlow, Jaguar Development Group LLC

327 W. Ship Creek Avenue
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

MAILING ADDRESS
P.O. Box 107500 Anchorage, Alaska, 99510-7500

TEL 907.265.2300 FAX 907.265.2416
AlaskaRailroad.com

Attachment 4





NORTHERN GEOTECHNICAL ENGINEERING, INC. / TERRA FIRMA TESTING

Laboratory Testing Geotechnical Engineering Instrumentation Construction Monitoring Services Thermal Analysis

March 6, 2018

NGE-TFT Project # 4927-18

Northpointe Bluff HOA
1501 W 11th Avenue, #14
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Attn: Steve Leider

**RE: NORTHPOINTE BLUFF ASSESSMENT WITH RESPECT TO TREE CUTTING,
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA**

Steve,

Per your request, we (Northern Geotechnical Engineering, Inc. *d.b.a.* Terra Firma Testing) have completed a site visit and assessment of the geotechnical conditions on the south facing bluff as it pertains to proposed tree removal on the slope. Because the slope is within an Alaska Railroad reserve, the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) has requested a professional review of the potential impacts associated with tree clearing.

Our scope of service was authorized by email on January 17, 2018.

Background

Following demolition of the Hollywood Vista apartment complex, the land at the top of the bluff was redeveloped for residential development. A part of that effort included a global slope stability analysis, the results of which showed the property was stable according to the then current code requirements mandated by the Municipality of Anchorage. The slope configuration has not changed, therefore no global stability evaluation is necessary.

Over the past years, vegetation has grown on the slope and is now starting to block home owner views. It is understood that the residents, through the HOA would like to remove the vegetation that is blocking views. This includes the relatively new growth directly below the development and the mature growth on the bluff slope to the west of the subdivision.

The general soil profile for the bluff consists of 30 to 40 feet of sand, gravel, and occasional silty layers overlying silt with varying degrees of strength. The silt layer impedes groundwater percolation, and as such, this water daylights in numerous springs along the bluff face

Evaluation

A site visit was conducted on February 9, 2018, with yourself and Blake Adolfae of the ARRC. Weather conditions were sunny and several degrees below freezing. Approximately 1 foot of snow covered the site. A few springs were noted near the base of the bluff. A bench approximately 100 feet wide is located at about mid-elevation of the bluff. The upper ½ of the slope is generally clear of woody vegetation, the bench area has thick young growth of cottonwood trees, and the lower slope generally has sparse cottonwood growth.

Page 1 of 2

Attachment 5 (continued)

Slope Evaluation
Northpointe Bluff Stability
Northpointe Bluff HOA
March 6, 2018

NGE-TFT Project #4927-18

Vegetation on the bench area can be cut close to the ground surface, leaving the root system in place. This can be accomplished by individual cutting, mowing or other mechanical cutting as long as the root system is not disturbed or removed. The plant matter cut should be chipped or shredded and the chips spread on the ground surface. For mass clearing of vegetation on any slope steeper than 6H:1V, we recommend that trees that are obstructing views be topped rather than cut at the ground surface. For selective cutting, single trees can be cut near the ground surface, leaving the root system in the undisturbed ground. Again, any cut vegetation should be chipped and the chips spread out over the ground surface. Vegetation within 50 feet of any channel where water flows (even if just intermittently) should not be disturbed. Taller trees could be topped and the cut off portions removed, chipped and the chips spread out on the site.

From an erosion and geotechnical stability standpoint, chipping is not necessary, however the chips will decrease the potential for erosion in the event of extreme rainfall, and the chips will decrease the rate of regrowth of vegetation cut close to the ground surface. The alternative of limbing tree trunks and leaving the branches and logs decreases animal movement through the area and increases fire potential if there is a long, dry spell during hot weather. For selective cutting and effort to reduce the brush pile height, leaving the logs and branches could be considered as an alternative.

We do not recommend that the mature cottonwoods to the west of the subdivision be cut or removed. The understory vegetation is sparse, and it is expected that if these trees are removed, erosion may occur before new vegetation can establish itself. Some trees could be topped, however this work would have to be done in such a way to avoid disturbance with the soils on the slope.

Although not imperative, we recommend that the tree topping, cutting, and/or mowing be accomplished in the winter while the ground is frozen. This will protect the undergrowth and minimize soil disturbance. If the work is done while the surface is thawed, the ground should be dry enough such that the equipment used does not leave visible ruts.

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide you with our professional service. Please contact us directly with any questions or comments you may have regarding the information that we present in this letter, or if you have any other questions, comments, and/or requests.

Sincerely,
Northern Geotechnical Engineering, Inc. *d.b.a.* Terra Firma Testing,



Keith F. Mobley, P.E.
President



Page 2 of 2