

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 18, 2025

SOUTH BAY PRESCRIBED BURN ASSOCIATION

Project No. 25-019-01
Project Manager: Lilly Allen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$400,000 to the Santa Clara County Fire Safe Council to adapt their Community Wildfire Prevention Plan into a Regional Priority Plan, to establish a Prescribed Burn Association in Santa Clara County (South Bay Prescribed Burn Association) and, through the Prescribed Burn Association conduct initial workshops, classes, and training programs that will entail a series of small, prescribed burns on Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District lands with the goal of enhancing the ability of both private and public landowners to safely use prescribed burns to reduce wildfire severity and improve landscape health in Santa Clara County.

LOCATION: Santa Clara County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
Exhibit 2: [Project Letters](#)
Exhibit 3: [Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Wildfire Resilience Program Staff Recommendation dated June 7, 2021](#)
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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 a grant of an amount not to exceed four hundred thousand dollars (\$400,000) to the Santa Clara County Fire Safe Council (“the grantee”) to adapt their Community Wildfire Prevention Plan into a Regional Prioritization Plan to establish a Prescribed Burn Association in Santa Clara County (South Bay Prescribed Burn Association) and, through the Prescribed Burn Association, conduct initial workshops, classes, and training programs that will entail a series of small, prescribed burns on Midpeninsula

Regional Open Space District lands with the goal of enhancing the ability of both private and public landowners to safely use prescribed burns to reduce wildfire severity and improve landscape health in Santa Clara County (“the project”).

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. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
5. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement, operate, and maintain the project.

If the grantee uses the grant funds to purchase equipment costing \$5,000 or more, the grantee shall use such equipment for wildfire-related purposes for the duration of the useful life of the equipment.

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.
3. Santa Clara Fire Safe Council is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$400,000 grant to the Santa Clara County Fire Safe Council (SCCFSC) to adapt their Community Wildfire Prevention Plan into a Regional Prioritization Plan, to establish a Prescribed Burn Association in Santa Clara County (South Bay Prescribed Burn Association), and, through the Prescribed Burn Association, conduct initial workshops, classes, and training programs that will entail a series of small, prescribed burns on Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District lands with the goal of enhancing the ability of both private and public landowners to safely use prescribed burns to reduce wildfire severity and improve landscape health in Santa Clara County (“the project”). SCCFSC will primarily use the recommended grant to establish and operate the activities of the South Bay PBA.

Prescribed Burn Associations are community-based, mutual aid networks to support the safe use of prescribed burns. There are over 27 Prescribed Burn Associations in California where community members and organizations help each other implement burns by providing labor, equipment, and skills.

In Santa Clara County, the use of prescribed fire in land management has been limited. The goals of the project are to teach the use of prescribed fire and incorporate it as a long-term forest health management tool primarily in the Los Gatos Creek watershed. The Los Gatos Creek watershed was chosen because of the existing collaboration between land managers and interest in prescribed burning. The project will include training practitioners and conducting public outreach and education, including workshops for pile building techniques and navigating the permit process for private landowner burning and smoke management. The project will include a series of small burns as part of initial trainings and capacity improvements, as mentioned above. These treatments are strategically placed to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, while creating a more resilient and fire adapted ecosystem. Treatment areas are chosen in collaboration between Midpen (landowner) and SCCFSC to maximize benefits. The project is divided into numerous small treatment areas, which are well-suited for prescribed burning as a maintenance strategy and located on Midpen land.

SCCFSC is well-suited to lead the South Bay PBA as they already coordinate on county-wide wildfire efforts (including managing the update of the County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, leading in the development of the Regional Prioritization Plan, and working with their County Office of Emergency Management to update the County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan) through the California Fire Safe Council's County Coordinator program funded by CAL FIRE. Through SCCFSC County Coordinator role, they act as the conduit between partners (county and region, public and private). This role builds a strong foundation for the South Bay PBA as well as expanding the Community Wildfire Prevention Plan (CWPP) into a Regional Prioritization Plan (RPP). The SCCFSC will use existing staff to plan and manage the South Bay PBA, and the RPP adaptation process.

