

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

February 19, 2026

WILDFIRE RESILIENCY PROJECTS

Project Numbers: 25-059-01 and 25-060-01

Project Manager: Lilly Allen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$2,000,000 to one tribe and one nonprofit organization to carry out implementation projects that will improve forest health and wildfire resiliency in the vicinity of Gasquet, Del Norte County and in the vicinity of Somes Bar, Humboldt County.

LOCATION: Gasquet, Del Norte County and Somes Bar, Humboldt County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

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 disbursement of a total amount not to exceed two million dollars (\$2,000,000) to one tribe and one nonprofit organization to carry out two projects (collectively, the “projects”) that will improve forest health and wildfire resiliency in the vicinity of Gasquet, Del Norte County and in the vicinity of Somes Bar, Humboldt County. The two projects are as follows:

1. **Tolowa Dee-ni’ Nation:** One million five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,500,000) to implement 250-350 acres of fuels treatments, such as prescribed fire and cultural burning, on lands surrounding the Tolowa community of Mvs-yee (present-day Gasquet), in partnership with the U S Forest Service.
2. **The Mid Klamath Watershed Council:** Five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) to implement critical fuel reduction treatments and cultural burning on 150-250 acres in the

Wildland Urban Interface in the Klamath River watershed in the Six Rivers National Forest and along State Highway 96 in the vicinity of Somes Bar.

The Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation and Mid Klamath Watershed Council are each a "grantee." Prior to commencement of each project, the grantee for the specific project 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.

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 projects are consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Mid Klamath Watershed 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 up to a total of \$2,000,000 in grants to one tribe and one nonprofit to carry out two projects (collectively, the "projects") that will improve forest health and wildfire resiliency in the vicinity of Gasquet, Del Norte County and in the vicinity of Somes Bar, Humboldt County. The projects are part of the Conservancy's wildfire resilience program and will develop and implement vegetation management activities to increase wildfire resilience of California's forests, grasslands, and natural lands, and to reduce fire risk to communities. The recommended authorization will be funded with California's 2024 Climate Bond (Proposition 4) funding. Due to the urgency of addressing the wildfire crisis, the California legislature and Governor acted quickly to authorize spending of 2024 Climate Bond funds on wildfire resilience through the 2024 Budget Act rather than waiting for completion of the 2025 Budget Act.

Each proposed project is described below. Each project summary includes the grant applicant; project name; recommended funding amount; a brief project description; a brief site description; consistency with the Conservancy's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan; and information concerning compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Project consistency with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, enabling legislation, Strategic Plan, and the proposed funding source are provided in the pages following the project summaries.

TOLOWA DEE-NI' NATION

\$1,500,000

Cooperative Stewardship of Mvs-yee-se'-ne and Cedar Rustic

Project Number 25-059-01

To address the critical need for wildfire mitigation and ecological restoration, the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation ("the Nation"), a federally recognized tribe, will implement a multi-faceted approach centered on active land stewardship in Del Norte County. The project consists of the strategic fuel treatment of 250-350 acres in partnership with the US Forest Service. The project will use a combination of cultural burning, manual and mechanical methods to thin dense vegetation, remove non-native invasive plants, and reduce hazardous trees and ladder fuels. This work will be done in close partnership with the US Forest Service and will create 20-30 jobs for the Nation.

Site Description:

Located in Del Norte County, the full project area encompasses 1,505 acres of culturally and ecologically significant land in the wildland urban interface near the town of Gasquet in Tolowa Dee-ni' ancestral territory on the Smith River National Recreation Area. The project will treat 250-350 acres within that 1,505-acre footprint, with the exact location of the treated acreage to be determined based on closing the gap in defensibility along the North Fork Smith River drainage, where current conditions and limited access present substantial risks to life and property.

