

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 7, 2021

**Shaded Fuel Breaks or Defensible Space Projects for the Elderly and Medically Vulnerable
Population in Hoopa**

Project No. 21-027-01
Project Manager: Peter Jaraus

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$35,000 to the Hoopa Valley Tribe implement shaded fuel brakes or defensible space projects to protect the homes of approximately 75 vulnerable residents on the Hoopa Valley Tribal Reservation, Humboldt County.

LOCATION: Hoopa Valley, Humboldt County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [NEPA Categorical Exclusion](#)

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 thirty-five thousand dollars (\$35,000) to the Hoopa Valley Tribe (“the grantee”) to help implement shaded fuel brakes or defensible space projects to protect the homes of approximately 76 vulnerable residents on the Hoopa Valley Tribal Reservation, Humboldt County.

- 1) 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:
 - a. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
 - b. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.

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- 2) 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 and Guidelines.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$35,000 grant to the Hoopa Valley Tribe to help implement shaded fuel brakes or defensible space projects to protect the homes of approximately 76 vulnerable residents on the Hoopa Valley Tribal Reservation. The Hoopa Valley Fire Department will create 100-foot defensible space areas around the homes as described in the 2016 Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Defensible space around homes is critical in a landscape where wildfires are a common occurrence. The project will both reduce the amount of fuel near the home as well as ensure that there are no fuels that directly connect the wildland area to the homes. This reduces the intensity of a fire as it approaches, creates a safer area in which to work, and increases the ability to prevent structural damage. The implementation of defensible space involves a significant amount of physical labor on the part of the homeowner or requires sufficient money to hire a crew.

The 2021 Hoopa Valley Tribal Emergency Services Medically Vulnerable Evacuation Plan Map identified approximately 76 homes that had the highest need for defensible space. Protection of these homes will help give additional time for people living in the homes to evacuate, or for members of the community to help with that effort.

The Conservancy's grant will enable the Hoopa Valley Tribe to purchase a mulching head that will attach to the Hoopa Valley Fire Department's skid steerer. A mulching head significantly speeds up the creation of defensible space and it is also particularly good at tackling fire prone fuels such as Poison Oak and Himalayan Blackberry. Both species are labor intensive to remove by hand and poison oak can result in staff missing work due to allergic reactions. The mulching head should reduce the cost to implement the protection efforts and allow fire department staff to treat more homes. The Hoopa Fire Department will contribute all of the labor to the project.

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The grant will also provide for 12 signs that will be installed in the area to demonstrate, promote, and educate the public about defensible space benefits within the Wildland Urban Interface. The signs will help explain the work being done by the Fire Department to protect these homes and promote awareness of the need for all residents to maintain their defensible space.

Site Description: The project will take place on or near the approximately 92,000 acre Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation. The reservation is located in inland Humboldt County along the lower section of the Trinity River just upstream of its confluence with the Klamath River. Sixty-one of the homes are on Federal Trust property and fifteen of the homes are fee-title properties within the boundaries of the Hoopa Reservation. Landowner agreements will be obtained prior to work on the properties that are owned fee-title. All of the homes are located in the Wildland Urban Interface as identified in hazard mitigation planning done by the Hoopa Valley Tribe and the County of Humboldt.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The Hoopa Valley Tribe is a tribal government dedicated to protecting and promoting the interests of the Hoopa Valley Indians, and cooperating and collaborating with Federal, State and local governments. The Hoopa Fire Department was one of the first tribal fire departments established in the nation and is seen as a model for other departments. It is responsible for providing fire protection services to the Hoopa Indian Reservation and has extensive experience with wildland fires. Not only does the department strive to provide excellent services when a fire occurs it is also active in educating local residences as to the importance of fire prevention. The fire department has been reducing fuels through mechanical thinning and prescribed fire since the early 2000's.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$35,000
Project Total	\$35,000

The anticipated source of funding is a Fiscal Year 2020-21 special appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy. This appropriation was part of a package of funding for the purpose of urgent wildfire risk reduction. The proposed project is consistent with the anticipated funding source.

