

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

February 19, 2026

UKIAH WEST HILLS WILDFIRE RESILIENCY PROJECT

Project Number: 25-061-01

Project Manager: Lilly Allen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,500,000 to the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District to implement the Ukiah West Hills Project, which consists of reducing fuels on 270-370 acres in the Ukiah Western Hills in Mendocino County.

LOCATION: Mendocino County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters Of Support](#)

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 a total amount not to exceed one million five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,500,000) to the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District (“grantee”) to implement the Ukiah West Hills Project, which consists of reducing fuels on 270-370 acres in the Ukiah Western Hills in Mendocino 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 from the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024.

4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
5. Evidence that the grantee has entered into any agreements necessary to enable the grantee to implement the project.

Additionally, pursuant to its April 18, 2024 authorization to disburse funds to the Humboldt County Resource Conservation District for purposes of awarding grants to public entities and nonprofit organizations for wildfire resilience projects, the Conservancy authorizes the Humboldt County Resource Conservation District to award a subgrant to the grantee for the project.

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 grant of up to \$1,500,000 to the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District (the “Mendocino County RCD”) to implement the Ukiah West Hills Project, which consists of reducing fuels on 270-370 acres in the Ukiah Western Hills in Mendocino County (the “project”).

The project will implement vegetation management activities to increase wildfire resilience of California’s forests, grasslands, and natural lands and to reduce fire risk to communities. The project includes treatment of 270-370 acres with dense brush and trees along trails, roads, and ridges in the Ukiah Western Hills. The project area is open space that was acquired on April 1, 2025, by the City of Ukiah (the “City”). The project area is located directly to the west of the City in the wildland urban interface and is currently considered a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone by CAL FIRE. The project area is characterized by heavy, continuous brush and small trees that create a high wildfire risk directly adjacent to the City. Steep slopes, dense fuels, and limited safe access routes mean that a fire starting in these hills could move quickly toward neighborhoods and infrastructure. Fuel reduction along roads and trails in the project area will reduce the probability of ignition.

This project will increase wildfire resiliency by thinning vegetation along fuel breaks, trails, roads, and staging areas. Crews will thin small trees and brush, remove dead and down material where needed, prune lower branches to reduce ladder fuels, and chip, pile, or burn slash in a safe, controlled way. Larger, healthy trees will be kept to provide shade, slow understory regrowth, and maintain habitat, resulting in a continuous but lightened fuel zone rather than a clearcut strip. This work will help address the wildfire risk of the project area and vicinity while

providing access for the public and for emergency responders. The City and the Ukiah Valley Fire Authority will maintain the shaded fuel breaks and trail corridors after the project ends. To aid in maintenance, this project includes the purchase of a mini excavator with masticator head.

The project will include 1–2 community outreach events or guided walks to share information about project design and implementation, solicit public input, and encourage public trail use. The project will also install interpretive signage to help educate trail users on how vegetation management can improve the area’s ecological health while increasing public safety

Site Description:

The project will take place on land owned by the City, located directly west of the City, in the Western Hills Watershed Protection Area (Exhibit 1). The City is currently in the process of implementing a passive use public access trail system in the project area. The area consists of steep, mostly undeveloped hills, populated by oak woodland and chamise chaparral. Oak woodland in the project area is dominated by Interior Live Oak, as well as Douglas-fir, Gray Pine, Blue Oak, and Oregon White Oak. Chaparral in the project area is dominated by chamise, common and whiteleaf manzanita, wedgeleaf ceanothus, shrubby California Buckeye, birchleaf mountain mahogany, huckleberry oak and shrub oaks such as scrub, canyon live, and sadler oaks. Slopes rise sharply from the valley floor to the main ridge above town and lie immediately upslope of about 13,000 homes, city facilities, and major power and communication lines. The City is a disadvantaged community.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The Mendocino County RCD’s Forest Health and Resilience Program has extensive experience administering multimillion-dollar public grants and implementing large-scale vegetation management, forest health, and wildfire risk reduction projects throughout Mendocino County. Mendocino County RCD staff have successfully managed several CAL FIRE Forest Health Grant–funded projects, including the completed Northern Mendocino County Forest Health Collaborative (\$5.65 million), which treated over 2,000 acres of forested landscapes on Bureau of Land Management and Usal Redwood Forest properties. The Mendocino County RCD currently manages the Leonard Lake Reserve and Montgomery Woods State Reserve Forest Health Collaborative (\$7.3 million), which is treating approximately 2,100 acres of dense forests and shrublands. These projects require comprehensive grant administration, including budgeting, contractor oversight, interagency coordination, progress reporting, and compliance with state and federal requirements. Collectively, this experience positions the Mendocino County RCD to provide strong fiduciary oversight, effective project management, and timely, accountable delivery of public grant funds.

