

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 14, 2023

Wildfire Resilience Program 2023-2024 Augmentation

Project No. 23-041-01 and 23-053-01
Project Manager: Kostoula Vallianos

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,057,650 to the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County and the San Luis Obispo County Fire Safe Council for two additional wildfire resilience projects under the Conservancy's Wildfire Resilience Program 2023-2024.

LOCATION: Various locations in coastal watersheds in Monterey and San Luis Obispo Counties

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
Exhibit 2: [June 1, 2023 Wildfire Resilience Program 2023-2024 Staff Recommendation](#)
Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes grants in a total amount not to exceed one million, fifty-seven thousand, six hundred and fifty dollars (\$1,057,650) to the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County and the San Luis Obispo County Fire Safe Council to conduct planning and build capacity to increase wildfire resilience of California's natural lands and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, as specified below:

Resource Conservation District of Monterey County: Seven hundred eighty-seven thousand, four hundred dollars (\$787,400) to conduct wildfire resilience planning, education and outreach, and increase organizational capacity for four Monterey County organizations.

San Luis Obispo County Fire Safe Council: Two hundred and seventy thousand, two hundred and fifty dollars (\$270,250) to conduct countywide wildfire resilience planning.

Prior to commencement of the projects, the grantees shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding
4. Any other agreements determined necessary for the project by the Conservancy's Executive Officer.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Climate Ready Program.
2. The proposed projects are consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The proposed grantees are nonprofit organizations organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy) authorize disbursement of up to \$1,057,650 for two additional projects as part of the Conservancy's Wildfire Resilience Program 2023-2024, for which the Conservancy authorized disbursement of up to \$4,983,994 on June 1, 2023. The two additional projects will increase wildfire resilience planning and capacity building in Monterey and San Luis Obispo Counties and contribute to the development of a pipeline of vegetation management projects that will increase wildfire resilience of California's forests, grasslands, and natural lands and reduce fire risk to communities. The grantees for these two projects will be the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County and the San Luis Obispo County Fire Safe Council. The Conservancy's June 1, 2023 staff recommendation for the Wildfire Resilience Program 2023-2024 describes multiple projects to be funded under this program. (See Exhibit 2). The two additional projects to be funded under this program are summarized below.

RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT OF MONTEREY COUNTY	\$787,400
Monterey County Wildfire Resilience and Capacity Building Project	Central Coast
	Monterey County

The magnitude and frequency of recent wildfires is a result of numerous factors, including climate change, an emerging mega-drought cycle, increased wildland-urban interface population expansion and historic management of wildland areas. Monterey County

organizations need increased capacity to address the challenge of reducing wildfire risk and to implement projects that improve the health of ecosystems. Conservancy funding will support the implementation of the following four subprojects led by the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County (RCDMC) in partnership with the Fire Safe Council of Monterey County (FSCMC), Carmel River Watershed Conservancy (CRWC) and the Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association (CCPBA) which will address the need to increase the scale of wildfire resilience project work in the county.

1) The majority of funding from this grant will support the Monterey County Wildfire Resilience Organizational Capacity Project, which will pay to augment staffing for four local organizations: the RCDMC, the FSCMC, CRWC and the CCPBA. Specifically, the grant will support staff to work on refining and vetting a regional prioritization planning process and identifying priority projects. The FSCMC and the CRWC will share a part-time staff person that will develop wildfire resilience education and outreach material (digital and hardcopy) and events. Conservancy funding will also support two full time CCPBA staff, a Program Manager and Program Specialist, to develop several prescribed burn trainings and workshops, five certified burn plans, and a Tribal Good Fire internship for training local tribal members.

2) The North County Wildfire Prevention Planning Project will create a North County stakeholders' group and develop a future grant proposal for implementation. The North County area includes disadvantaged communities such as Marina and Salinas. Historically, this area has been overlooked for larger-scale fuels reduction projects. This project will identify critical elements for a future North County fuels treatment project and use public and partner feedback to design the project.

3) In February 2023, the California Coastal Commission approved the Monterey County Forest Health and Wildfire Resilience Public Works Plan (Monterey County PWP). The Monterey County PWP provides a framework that streamlines the coastal development permit process and CEQA compliance, using the California Vegetation Treatment Program Programmatic Environmental Impact Report standards and mitigation measures and coastal-specific standards developed by the Coastal Commission. The RCDMC will develop two Project Specific Analysis using the Monterey County PWP for two wildfire resilience forest health projects in Monterey County. Each Project Specific Analysis will then be used when applying for their respective coastal development permit.

4) Carmel Valley is a high fire hazard zone and detailed mapping is needed to develop and plan projects. The Carmel River Watershed Mapping project will create a fine-scale vegetation and wildfire regime map for the Carmel River watershed in partnership with California State University of Monterey Bay (CSUMB) Watershed Institute.

Funding: The proposed source of funding is a block grant to the Conservancy from the Department of Conservation's Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFCP). The RFFCP seeks to increase capacity to prioritize, develop, and implement projects that improve forest health and fire resiliency. The Conservancy's block grant covers projects from Marin County south to Ventura County. The proposed Monterey County project is consistent with the anticipated funding source as described in the Project Financing section listed below.

