

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
February 13, 2025

PROSPER RIDGE PRAIRIE RESTORATION PROJECT: AUGMENTATION

Project No.24-057-01
Project Manager: Lilly Allen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$150,000 to augment the Conservancy’s previously authorized grant to the Mattole Restoration Council to host wildland fire-fighting training sessions and to restore historical prairies and landscape level fuel breaks through vegetation removal and management in the King Range National Conservation Area.

LOCATION: Humboldt County.

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [September 22, 2022 Conservancy Staff Recommendation](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

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

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of up to one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) to the Mattole Restoration Council (the “grantee”) to augment the Conservancy grant authorized on September 22, 2022 for a total authorized amount of four hundred sixty-seven thousand dollars (\$467,000) to provide wildland fire-fighting training and to restore historical prairies and landscape level fuel breaks in the King Range National Conservation Area. The augmentation will enable additional use of mechanical vegetation removal in the event that prescribed burning is infeasible and provide additional training sessions. This authorization is subject to the same conditions as the September 22, 2022 authorization.

Findings:

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

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Climate Ready Program.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
 3. The Mattole Restoration Council is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.
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STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$150,000 to the Mattole Restoration Council (MRC) to augment the Conservancy grant authorized on September 22, 2022, which provided funding to host wildland fire-fighting training sessions and to restore historical prairies and landscape level fuel breaks in the King Range National Conservation Area. The original grant was authorized by the Conservancy September 22, 2022 (Exhibit 2). The original authorized amount was \$317,000. The recommended augmentation will enable different methods of vegetation removal in the event that prescribed burning is not feasible and will increase the number of training sessions.

The MRC's Prosper Ridge Prairie Restoration Project is a collaboration with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to restore historical prairies and landscape level fuel breaks on Prosper Ridge in the King Range National Conservation Area in Humboldt County. Original project tasks included the restoration of grassland through mechanical removal of approximately 42 acres of encroaching coyote brush vegetation; propagation of up to 30,000 native grass and forb plugs; trainings; mechanical and manual thinning on approximately 41 acres of forested areas, and prescribed burning on 100 acres. The prescribed burning was to take place on the 42 acres of newly restored grassland to control root sprouting coyote brush and on 58 acres of previously restored areas in need of maintenance burning to reduce fuel load.

To date, 5 acres of vegetation removal, 3 classroom fire trainings, and planting over 18,000 grass plugs have been completed.

Two changes to the original project justify the need for additional funding. Due to staffing issues, vegetation may have to be mechanically removed instead of burned. Mechanical removal of vegetation on the 100 acres will be more expensive than prescribed burning. Second, the 41 acres of encroaching Douglas fir forest will be removed and restored to historical prairie condition. Originally, only forest thinning was planned for these 41 acres, but thinning is not allowed under the current BLM NEPA Environmental Assessment for Prosper Ridge. The mechanical removal of Douglas fir forest and mastication of the vegetation is more costly than the originally planned thinning. The \$150,000 in added funding will allow MRC to conduct the additional mechanical vegetation removal in place of burning and thinning, and to provide an additional 1-3 wildland firefighting training opportunities to the four previously committed.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: MRC is a nonprofit organization organized under U.S. Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3), working for more than 35 years toward the recovery of salmonid populations in the Mattole River. It is a member of the collaborative Mattole River and Range Partnership, an alliance of local nonprofit organizations working together to carry out enhancement activities in the Mattole watershed.

MRC has an experienced administrative and contract management team and is currently managing over 5 million dollars in secured grant contracts. These include grants for riparian habitat restoration, forest health, workforce development, invasive species removal, coastal prairie restoration, fire safety, landscape-level fuel break and wildlife corridor enhancement, ecological education, workforce development, and management of a native plant nursery and operations base.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

Selection Criteria

1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.

See the "Consistency with Conservancy's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan" section below.

2. Project is a good investment of state resources.

The proposed project is a good investment of state funding. The project is feasible, has a reasonable budget, and addresses a demonstrated need or regional problem. The project implements many statewide wildfire and forest resiliency goals. The proposed project is consistent with several state plans, and specifically with the following:

- **California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan** (Governor's Forest Management Task Force, January 2021), which calls for activities such as fuels reduction, forest thinning, vegetation management, prescribed fire, shaded fuel breaks, defensible space, and enhancement of fire-prone habitats to reduce fire risk.
- **California Forest Carbon Plan** (California Natural Resources Agency, 2018), which calls for restoration of natural fire regime and forest composition through a multitude of approaches including thinning, prescribed burns, invasive vegetation management, and shaded fuel breaks.
- **Community Wildfire Prevention & Mitigation Report** (CAL FIRE, 2019), which urges state and local agencies to implement the goals of the Carbon Forest Plan and lays out

recommendations to agencies to increase the scale and pace of management and mitigation actions to improve forest health and resiliency.

3. Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area.

MRC has engaged the Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria (Bear River Band) Tribal Council members, Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) staff, and tribal members in face-to-face discussions, phone calls, and emails. Bear River Band’s THPO director and staff work closely with MRC’s existing Mattole Field Institute program. MRC has been working with the Bear River Band to develop opportunities for tribal members to participate in workforce development trainings for fire and forest health-related careers.

MRC staff have followed up on conversations and provided timely updates and sought feedback from tribal partners whenever there has been meaningful progress on this project. MRC staff also introduced Bear River Band and California Indian Basketweavers’ Association staff/members to existing nearby public (but not publicized) areas containing significant culturally important plants. MRC has demonstrated to Bear River Band that they seek to empower and benefit the local tribe. The MRC’s Mattole Field Institute currently engages Bear River Band staff and members as guest presenters.

4. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan: See Exhibit 2.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact: See Exhibit 2.

6. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support:
See Exhibit 2

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy (previous authorization)	\$317,000
Coastal Conservancy (current authorization)	\$150,000
Project Total	\$467,000

The anticipated source of funding is the Fiscal Year 2023-24 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of wildfire risk reduction (The Budget Act of 2023, Chapter 12, Statutes (SB 101), as amended by Chapter 38, Statutes of 2023 (AB 102)). The proposed program is consistent with this funding source because it will help increase the pace and scale of wildfire resilience projects and ultimately reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

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 project remains consistent with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation as described in the September 22, 2022 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.4 Incorporate Workforce Development in Our Projects**, the project includes workforce development through wildland firefighting training opportunities.

Consistent with **Goal 4.2 Wildfire Resilience**, the proposed project will implement a wildfire resilience project on approximately 80 acres.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project remains exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as described in the September 22, 2022 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2) pursuant to Public Resources Code section 4799.05(d), which exempts state funding of projects undertaken on federal lands that consist of prescribed fire, thinning, or fuel reduction to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire. This exemption is applicable only to projects that have been reviewed under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and if the Secretary for Natural Resources has certified that NEPA and laws that affect management of federal forest lands in California have not been substantially amended since August 31, 2018. On January 13, 2022, the Secretary for Natural Resources made the necessary certification. The proposed project was reviewed in the Prosper Ridge Prairie Plan Environmental Assessment, dated 1/18/2014 (DOI-BLM-CA-N030-2013-0002). Accordingly, Conservancy funding of the proposed project is exempt from CEQA under Section 4799.05(d).