Utilizing prescribed fire and cultural burning methods, tribal and federal partners implementing the project aim to enhance fire resilience, return healthy fire processes to the ecosystem, and restore the cultural landscape in alignment with desired conditions mimicking historical precedent. The Tolowa community of *Mvs-yee* (present-day Gasquet), traditionally known for its acorns and grassy woodlands, has become increasingly encroached by hardwood and shrub in modern times resulting in the current need to accelerate and expand existing stewardship efforts. As recently as the 2020 Slater Fire and 2023 Smith River Complex, large-scale fire threats occurred in the Gasquet community resulting in extended wildland fire evacuations, long-term county-wide power outages, and highway and Forest closures.

Strategic Plan: The project will further the following strategic objectives:

Consistent with **Goal 1.1, Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will benefit the Nation by bringing back a traditional practice of cultural burning and land stewardship to Del Norte County and increase the Nation's capacity to conduct more cultural burns in the future.

Consistent with **Goal 1.2, Return Power to Tribes**, the proposed project will invest in traditional wildfire practices like cultural burning and land stewardship on their ancestral lands and support the development of the Nation's fuels reduction crew.

Consistent with **Goal 4.2, Wildfire Resilience Projects**, the proposed project includes building lasting community resilience through direct engagement and training and on the groundwork. The Nation will develop and train a fuels reduction crew, increasing capacity to implement future wildfire resilience projects and providing jobs and revenue to the local economy.

CEQA: This project is statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 4799.05 (d)(1), which exempts prescribed and cultural fire, thinning, and fuels work on federal lands where NEPA is already completed. The US Forest Service prepared and adopted an environmental assessment (EA) for the Six Rivers Hazardous Fuels and Fire Management plan in August 2023 with a Finding of No Significant Impact. This project was analyzed in that NEPA document.

MID KLAMATH WATERSHED COUNCIL

\$500,000

Klamath River Wildfire Resiliency Project

Project Number 25-060-01

This project will implement critical fuel reduction treatments and cultural burning on 150-250 acres in the Wildland Urban Interface in the Klamath River watershed in the Six Rivers National Forest and along State Highway 96. This project is a continuation of the Western Klamath Restoration Partnership's Somes Bar Integrated Fire Management Project. This project consists of forest restoration and cultural resources revitalization through manual, mechanical and prescribed fire treatments. The treated areas will be managed as outlined in the Stewardship Supplemental Project Agreement between the US Forest Service, Karuk Tribe, and Mid Klamath Watershed Council. The project includes implementing forest thinning along State Highway 96 and in the Wildland Urban Interface near the Orleans/Somes Bar Communities, and extending shaded fuel breaks in the Orleans/Somes Bar Communities. All of this work is within in Karuk ancestral territory, and in close coordination with the Karuk Tribe.

These treatments will extend shaded fuel breaks and improved access/egress along the northwestern region of the Orleans/Somes Bar Communities. This project area is part of a greater plan to create and maintain a contiguous area of shaded fuel breaks around these two communities, through the completion of multiple landscape-scale restoration and wildfire preparation projects. The project plans to treat between 150-250 acres of public land and restore Karuk Tribal cultural resources.

Site Description: The project area is in Humboldt County within the Six Rivers National Forest, which spans 3,878 square miles and features both coastal and inland forested habitats. Historically, the Western Klamath Mountains experienced frequent human and lightning ignitions. Fire suppression over the last 100 years has resulted in a fire deficit that the Western Klamath Restoration Partnership is working to remediate. A hallmark of the partnership is the Karuk Tribe's knowledge of fire, passed down from generation to generation. Current watershed conditions require a concerted effort among multiple partners to achieve more comprehensive restoration.

Strategic Plan: The Mid Klamath Watershed Center’s project will further the following strategic objectives:

Consistent with **Goal 1.1, Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will benefit the Karuk Tribe by bringing back a traditional practice of cultural burning and land stewardship to Humboldt County. The project area is in a disadvantaged community, which will benefit from reduced risk of catastrophic wildfire and from increased job opportunities and training in vegetation management and prescribed burning.

