



## Eucalyptus in State Parks

### What is eucalyptus?

The eucalyptus commonly found in California is a tall, fast-growing tree native to Australia. More than 250 species of eucalyptus have been planted in California; of these, 18 species are now naturalized and reproduce on their own.

### Where did it come from?

In the late 1800s, Australian settlers planted the first eucalyptus in California, believing the trees to be a good source of hardwood. However, eucalyptus wood commonly split or twisted when used for construction. Eucalyptus planted in California had no natural enemies and have since spread within many state parks.

### What problems does it cause?

**Fire hazards**—The tree uses fire, fed by its own highly incendiary oil, to open its seeds. When low-hanging branches catch fire, long bark strips ignite and carry sparks up to seeds in the tree canopy. Burning debris carries fire long distances to kindle other fuel.

**Falling hazards**—Top-heavy branches are prone to “sudden



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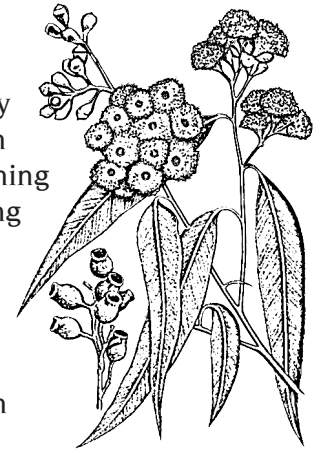
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**Falling hazards**—Top-heavy branches are prone to “sudden



limb failure,” dropping to the ground from great heights. At times, the trees’ shallow root systems can cause them to topple without warning.

**Loss of natural diversity**—Beneath this aggressive non-native tree, native growth is rare to nonexistent. In addition to the eucalyptus toxin that kills native plants, thick fallen litter can often smother understory vegetation. Once-abundant native wildlife, dependent on local flora, have decreased in areas with eucalyptus.

### **Eucalyptus and wildlife habitat**

Since the loss of native Monterey pines, coast redwoods and other trees once used as roosts by migrating monarch butterflies, the insects largely roost in eucalyptus groves.

Eucalyptus has also provided a canopy where no shade existed previously. The thick, strong branches provide an excellent rookery habitat for herons and egrets.

### **Managing eucalyptus in parks**

Many of the eucalyptus trees in our state parks contribute to cultural landscapes that demonstrate how land was used during a particular period of history. However, the fast growth and drought tolerance of the trees make its management difficult.

Parks staff may thin stands of eucalyptus, trim lower limbs, or remove entire groves. Fire management in developed areas sometimes calls for removal of these naturalized non-native trees, followed by native plant restoration.

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