

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 7, 2021

NORTH COUNTY FIRE AUTHORITY WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE FUEL REDUCTION

Project No. 21-039-01
Project Manager: Hilary Hill

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$130,000 to the City of Pacifica and \$67,500 to the City of Brisbane for the North County Fire Authority to implement two wildfire fuel reduction projects in the wildland urban interface in northern San Mateo County, including vegetation management along public roadways in City of Brisbane and a community chipper program in the City of Pacifica.

LOCATION: Cities of Brisbane and Pacifica, San Mateo County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

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 two grants as follows:

- City of Pacifica: One hundred thirty thousand dollars (\$130,000) for the North County Fire Authority to implement a community chipper program to support reduction of fire fuel loads in the wildland urban interface.
 - City of Brisbane: Sixty seven thousand five hundred dollars (\$67,500) for the North County Fire Authority to reduce fire fuel vegetation along public roadways in the wildland urban interface.
1. Prior to commencement of each project, each 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.
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 grants totalling \$197,500 to the City of Pacifica (\$130,000) and the City of Brisbane (\$67,500) for the North County Fire Authority to implement two wildfire fuel reduction projects in the wildland urban interface in northern San Mateo County, including vegetation management along public roadways in City of Brisbane and a community chipper program in the City of Pacifica. These projects will reduce the accumulated fuel load in these two high risk residential areas, reducing the potential for life loss, property loss, and environmental damage during a wildfire.

City of Brisbane Roadway Fuel Reduction Project:

The City of Brisbane is located on the lower slopes of San Bruno Mountain wildland open space, which is classified as a High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. San Bruno Mountain had two brush fires in 2020 (February and October) amid dry conditions, highlighting the fire risk of this area throughout the year. Many of the streets in the upper residential portion of Brisbane are very narrow and winding along the hillside and are overgrown with vegetation (Exhibit 2). During a wildland fire, embers can be cast down from high winds, igniting this roadside vegetation and posing a danger for the evacuation of residents and entry of firefighters and emergency personnel, and hampering the ability to create fire breaks.

Through this project, the North County Fire Authority will reduce fuel loads on approximately 3.6 miles of narrow and vegetated public roadways within the City of Brisbane's residential neighborhoods at the wildland-urban interface adjacent to San Bruno Mountain (Exhibit 1). Work will include trimming and limbing up trees that encroach on the public right of way; removing invasive, overgrown, dead and flammable vegetation from the sides of public streets; and clearing of vegetation around fire hydrants along the public roadways. This will reduce fuel

loads along roadways, and thus dampen the ability of wildfire to spread within the City and improve conditions for safe evacuation of residents and entry of firefighters and emergency personnel. This project is ready to be implemented beginning in August 2021 and will prepare the City of Brisbane for the coming wildfire season.

City of Pacifica Community Chipper Program: The City of Pacifica is bordered by Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone at its southern boundary, where vast swaths of open space extend down the San Francisco Peninsula and San Mateo Coastside (Exhibit 1). Each year hot weather and high winds pose a fire hazard throughout the City of Pacifica. The proposed project will implement a Community Chipper Program to reduce the volume of flammable vegetation in the City and encourage residents to create defensible space around their property. Properly maintaining and reducing trees and shrubbery around a property will greatly improve the chances of the structure being safely protected in the event of a wildfire while also reducing the spread of wildfire.

The Community Chipper Program is based on a “you cut, we chip” model. Homeowners will be responsible for cutting, gathering and piling vegetation from around their homes to a roadside or drop-off location. The North Coast Fire Authority will provide chipping crews who visit neighborhood-by-neighborhood to chip vegetation on site or for removal. Chips will be hauled off at no cost to the homeowner. Through this model, residents have incentive to reduce the dangerous accumulation of vegetation around their homes as the program is free of charge. By engaging the community, this project will quickly remove and reduce the accumulation of combustibles within the wildland urban interface of Pacifica.

Through implementation of this project, approximately 20 “chipping days” will be available to City of Pacifica residents, prioritizing areas immediately adjacent to the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone such as Park Presidio, Pedro Point, and South Linda Mar neighborhoods. This project aims to be implemented as soon as possible, with a majority of chipping days to occur August through October 2021 in advance of the fire season.

Site Description: The City of Brisbane and the City of Pacifica are located in northern San Mateo County, both at the wildland urban interface of open space and urban areas. The City of Brisbane encompasses approximately 20 square miles including office parks, industrial park, commercial area, bayland waterfront, and a small residential area. This residential area is located near the lower slopes of San Bruno Mountain wildland open space, which is classified as a High Hazard Severity Zone. Many of the residential streets are winding and narrow causing high risk during wildfires for evacuation.

The City of Pacifica stretches six miles along the northern coast of San Mateo County and is comprised of several small valleys inland. The City of Pacifica is primarily a residential and commuter town and is known for its beaches and access to vast amounts of open space including Golden Gate National Recreation Area (Sweeny Ridge, Milagra Ridge, Mori Point), Montara Mountain, Pedro Point Headlands, and San Pedro Valley County Park. As a small city, the City of Pacifica has not had the funding to do fire prevention work at its wildland urban interface.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The Cities of Brisbane and Pacifica are small municipalities that have both received multiple grants over the last two decades from the Conservancy. North County Fire Authority will be implementing work under the proposed grants and has experience executing similar fire prevention projects. North County Fire Authority is a Joint Powers Authority serving the communities of Brisbane, Daly City, and Pacifica in San Mateo County. The mission of the North County Fire Authority is to protect life, property, and the environment from fires, accidents, medical emergencies and disasters through training, public education, fire prevention, and emergency response. The North County Fire Authority has a history of success overseeing and managing the delivery of these services through its Operations Bureau, Support & Administrative Services Bureau, and the Fire Prevention Bureau, which includes the Vegetation Management Program that aims to reduce the wildland-urban interface fire hazard potential. North County Fire Authority is equipped with emergency and support personnel to serve its jurisdictional area of approximately 60 square miles and a population of over 185,000 citizens.

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 will be located in a county 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

Coastal Conservancy	\$197,500
Project Total	\$197,500

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 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) that is also within one of the nine counties of the San Francisco Bay Area (Chapter 4.5 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.