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 projects help the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.

See the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Strategic Plan” section below.

2. Projects are 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 for wildfire resilience. The project implements many statewide wildfire and forest resiliency goals. The proposed project is also 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 the 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 Forest Carbon Plan and provides 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.

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, a growing populace and an increasing number of people living in high fire risk areas, including areas adjacent to wildlands.

This project helps address an immediate wildfire risk in hills near a community and includes long-term investments that will enable wildfire resilience work to continue through equipment purchases.

4. Projects deliver multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The proposed project was selected because it is a multi-benefit project that will reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire impacts to communities, while protecting trails from fire risk for public recreation.

5. Projects planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

There is enormous public support for wildfire risk reduction. A 2025 poll by the Public Policy Institute found that 81% of Californians are concerned about wildfire risk. The proposed project will engage with local communities to promote planning and implementation.

PROJECT FINANCING

State Coastal Conservancy (<i>this authorization</i>)	\$1,500,000
State Coastal Conservancy - North Coast Wildfire Resilience Planning and Implementation Grant (<i>previous authorization</i>)	\$400,000
Project Total	\$1,900,000

The anticipated source of funding is an appropriation to the Conservancy from Chapter 3 of the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 codified at Public Resources Code section 90000, et seq. and referred to as the 2024 Climate Bond or Proposition 4. Chapter 3 of the 2024 Climate Bond authorizes the Conservancy to use the funds for “watershed improvement, wildfire resilience, chaparral and forest restoration, and workforce development that addresses needs related to this subdivision and is designed to create career pathways for individuals from disadvantaged communities, severely disadvantaged communities, or vulnerable populations.” (Public Resources Code section 91520(k)). The proposed project is consistent with the funding source because it will increase wildfire resilience of lands and communities.

On April 18, 2024, the Conservancy authorized a \$6,000,000 block grant to the Humboldt County Resource Conservation District (the “Humboldt RCD”) for it to make subgrants to other resource conservation districts for planning and implementing wildfire resilience projects. Pursuant to that block grant, this project will be funded in part by a \$400,000 subgrant from Humboldt RCD. To comply with the terms of the block grant, the Humboldt RCD requested Conservancy approval of the subgrant to the Mendocino County RCD.

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 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), the Conservancy is authorized to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address 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 for projects that maximize public benefits and have one of several purposes, including reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and preserving natural lands.

Consistent with these sections, the proposed project will restore the health and resilience of California forests and chaparral and reduce fire risk to the City, a disadvantaged community. The project will help natural lands to 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 1.1, Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will benefit the disadvantaged community of Ukiah.

Consistent with **Goal 4.2 Wildfire Resilience Projects**, the proposed project will reduce fuel loads adjacent to roads and trails, increasing wildfire resiliency.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land) because it involves fuel reduction and vegetation management without the removal of healthy, mature, or scenic trees. Tree removal is limited to small diameter trees and understory vegetation to reduce ladder fuels. Larger trees will be kept to provide shade and maintain habitat.

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