To support activities of the South Bay PBA, SCCFSC will provide training programs, tools and Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) so that South Bay PBA members will be able to participate in burns. The training programs will provide educational opportunities for non-fire service affiliated individuals on prescribed burning techniques, wildfire behavior, forest ecology, and more. SCCFSC will also conduct workshops and community outreach on prescribed burning, smoke management, and forest health. SCCFSC will contract certified experts to conduct training sessions for members to receive qualifications that may be required for certain burns. Classes will include:

- Basic 32 – National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Firefighter Type 2 (FFT2)
- National Wildfire Coordinating Group Firefighter Type 1 (S-131)
- Portable Pumps and Water Use (S-211)
- Wildland Fire Chain Saws (S-212)
- Firing Boss (S-219)
- Anticipating Wildland Fire Behavior (S-290)

By providing these opportunities, SCCFSC will expand capacity and develop a new workforce that can move the area toward using prescribed fire more as a land management tool. Also, through the SCCFSC, the South Bay PBA will act as technical consultants to assist landowners in reaching their goals to conduct their own prescribed burns on their lands. This project has broad support from numerous groups outlined in Exhibit 2. These initial activities of the South Bay PBA will all occur on Midpen land. Eventually, the South Bay PBA hopes to expand their activities to the entire county.

The recommended grant will also be used by SCCFSC to purchase technologies such as BurnBot, N5 Sensors Wildfire Smoke Sensor technology, and UC San Diego's BurnPro3D technology for burn planning and safety. SCCFSC will make these technologies available to its partners in pre-prescribed burn planning, burn safety, active smoke management and monitoring. Through collaboration with their partners, the South Bay PBA will contribute to maintaining forest health in the Los Gatos Creek Watershed (and beyond when there is opportunity) by providing trained and equipped South Bay PBA member burners to assist in their prescribed fire operations.

A smaller portion of this funding focuses on adapting SCCFSC's recently updated Community Wildfire Prevention Plan (CWPP) into a Regional Prioritization Plan (RPP). The CWPP is a county-wide planning tool rooted in facilitated collaboration among local, state, and federal officials, as well as non-governmental stakeholders and private citizens. The CWPP identifies potential priority areas where mitigation measures are needed to protect from wildfire the irreplaceable life, property, and critical infrastructure within the County. This planning tool meets many, but not all, requirements for an RPP. The largest gap between the plans is flushing out project prioritization. Some funding for this project will allow SCCFSC to work with State Coastal Conservancy staff to fill gaps between the CWPP and RPP. Creating an RPP will 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.

Site Description: Santa Clara County Fire Safe Council (SCCFSC) is currently implementing a two-phase forest health project and is planning a third phase along with a long-term strategic plan with their partners. This three phase forest health project involves treating between 800 and 1,800 acres of the forested Los Gatos Creek Watershed area in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The Los Gatos Creek watershed was chosen as the focus of the South Bay PBA activities of the existing collaboration between land managers. South Bay PBA activities will specifically be on lands managed by the Santa Clara County Parks Department, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen), and San Jose Water Company.

