

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
February 13, 2025

**PEDRO POINT HEADLANDS WILDFIRE RESILIENCE PROGRAM**

Project No. 24-062-01  
Project Manager: Erin Gravley

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$4,114,532 to the San Mateo Resource Conservation District to undertake the Pedro Point Headlands Wildfire Resilience Program, consisting of 1) planning and preparing permit applications and environmental review documents for wildfire fuel reduction, including removal of mature trees, and 2) planning and implementing discrete vegetation management tasks at the Pedro Point Headlands in San Mateo County.

**LOCATION:** Pedro Point Headlands, Pacifica, San Mateo County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS**

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

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed four million one hundred fourteen thousand five hundred thirty-two dollars (\$4,114,532) to the San Mateo Resource Conservation District (“the grantee”) to undertake the Pedro Point Headlands Wildfire Resilience Program, consisting of 1) planning and preparing permit applications and environmental review documents for wildfire fuel reduction, including removal of mature trees, and 2) planning and implementing discrete vegetation management tasks at the Pedro Point Headlands in San Mateo County.

Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee 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. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.

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.

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$4,114,532 grant to the San Mateo Resource Conservation District (RCD) to undertake the Pedro Point Headlands Wildfire Resilience Program (the project), consisting of 1) planning and preparing permit applications and environmental review documents for wildfire fuel reduction, including removal of mature trees, and 2) planning and implementing discrete vegetation management tasks at the Pedro Point Headlands in San Mateo County (Exhibit 1). Pedro Point Headlands is owned by the Conservancy and the City of Pacifica (City) as shown in Exhibit 1. The Headlands contains approximately two miles of trails that provide expansive and jaw-dropping views of the adjacent ocean and coastline, as well as tranquil paths through thriving native habitat. Due to its location immediately adjacent to the City, the property provides easy access to open space and recreational opportunities for residents in Pacifica as well as regional urban visitors from the greater San Francisco Bay Area and beyond. Its central location also means it directly abuts Highway 1 and a residential neighborhood. The areas of the property next to Highway 1 and the residential neighborhood fall in the Pedro Point Headlands Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and are heavily vegetated with Eucalyptus trees and other potential wildfire fuels, creating a high wildfire risk. The project area is partially located in and surrounded by high and very high fire hazard severity zones as identified by CAL FIRE.

Under portion 1 of the program, the RCD will plan for fuel reduction, including removal of mature trees, on 10-20 acres of the WUI area abutting private residences (Exhibit 1). Tasks include engaging with landowners, the Conservancy, the City, and other stakeholders such as CAL FIRE; preparing maps, undertaking surveys, and determining recommended treatment types for specific areas; finalizing treatment prescriptions for each area; and preparing environmental review documents. In addition, the RCD will prepare permit applications. The environmental review process may require preparation of a Project Specific Analysis (PSA) for Pedro Point Headlands under the California Vegetation Treatment Program's Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (CALVTP PEIR). Possible treatments to be considered in the plan include full removal of invasive Eucalyptus trees and other identified hazardous vegetation, creation of a shaded fuel break, vegetation thinning and limbing, and biomass management.

Under portion 2 of the program, the RCD will plan for and implement discrete vegetation management tasks at Pedro Point Headlands that do not require environmental review documents. The discrete vegetation management tasks include removal of non-native species, vegetation thinning to reduce ladder fuels, and re-establishment of fire-resilient native species, and does not include the removal of healthy, scenic, or mature trees.

The RCD may determine that the discrete vegetation management tasks should be incorporated into portion 1 of the program. In the event that the RCD incorporates the discrete vegetation management tasks into portion 1 of the program, the RCD will prepare environmental compliance documents for the vegetation removal planned under both portions of the program and will not implement the discrete vegetation management tasks of portion 2 separately from portion 1.

The RCD has started planning and permitting for a wildfire fuel management project along the Highway 1 evacuation corridor that is also in the Pedro Point Headlands WUI. The Conservancy is helping fund this work through a pre-existing Regional Forest and Fire Capacity grant. This project will provide the funding to address the remainder of the Pedro Point Headlands WUI and allow the RCD to more holistically plan and permit for wildfire risk reduction at Pedro Point Headlands.

**Site Description:** Pedro Point Headlands is a large promontory located at the southern edge of the City, 15 miles south of San Francisco. Pedro Point Headlands rises almost vertically from the ocean to a height of 625 feet, where the bluff-tops provide a spectacular view of the coastline north to Point Reyes, south to Devil's Slide, and east to Montara Mountain and the Santa Cruz Mountains. Protected public land extends directly to the south at Devil's Slide County Park. While a small portion of the Pedro Point Headlands is privately owned and developed with houses, the remainder is publicly-owned open space. The Conservancy owns approximately 98 acres and the City owns an adjacent 157 acres. Aside from its recreational value, the Pedro Point Headlands provide habitat for coastal native species. Its usefulness as wildlife habitat is enhanced by its proximity to other open spaces and protected lands.

