

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
June 7, 2021

**Carpinteria Summerland Fire Hazard Fuels Reduction Treatment Project**

Project No.  
Project Manager: Rachel Couch

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$120,000 to the Carpinteria-Summerland Fire Protection District for a multi-pronged wildfire hazard fuels reduction project in the Carpinteria-Summerland area of Santa Barbara County.

**LOCATION:** Southern Santa Barbara County

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Figures and 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 one hundred twenty thousand dollars (\$120,000) to the Carpinteria Summerland Fire Protection District (“the grantee”) to conduct a multi-pronged fuels reduction treatment program in the southeastern foothills of Santa Barbara County, including continuous, year-round community-wide chipping, grazing livestock herbivory techniques, and continued maintenance of existing community fuel breaks.

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. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
  3. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement, operate, and maintain the project.
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4. 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 \$120,000 grant to the Carpinteria-Summerland Fire Protection District (CSFPD) for a multi-pronged fire hazard fuels reduction project in the foothills of southeastern Santa Barbara County.

The project is needed in order to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and resulting damage to life, property and the environment and local economies. According to the 2021 Carpinteria-Summerland Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), both Summerland and Carpinteria communities are identified as “Communities at Risk” by CAL FIRE, with approximately 84% of the total land area in the District designated as having a moderate to very high fire hazard severity rating. These communities are also adjacent to other lands designated by CalFire as High Fire Hazard Severity Zones.

The project addresses several conditions in the project area that contribute to community fire risk. These are: 1) narrow roads with overgrown vegetation which create risk for evacuation of residents and fire department access during a fire; 2) ornamental plants and combustible debris next to structures providing fuel ladders to those structures; and 3) and difficult to access parcels with heavy fuel loading in High/Very High Fire Danger Areas. Removing vegetation will not only address individual properties, but also provide the ability to make sure narrow roads and driveways have the proper clearance for access and egress of fire apparatus and residents alike. The proposed will reduce fire risk conditions on approximately 10 miles of road and 40 acres of high-risk property.

The proposed project consists of three elements: continuous, year-round community-wide chipping program; grazing livestock herbivory on private land; and maintenance of existing community fuel breaks. The fuel reduction treatments provide defensible space around structures slowing wildfires down and allowing for increased access for firefighters. First, CSFPD will implement a continuous, year-round, community wide chipping program. Residents will be responsible for cutting and placing their cleared vegetation curbside for disposal by the CSFPD at no cost to them. Second, CSFPD will use grazing livestock (sheep and/or goats) for

prescribed herbivory projects to reduce fire fuels in difficult to access areas. The animals will graze in each area until 60-70 percent of standing vegetation is removed or trampled. If there is regrowth, the animals will be returned to each portion of the site for a second treatment. Lastly, SCFPD will trim and reduce vegetation on existing fuel breaks in and around the communities of Carpinteria and Summerland, to ensure continued effectiveness of the fuel breaks.

CSFPD will conduct community outreach as part of the project. Local community members and stakeholders identified through the CWPP process will be invited to attend an informational meeting on the project and offered opportunities to provide input on project elements and ways to engage in community resilience building and disaster preparedness education efforts.

**Site Description:**

The CSFPD has jurisdiction over the City of Carpinteria, the community of Summerland and other unincorporated lands within Santa Barbara County, located between the coastal Santa Ynez Mountain Range and the Pacific Ocean, 10 miles south of Santa Barbara, and approximately 90 miles northwest of Los Angeles. Highway 101, a major north-south state transportation artery runs through the CSFPD along the Coastal Plain. CSFPD’s jurisdictional area incorporates approximately 40 square miles of urban and rural communities. This area has a history of having been impacted by major wildfire incidents and the greater part of CSFPD’s jurisdiction is at a risk from wildland fires. The project areas are located along mostly rural roads or in relatively steep topography that is covered with non-native ornamental vegetation, including large stands of eucalyptus, as well as areas of native oak woodland, oak riparian and chaparral.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** CSFPD is well qualified to manage the project. CSFPD has administered many state and federal grants over past decades. CSFPD is under contract with CAL FIRE to provide wildland fire protection on all State Responsibility Areas (SRA) lands in the county, which includes much of the land comprising the project. CSFPD provides a full range of fire protection services to the community. These services include emergency medical response, structural firefighting, water rescue, wildfire response and mitigation strategies for fire prevention such as training, pre-planning, and public education.

**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 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 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).
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.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$120,000</b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$120,000</b>

The anticipated source of funding is a Fiscal Year 2020-21 special appropriation of General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of wildfire risk reduction. The proposed project is consistent with the anticipated funding source. The Coastal Conservancy does not typically require matching funds nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders. Typical grant conditions require Grantees to provide any funds needed to complete the project.

**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.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

All components of the proposed project are categorically and statutorily exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines at California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15301, 15304], and 15269.

Section 15304 (Minor Alterations) 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.

Section 15301 (Existing Facilities) exempts projects that consist of operation, repair, maintenance, or minor alterations of existing structures, facilities, or topographical features, involving negligible expansion of existing or former use of the site. Such projects include, but are not limited to, management of existing landscaping or native growth.

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.