Eventually, the RPP will cover all of Santa Clara County, drawing closely off work completed under the countywide CWPP. The SCCFSC will work closely with neighboring RPP developers to further cross county coordination and interjurisdictional project development. Wildfires do not stop at the county boundary and this project ensures that coordination won't either.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: SCCFSC is a non-profit organization with over 15 years of experience in securing and managing grants from federal, state, county, and community sources. Their recent grants have funded various hazardous fuel reduction projects, including community chipping programs, landscape-scale evacuation routes, fuel breaks, and outreach activities in the Wildland-Urban Interface areas of Santa Clara County. Active projects include the Los Gatos Creek Watershed Collaborative, supported by two current CAL FIRE Forest Health Grants (\$14.4 million in total). The SCCFSC's most recent CAL FIRE Fire Prevention Grant for \$1.5 million is aimed at protecting homes and infrastructure in South Santa Clara County. The SCCFSC's latest funding to support the ongoing maintenance and coordination of the Santa Clara County CWPP update, enhancing community resilience and fire prevention efforts through outreach, education, and program development is being supported by the California Fire Safe Council's County Coordinator Grant Program, the Community Wildfire Defense Program, and prior grants awarded by CAL FIRE. They were also recently awarded a grant from the California Fire Safe Council's State Fire Capacity Grant Program to build a Firewise Community based volunteer program.

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 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's Strategic Plan for Expanding the Use of Beneficial Fire (Governor's Forest Management Task Force, March 2022), which builds on the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan and lays out goals and actions to increase beneficial fire including prescribed fire and cultural burning.
- 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.

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

Implementation of prescribed fire is an important tool in addressing California’s wildfire crisis. The proposed project includes funding the development of a Prescribed Burn Association which will organize training programs to provide educational opportunities for non-fire service affiliated individuals on prescribed burning techniques, wildfire behavior, forest ecology, and more. The South Bay PBA will also conduct workshops and community outreach on prescribed burning, smoke management, and forest health. Through the SCCFSC, the South Bay PBA will contract certified experts to conduct training sessions for members to receive qualifications that may be required for certain burns.

Increasing Regional Prioritization Plans creates a cohesive effort to develop thoughtful wildfire resilience projects.

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. The 2020, 2021 and 2024 fire seasons broke numerous records. The January 2025 catastrophic wildfires in southern California make this year the second most destructive fire year in California history.

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The proposed project includes many trainings, capacity improvements and a series of small, prescribed burns on Midpen lands, which will improve ecosystem health, enhance biodiversity, replenish soils, reduce disease, encourage growth of culturally important species, and enable further use of prescribed fire.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$400,000
Project Total	\$400,000

The anticipated source of funding for the proposed project is 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 proposed project is consistent with the funding source because it is increasing the organizational capacity of the Santa Clara Fire Safe Council to create a prescribed burn association and conduct burns.

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 would 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) and 31113(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 restore the health and resilience of California forests, grasslands, or natural lands. 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](#):

Consistent with **Goal 1.4 Incorporate Workforce Development in Our Projects**, the South Coast Prescribed Burn Association develops prescribed burn trainings and workshops. 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 project increases wildfire resiliency by increasing the number of people who are trained in prescribed fire use and application, building membership of the Prescribed Burn Association, and creating a Regional Prioritization Plan for future wildfire resiliency projects.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project includes conducting workshops, classes, and training programs that will entail a series of small, prescribed burns in the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen). In its June 7 2021 authorization (Exhibit 3), the Conservancy adopted findings pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Those findings considered the “Wildland Fire Resiliency Program Final Environmental Impact Report” (WFRP EIR) which was certified by

Midpen in connection with its Wildfire Resilience Program and its vegetation management activities in the wildland urban interface and around structures respectively; and the Conservancy authorized a grant to Midpen for wildland fuels reduction activities in 11 of its preserves. (Exhibit 3) The recommended authorization includes funding additional wildland fuel reduction activities that were the subject of the prior authorization. The proposed activities are addressed by the Conservancy's CEQA findings on June 7, 2021. There have been no changes in Midpen's wildfire fuel reduction activities and no changed circumstances or new information that trigger the requirement for additional documentation under CEQA. Therefore, no further review pursuant to CEQA of the prescribed burns to be conducted under this authorization is required.

The remainder of the project consists of the preparation of a prescribed fire plan, environmental documentation and permit applications which are statutorily and categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines at 14 California Code of Regulations Sections 15262 and 15306, which exempt projects that involve feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved; and basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

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