

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 7, 2021

Lewiston Resilience 2021

Project No. 21-015-01
Project Manager: Karyn Gear

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$75,000 to the Trinity County Resource Conservation District to implement fuel reduction projects on Bureau of Land Management property in the community of Lewiston, Trinity County.

LOCATION: Lewiston, Trinity County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Photos](#)

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 seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000.00) to the Trinity County Resource Conservation District (“the grantee”) to implement fuels reduction projects in the vicinity of Lewiston, Trinity County to decrease fire risk.

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.
 - c. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement the project.

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.

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 \$75,000 grant to the Trinity County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD) to implement fuel reductions activities (proposed project) on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land in Trinity County to improve fire resiliency for the disadvantaged community of Lewiston (See Exhibit 1).

Trinity County lies in a fire adapted area. Over history, frequent fires have influenced the rich ecosystem diversity of the region, which includes grasslands, oak woodlands and riparian areas in the valleys along with mixed conifer forests found in the hills and the mountains. Prior to European settlement, Native Americans used fire to manage the landscape and sustain their communities, and many of the plants found in Trinity County become established in recent fire footprints and/or have specific adaptations that help the plants cope with and flourish in a frequent fire environment. However, beginning in the early 1900's, fires were suppressed, and logging and the creation of forest plantations altered the landscape. There is now an unusually high accumulation of fuels, and wildfire intensity has increased. In 2020, 21% of the County burned, largely due to the August Complex fires.

All developed areas within Trinity County lie in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), and thus fire risk is high to very-high. Recognizing this threat, TCRCD developed a partnership with BLM and the US Forest Service to assist with fuel reduction projects in Trinity County. The proposed project consists of treating up to 20 acres in the 2021 season on BLM land in the vicinity of Lewiston. TCRCD will use standard fuels reduction treatments to increase defensible space around homes bordering BLM land. TCRCD will also create shaded fuel breaks along strategic roadways which pass through BLM lands to improve ingress/egress for evacuees and emergency personnel in the case of a catastrophic fire. Treatment will include thinning small diameter (<10" DBH) conifers and groups of hardwood trees in order to break up the vertical and horizontal fuel continuity. Brush will be removed out of the drip lines of trees and lower tree limbs will be removed to limit ladder fuels. Cut material will be cut and chipped on site where feasible or piled for future burning. Treatment will mimic what a natural fire regime would have done and create shaded fuel breaks in strategic areas. All work will occur within the areas identified on the map contained in Exhibit 1 and were identified in the Trinity County

Community Wildfire Protection Plan Update 2020. Examples of similar previously treated areas are included in Exhibit 2.

Site Description: Lewiston, originally built along the frontier route from Shasta to Weaverville during the 1850's goldrush, is a small, rural disadvantaged community located north of Highway 299 in Trinity County. The community lies to the west of Redding, east of Weaverville (Trinity County Seat), and south of Trinity Lake. The entire community is included in the wildland urban interface, as mapped by CalFire (see Exhibit 1), and the community is identified as a very high fire hazard severity zone. Typical of Trinity County, Lewiston has varied terrain, from rolling hills and oak woodlands in the central portion of the area, to steeper slopes with mixed conifer forest. Lewiston experienced the 1999 Lowden Fire (1,945 acres) and 2009 Coffin Fire (1,098 acres), which were both human-caused and wind driven and led to loss of homes and property, and was threatened by the 2018 Carr Fire (229,651 acres).

The areas that will be treated pursuant to this authorization are on BLM lands, and were selected due to their proximity to roads and structures.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: TCRCD is a county-wide agency with jurisdiction encompassing 2.1 million acres in rural Northern California. The mission of the organization is "To assist in protecting, managing, conserving and restoring the natural resources of Trinity County through information, education, technical assistance and project implementation programs." TCRD has an existing agreement with BLM to assist with fuel reduction projects. It has decades of experience obtaining and managing grants for forest improvement, habitat enhancement, and wildfire risk reduction projects, and is thus well qualified to manage the proposed project.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$75,000
Project Total	\$75,000

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.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to Public Resources Code section 4799.05(d), which exempts state funding of projects undertaken on federal lands that consist of prescribed fire, thinning, or fuel reduction to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire. This exemption is applicable only for projects that have been reviewed under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and 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. On April 12, 2021, the Secretary for Natural Resources made the necessary certification. The proposed project was reviewed in the

Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) Lewiston Community Protection Fuel Analysis, dated 9/29/2020 (DOI-BLM-CA-N060-2020-0017-DNA). Accordingly, Conservancy funding of the proposed project is exempt from CEQA under Section 4799.05.

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

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 will directly benefit 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:

 - [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 in Trinity County, within the Trinity River/Klamath Basin watershed, and is thus in the Coastal Conservancy's jurisdiction pursuant to 5.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.
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.