The area to be addressed in portion 1 is the City and Conservancy owned areas of the Headlands that are adjacent to the Pedro Point neighborhood, approximately 10-20 acres (Exhibit 1). The project area is designated as WUI, a designation that extends past the project area where it spans upwards of fifty private residences and a small shopping complex. The area to be addressed in portion 2 is Conservancy and City property at the Headlands overall. Potentially problematic vegetation in the project areas includes invasive Eucalyptus and English ivy, as well as other known wildfire fuels.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The RCD has extensive expertise, resources, and a proven track record of successfully administering grant funds to complete projects of this size and scope. With a team of professionals skilled in forestry, natural resource management, biological resources, and environmental planning, the RCD has a history of implementing similar projects and securing funding from local, state, and federal sources. The RCD is well equipped to lead partners and contractors in the completion of projects that enhance public safety and environmental health in San Mateo County, and it benefits from strong partnerships with local agencies and community groups that foster collaboration and support. The RCD has worked

closely with the Conservancy's Wildfire Program and its program leaders to administer, manage, and complete similar projects.

**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 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. The proposed project will help protect coastal habitats and public access resources at Pedro Point by reducing the risk of wildfire. 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.
- The 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.
- The 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.

The San Mateo Community Wildfire Protection Plan identifies Eucalyptus as a high priority fuel type for treatment, making the proposed project a priority for San Mateo County.

**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.**

The RCD will invite local Tribes to participate in the planning process and offer opportunities for Tribes to provide input on the project design. The RCD has a close working relationship with the Association of Ramaytush Ohlone (ARO), which the RCD will continue to develop on this project. The ARO has expressed support for removal of non-native forests and improving the

resiliency of the landscape to fire. The RCD will update ARO and any interested Tribes of the status of the project and offer opportunities to engage.

**4. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.**

The proposed project will help increase fire resiliency in the context of anticipated climate change. Fire resilience is a critical issue due to increased average temperatures, reduced marine fog, and longer and more severe droughts. California is facing unprecedented fire risk due to climate change and a growing populace. Fire seasons in the last several years broke numerous records. The proposed project will plan for fuel reduction and implement discrete fuel reduction actions, both of which will contribute to slow or lower the intensity of future wildfires. In turn, this change will result in less carbon emissions resulting from fires. Once completed, the success of this project is likely to foster increased community support and a desire for ongoing maintenance and future similar initiatives.

**5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.**

This project will directly address the significant fire hazards posed by dense and overgrown vegetation on the Pedro Point Headlands. Removal of non-native forest cover will increase available habitat for fire-resilient native vegetation. The project will enhance public safety by helping mitigate risks posed by wildfire, a critical concern in the region's dry climate, and improving residents' ability to evacuate safely and efficiently. The project will also provide ecological benefits by removing invasive species and monocultures of non-native trees, increasing available habitat for native species, and improving biodiversity. Finally, by reducing the risk of wildfire on the Pedro Point Headlands, the project will help protect the popular public access amenities on the property.

**6. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.**

The proposed project includes community engagement with adjacent landowners, community members, relevant agencies, and other stakeholders. Public engagement may include in-person or virtual meetings, on-site field tours, interactive website, social media, and educational materials. The RCD project team has an excellent track record of working within communities and incorporating insights gained from community engagement into project planning.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$4,114,532</b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$4,114,532</b>

Conservancy funds for this project are expected to come from the Fiscal Year 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 appropriations from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of wildfire risk reduction. (The Budget Act of 2022, SB 154 as amended by AB 178 (2022) and the Budget Act of 2023, SB 101). The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it will plan and prepare environmental review documents and permit applications for fuel reduction that involves removal of mature trees, and plan and implement discrete fuel reduction work that does not require environmental review documents at the Pedro Point

Headlands. This will reduce the risk of fire ignition and reduce the risk of fire spread to the adjacent community in this high wildfire risk area.

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 will be undertaken pursuant to Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy’s jurisdiction (Section 31113(a)).

Pursuant to Section 31113(b)-(c), the Conservancy is authorized to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects within its jurisdiction that include reducing greenhouse gas emissions and addressing extreme weather events, sea level rise, flooding, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources.

Pursuant to Section 31113(c), the Conservancy must prioritize grants, to the extent allowed, for projects that maximize public benefits and that accomplish one of several purposes, including reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.

Consistent with this Section, the proposed project will plan, permit, and prepare environmental review documents for the Pedro Point Headlands Wildfire Resilience project and implement discrete fuel reduction work along the Pedro Point Headlands WUI which will reduce the risk of fire ignition and fire spread to the adjacent community. The project will help California’s natural lands be more resilient to catastrophic wildfires, which may ultimately reduce greenhouse gas emissions released from increased wildfires due to climate change.

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

Consistent with **Goal 4.2 Wildfire Resilience Projects**, the proposed project will plan actions to reduce hazardous fuels on at least 10-20 acres at Pedro Point Headlands.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The planning and permitting portions of the project are statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to Title 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR), Section 15262, which exempts projects that involve only planning studies and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded. Environmental factors will be considered in the studies undertaken pursuant to this authorization. These portions of the project are also categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15306, which

exempts basic data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in disturbance to an environmental resource.

The implementation of the discrete vegetation management tasks under portion 2 of the program is categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land) because it involves only minor alterations to land without the removal of healthy, scenic, or mature trees. The implementation portion of the project will include only removal of non-native species, vegetation thinning to reduce ladder fuels, and re-establishment of fire-resilient native species.

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