Consistent with **Goal 1.2, Return Power to Tribes**, the proposed project will invest in traditional wildfire practices like cultural burning and land stewardship on their ancestral lands.

Consistent with **Goal 4.2, Wildfire Resilience Projects**, the proposed project includes building lasting community resilience through direct engagement and training and on the ground work.

CEQA: This project is statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 4799.05 (d)(1), which exempts prescribed and cultural fire, thinning, and fuels work on federal lands where review under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) is already completed. The US Forest Service prepared and adopted an environmental assessment (EA) for the Somes Bar Integrated Fire Management Project in July 2018 with a Finding of No Significant Impact. This project was analyzed in that NEPA document.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed projects are 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” sections above.

2. Projects are a good investment of state resources.

The proposed projects are good investments of state funding. Both projects are feasible, have reasonable budgets, and address a demonstrated need for wildfire resilience. The projects implement many statewide wildfire and forest resiliency goals. The proposed projects are 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. Projects include 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 Cooperative Stewardship of Mvs-yee-se'-ne and Cedar Rustic Project is led by the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation. The Karuk Tribe is a partner in the Klamath Wildfire Resilience Project and has been involved in all stages of the design process, which is located within its ancestral territory. Both projects are the direct result of a deep, ongoing community engagement process, planned by the tribes for their members. Both projects directly benefit tribal members.

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

Both proposed projects will 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.

One of the projects includes long-term investments that will enable wildfire resilience work to continue into the future. For example, the Tolowa Dee-ni Nation's workforce training combined with fuels treatment reduces wildfire risk while increasing workforce capacity.

5. Projects deliver multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The proposed projects were selected because they are multi-benefit projects that will reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire impacts to communities. Added benefits of these projects include tribal empowerment, native habitat restoration, and workforce training.

Projects planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

Both projects will engage with local communities to promote wildfire resilience planning and implementation.

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.

PROJECT FINANCING

State Coastal Conservancy	\$2,000,000
US Forest Service	\$292,200
Project Total	\$2,292,200

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)). Projects proposed for funding in this staff recommendation are consistent with the funding source because they will increase wildfire resilience of lands and communities. Both projects will restore forests.

Under the Good Neighbor Authority Program, the US Forest Service has provided \$292,200 to the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation to conduct restoration services on Six Rivers National Forest lands, inclusive of developmental activities and training needed to perform those services. These funds are available to pay for the Cooperative Stewardship of Mvs-yee-se'-ne and Cedar Rustic Project.

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:

Both projects 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 projects will restore the health and resilience of California forests, grasslands, and/or natural lands and reduce fire risk to communities. The projects will help California’s natural lands to be more resilient to catastrophic wildfires which may ultimately reduce greenhouse gas emissions released from increased wildfires due to climate change.

The proposed projects will improve forests, grasslands, and other natural lands and reduce the risk of wildfire that would adversely impact water quality and habitat in coastal watersheds (Chapter 5.5).

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

Both projects proposed for funding assist the Conservancy in meeting a number of its Strategic Plan goals and objectives. Relevant goals and objectives are listed below, along with the names of the proposed projects that meet each goal. Please see the "Project Summary" section, above, for how each proposed project meets the relevant goal(s) and objective(s).

- **Goal 1.1, Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities:** Both proposed projects directly benefit one or more systemically excluded communities.
- **Goal 1.2, Return Power to Tribes:** Both projects directly benefit tribal communities.
- **Goal 1.4, Workforce Development:** The Cooperative Stewardship of Mvs-yee-se'-ne and Cedar Rustic Project includes workforce development.
- **Goal 4.2, Wildfire Resilience:** Both proposed projects will implement wildfire resilience projects.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

Both proposed projects are exempt under CEQA. See the "Project Summary" section, above, for a discussion of the projects' CEQA exemptions. Upon approval of the projects, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption for both exempt projects.