CEQA: The proposed project is statutorily exempt under 14 CCR Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies) because it involves planning for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded. Consistent with Section 15262, the project will consider environmental factors. The proposed project is also categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15306 (Information Collection) because it involves data collection and research activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY FIRE SAFE COUNCIL

\$270,250

San Luis Obispo County Wildfire Resilience Regional Priority Planning Project

Central Coast

San Luis Obispo County

Wildfires, historical and current, present a catastrophic threat to San Luis Obispo County with fires that routinely cross jurisdictional boundaries. Drought, bark beetle kill, diseases, and climate change have resulted in abnormal accumulation of stressed vegetation that is reaching a critical stage. Wildfire hazard/risk reduction and ecological restoration projects aimed at reducing consequences and returning to a more natural fire return interval are critical. Wildfire resilience planning in San Luis Obispo County requires a regional approach that includes a multi-organizational collaborative effort to build capacity, identify wildfire hazards and risk, strategize, plan, and prioritize efforts to restore ecological landscapes and reduce the consequences of these fires.

The proposed project will develop a wildfire regional priority plan and a portfolio of projects through a collaborative stakeholder process. The San Luis Obispo County Fire Safe Council (SLOFSC) has a large and diverse 32-member board of directors with a mission to build collaborative approaches to wildfire hazard and risk reduction countywide. The SLOFSC Board of Directors and ex officio members represent the spectrum of wildfire stakeholder organizations (private and public) throughout the county. The project also includes conducting a countywide wildfire hazard and risk assessment and the development of a project prioritization tool (scorecard) in collaboration with California Polytechnic State University Wildland Interface Institute (Cal Poly).

Funding: The proposed source of funding is a block grant to the Conservancy from the Department of Conservation’s Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFCP). The RFFCP seeks to increase capacity to prioritize, develop, and implement projects that improve forest health and fire resiliency. The Conservancy’s block grant covers projects from Marin County south to Ventura County. The proposed San Luis Obispo County project is consistent with the anticipated funding source as described in Project Financing section listed below.

CEQA: The proposed project is statutorily exempt under 14 CCR Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies) because it involves planning for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded. Consistent with Section 15262, the projects will consider environmental factors. The proposed project is also categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15306

(Information Collection) because it involves data collection and research activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed augmentation remains consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, as described in the June 1, 2023 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$1,057,650
Others	\$185,000
Project Total	\$1,242,650

Conservancy funding for the projects is anticipated to come from a block grant to the Coastal Conservancy from the Department of Conservation’s Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFCP). The Conservancy is one of nine recipients of RFFCP block grants. The goal of the RFFCP is to increase regional capacity to prioritize, develop, and implement projects that improve forest health and fire resiliency. The Conservancy’s block grant covers projects from Marin County south to Ventura County. The two additional proposed projects are consistent with the funding source because they include training, education, regional planning, coordination, and/or data gathering activities to support future fuel management projects.

In kind from the SLOFSC and Cal Poly as well as other grant funding will contribute approximately \$185,000 to the San Luis Obispo County Wildfire Resilience Regional Priority Plan.

Unless specifically identified as “Required Match,” the other sources of funding and in-kind contributions described above are estimates. The Conservancy does not typically require matching funds or in-kind services, nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders or of in-kind services. Typical grant conditions require grantees to provide any funds needed to complete a project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed augmentation remains consistent with the Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation for the reasons discussed in the June 1, 2023 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2), which is incorporated herein by reference.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#):

Consistent with **Goal 1.1, Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the North County Wildfire Prevention Planning Project, which is a sub project of Monterey County Wildfire Resilience and Capacity Building Project, will benefit systemically excluded

communities in northern Monterey County by developing a stakeholder group and identifying a wildfire resilience project in the area for future funding.

Consistent with **Goal 1.4, Incorporate Workforce Development in Our Projects**, the Monterey County Wildfire Resilience Organizational Capacity Project, a sub project of the Monterey County Wildfire Resilience and Capacity Building Project, includes the funding for the Central Coast Prescribed Burn association to develop prescribed burn trainings and workshops as well as a tribal apprenticeship program. These training and workshops will help to increase the number of individuals trained to implement prescribed fire.

Consistent with **Goal 4.2 Wildfire Resilience Projects**, the proposed projects include two wildfire resilience planning projects.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

Conservancy staff reviewed the proposed projects for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.) and its implementing regulations (14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Sections 15000 et seq.).

All proposed projects are categorically and/or statutorily exempt under CEQA. Please see the “Project Summary” section above, for more information on each proposed project and why it is exempt from CEQA. Applicable CEQA exemptions are listed below.

14 CCR Section 15306 (Information Collection) exempts projects that involve basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The data gathering and research projects described in this staff recommendation qualify for this exemption.

Development of fuel management and fire resilience plans is exempt under 14 CCR Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies), which applies to planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions that have not been approved, adopted, or funded. Consistent with Section 15262, these projects will consider environmental factors.

Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.