The Hoopa Valley Tribe will contribute approximately \$27,000 towards the project in personnel and equipment costs. This will include all of the labor costs to implement the shaded fuel breaks.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The recommended 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), the Conservancy is authorized to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects 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 for projects that maximize public benefits and have one of several purposes, including reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.

Consistent with these sections, the proposed project maximizes public benefits and is a priority because it facilitates the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from increased wildfires due to climate change. Besides reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the public benefits include improvement of forest health and protection of life, property, public health, water quality, and natural resources.

The proposed project addresses resources within the Conservancy's jurisdiction by improving forest health and reducing the risks of wildfire that would adversely impact water quality and habitat in a coastal watershed (Chapter 5.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2018-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 8, Objective C** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will implement projects to increase resilience to climate change impacts using nature-based solutions and other multi-benefit strategies.

Consistent with **Goal 16, Objective A**, the proposed project benefits a disadvantaged community.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on October 2, 2014, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:**

The proposed project will help implement:

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- [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](#) (CNRA, 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 [Forests and Rangelands Companion Plan, California State Wildlife Action Plan Update](#) (CDFW 2015), which encourages projects that seek to create a healthier and more resilient forest ecosystem.
 - The [Environmental Goals and Policy Report "A Strategy for California @ 50 Million, Supporting California's Climate Change Goals"](#) (OPR, 2015), Goal 6 of the Steward and Protect Natural and Working Landscapes section, which calls on the State to "Build resilience into natural systems and prioritize natural and green infrastructure solutions".
4. **Support of the public:** There is enormous public support for wildfire risk reduction. A statewide poll last fall found that 74% of surveyed voters believe that wildfire threat is greater now than in the past.
 5. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the Coastal Conservancy's jurisdiction.
 6. **Need:** California is facing unprecedented fire risk due to climate change and a growing populace. The proposed funding was approved to accelerate fire risk reduction projects in advance of next year's fire season. This funding is needed to initiate this work as soon as possible.
 7. **Greater-than-local interest:** Minimizing wildfire risk is of statewide significance.
 8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The subject land is situated well above current and projected Year 2100 sea levels.

Additional Criteria

9. **Urgency:** California is facing unprecedented fire risk due to climate change and a growing populace. The 2020 fire season broke numerous records. The proposed project is urgently needed to reduce fire risk in advance of the upcoming fire season.
10. **Resolution of more than one issue:** This project addresses three major issues: it seeks to reduce wildfire risk, improve forest health, and will be focused on areas where homes and communities are most at risk, the wildland-urban interface (WUI).

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11. **Readiness:** The project is ready to begin work immediately.
12. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** The project will address 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.
13. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** This project seeks to mitigate GHG emissions from catastrophic wildfires by lessening the fire risk, improving resilience to fire, and improving carbon sequestration.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project will create up to 100-foot defensible space around up to 76 homes on the Hoopa Reservation. The project was reviewed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and a categorical exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was authorized by the BIA in 2021 covering fuels reduction work on the Hoopa Reservation (Exhibit 2). Thus, the project is exempt under Public Resources Code Section 4799.05, subdivision (d), which exempts from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) state funding for projects involving prescribed fire, thinning or fuel reduction undertaken on federal lands that reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire if those projects have been reviewed under NEPA. This exemption is applicable only 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. The Secretary of Natural Resources has provided that certification on April 12, 2021 (<https://resources.ca.gov/-/media/CNRA-Website/Files/Programs-and-Projects/Forestry/SB-901-Certification.docx>).

The project is also exempt under CEQA, 14 Cal. Code Regs. section 15304 Minor Alterations to Land. Subsection (i) of this section provides as an example, projects that involve fuel management activities within 100 feet of homes in an area that is determined to have extra hazardous fire conditions.

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