

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
June 7, 2021

**MISSION TRAIL NATURE PRESERVE FUEL ABATEMENT**

Project No. 21-037-01  
Project Manager: Timothy Duff

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$45,000 to the City of Carmel-by-the-Sea to remove hazardous fire fuels in City’s Mission Trail Nature Preserve, Monterey County.

**LOCATION:** Mission Trail Nature Preserve, Carmel-by-the-Sea, Monterey County.

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [Photos](#)

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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 forty-five thousand dollars (\$45,000) to the City of Carmel-by-the-Sea (“the grantee”) to remove hazardous fire fuels in City’s Mission Trail Nature Preserve, Monterey 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. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.

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5. 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.

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## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

### PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$45,000 grant to the City of Carmel-by-the-Sea to remove hazardous fire fuels in the City's Mission Trail Nature Preserve. The 35-acre Preserve is surrounded by residential properties and located in a Cal Fire-designated Very High Fire Hazard Zone (see Exhibit 1, page 2). For the past five years the City has been working in partnership with the Friends of Mission Trail Nature Preserve, a non-profit volunteer organization, on projects to remove invasive species and reduce fire fuel loads, including the removal of over 1400 eucalyptus trees. While the City and community volunteers have funded a significant amount of weed, brush, and tree removal in the Preserve, the economic impacts of COVID-19 have more recently hindered this effort. Today, with large areas in the Preserve adjoining private property yet to be cleared of hazardous fire fuels, the City has requested Conservancy grant funds to complete this critical next round of fire fuel management work.

The proposed Conservancy funds would be used to treat an area in the Preserve that is approximately 50 feet wide and 1,500 feet in length dominated by dry fuels made up of thick grass, dense tree cover and thickets of dry brush and poison oak (See Exhibit 2). In addition, areas that were previously cleared of fire fuels over the past five years would be treated again to remove any remaining dead wood and new brush. PG&E power lines extend across the length of the proposed fire fuel clearance area, and the City has confirmed it will continue to coordinate with the utility company to ensure all trees located in proximity to their power lines will continue to be treated to keep the lines clear of any potentially hazardous fire fuels. An existing Coastal Development Permit issued for work done to date will be updated and approved prior to initiation of the proposed additional work. Treating the new areas will begin this summer and will be completed by March 2022. Work to remove fire fuels from the areas that were previously cleared will begin in January 2022 and will be completed by June 2022.

**Site Description:** The 35-acre Mission Trail Nature Preserve is located along the southeast side of the Central Coast town of Carmel-by-the-Sea on the Monterey Peninsula. Established as a nature park in 1979 for passive recreational use, the Preserve is owned and managed by the

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City and offers 3 miles of hiking trails and a native plant garden. The Preserve's habitats include Monterey pine forest, coast live oak woodland, wetland, willow riparian corridor and coastal prairie. The Preserve is surrounded by residential properties and located in a Cal Fire designated Very High Fire Hazard Zone (see Exhibit 1, page 2). The Preserve provides habitat for the federally endangered Yadon's rein-orchid, and several California Native Plant Society-ranked significant species including Hickman's onion, Monterey Dusky-footed Woodrat, and Monarch Butterfly. In addition, there are three special status natural communities listed in the Department of Fish and Wildlife's California Natural Diversity Database: Monterey pine forest, coastal prairie, and the willow wetland areas. A stream running through the property drains to the Carmel River and Carmel Bay, an Area of Special Biological Significance. The Preserve contains areas that are very steep and thick with dead acacia trees, dry brush, invasive cotoneaster shrubs and small patches of genista (see Exhibit 2).

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The City of Carmel-by-the-Sea has owned and managed the Preserve for over 40 years and has actively implemented a management plan that calls for removing invasive plants, restoring wetlands, and improving the trail system. The City has invested substantial funds over the past several years to remove hazardous fire fuels and has demonstrated it has the staffing capacity and funding resources needed to successfully implement the proposed project.

### PROJECT FINANCING

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$45,000</b>
City of Carmel-by-the-Sea	\$15,000
Friends of Mission Trail Nature Preserve	<u>\$10,000</u>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$70,000</b>

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.

### 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

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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.

### **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:

- [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.

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- 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 conducted last fall (2020) found that 74% of surveyed voters believe that wildfire threat is greater now than in the past.
  5. **Location:** The proposed project is located in Monterey County, within the Coastal Conservancy’s jurisdiction.
  6. **Need:** California is facing unprecedented fire risk due to climate change, decades of fire suppression, and a growing populace. The extent of fire risk reduction projects that are needed to address the risk, including in advance of the upcoming fire season, cannot occur without public funding.
  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:** 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.
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 exacerbated by the effects of climate change, including increased average temperatures, reduced marine fog, and longer and more severe droughts.
13. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** This work seeks to mitigate GHG emissions from catastrophic wildfires by lessening the fire risk, improving forest resiliency to fire and improving carbon sequestration.

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### **CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed project is categorically and statutorily exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Section 15304 (Minor Alterations) that exempts projects that consist of minor alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry and agricultural purposes. In addition, Section 15269 (Emergency Projects) exempts emergency projects, including: emergency repairs to serviced facilities necessary to maintain service essential to the public health, safety, or welfare, including those repairs that require a reasonable amount of planning to address and anticipated emergency; and specific actions necessary to prevent or mitigate an emergency. Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.