

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 7, 2021

SAN MATEO COUNTY WILDFIRE RESILIENCE INITIATIVE

Project No. 21-045-01
Project Manager: Erica Johnson

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$194,400 to Woodside Fire Protection District for fuel reduction management practices and invasive plant removal in San Mateo County and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

LOCATION: Big Canyon & Eaton Park, City of San Carlos, San Mateo County; Thornewood Preserve, San Mateo County.

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Wildland Fire Resilience Program Final Environmental Impact Report](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program](#)
- Exhibit 4: [Letters of Support](#)

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 ninety-four thousand and four hundred dollars (\$194,400) to Woodside Fire Protection District (“the grantee”) to implement fuel reduction practices and invasive plant removal.

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.

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- 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, operate, and maintain 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.

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.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
 3. For the Thornewood Preserve project area, the Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered as a responsible agency the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's 2021 Wildland Fire Resiliency Program, Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) certified by Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District on May 12, 2021 pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 2. The EIR analyzes several alternative ways to achieve the programmatic objectives of the Wildland Fire Resiliency Program which outlines a comprehensive approach to vegetation management, including pre- and post-response activities to wildland fire on Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District lands.
 - a. The Conservancy finds that the Thornewood Preserve project may have potentially significant effects in the areas of Biological Resources, Geomorphology, Hydrology and Water Quality, Noise, Human Health and Safety, Transportation, and Cultural Resources, as described in the CEQA section of the accompanying staff report. With regard to the potentially significant impacts in these areas, the Conservancy finds that the mitigation measures identified in the EIR avoid, reduce, or mitigate significant environmental effects of the project to a less-than-significant level through mitigation measures identified in the EIR.
 - b. The Conservancy further finds that the Thornewood Preserve project may result in significant and unavoidable impacts regarding Aesthetics, Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas emissions, but environmental and other benefits of the proposed project as described in the accompanying staff recommendation outweigh or render acceptable these unavoidable adverse environmental impacts to achieve the objectives of the project.
 4. The Conservancy adopts the Significant Impact Findings and State of Overriding Considerations set forth in the CEQA section of the accompanying staff recommendation.
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STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$194,400 grant to Woodside Fire Protection District to implement fuel reduction practices and invasive plant removal at Big Canyon Park, Eaton Park, and Thornewood Preserve (Exhibit 1).

The project will address forest health and reduce wildfire threats to wildlife urban interface communities adjacent to the three project sites who are at risk of increasingly severe wildfires due to climate change. Big Canyon and Easton Parks are two adjacent parks located in a predominantly residential area within the City of San Carlos. Together the parks are 74 acres of oak woodland. The grantees will reduce wildland fire fuel at these two parks by implementing two years of seasonal goat grazing which is ideal for quick fuel mitigation.

Thornewood Preserve is in a predominantly residential community within the redwood forest and is a 167-acre preserve owned by Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District. The preserve offers easy access and forested trails to the community and visitors for walking, dogs, and horseback riding. Schilling Lake within the preserve provides habitat to waterfowl. The forest needs small tree thinning and invasive plant removal. The grantee's plan is to reduce wildland fire fuel and remove invasive plants by grazing, thinning of selected trees, burning piles of stacked wood and vegetation, and removing invasive broom plant.

Specific tasks for Thornewood Preserve:

1. **Biological survey before treatment**- Identify bird nesting and rat nesting areas to avoid during future treatment. This will take place in Summer of 2021.
2. **Forest thinning and wood pile burning** - Contractors along with Woodland Fire Protection District will use a combination of grazing, hand clearing, selective tree thinning, and stacking wood piles, in fall of 2021 and 2022. Wood piles will be burned in Spring before fire season in 2022 and 2023.
3. **Invasive plant removal** - Woodland Fire Protection District will hand pull invasive broom plant and others if identified in the project area.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Woodside Fire Protection District (the District) oversees the fire prevention and fire suppression division that serves the community in the wildland urban interface that is adjacent to Thornewood Preserve. They are involved with identifying and abating fire hazards in the community. The District will partner with Fire Safe San Mateo County, a local non-profit that is comprised of San Mateo County fire chiefs and other members who address the potential for serious loss of life and property in the wildland urban interface areas, such as in the cities of San Carlos and Woodside where Eaton Park, Big Canyon Park, and Thornewood Preserve are located.

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The District has experience and programs that address wildland fire and have programs to protect life and property against wildfires. The District has skilled staff to implemented projects that use fire for vegetation management and remove invasive plants. Their experience and expertise are crucial to reducing wildfire threats, controlling, and overseeing vegetation pile burning, and the management of invasive plants. The District worked closely with Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District on their Wildland Fire Resiliency Program and will be a key partner in implementing the measures called for by the Program.

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 wildland fire 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).

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$194,400
City of San Carlos	\$15,000
Mid-Peninsula Open Space	\$25,000
County of San Mateo	\$25,000
Town of Woodside	\$80,000

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Woodside Fire Protection District

\$10,000

Project Total

\$349,400

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 wildland fire risk reduction. The proposed project is consistent with the anticipated funding source.

Unless specifically labelled “Required Match” the other sources of funding listed above are provided as estimates. 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 [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.
- 1. Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
- 2. 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

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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”.
3. **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. A letter of support from the Old La Honda Road Association is attached as Exhibit 4 which is a neighborhood in the city of Woodside that is located in the wildland urban interface and whose homes would be affected by wildfires.
 4. **Location:** The proposed project is located in a county within the Coastal Conservancy’s jurisdiction.
 5. **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.
 6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Minimizing wildfire risk is of statewide significance.
 7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The subject land is situated well above current and projected Year 2100 sea levels.

Additional Criteria

8. **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.
9. **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).
10. **Readiness:** The project is ready to begin work immediately.
11. **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.

12. 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:

Big Canyon Park and Eaton Park

The project activities to take place at Big Canyon Park and Eaton Park are categorically exempt from review under CEQA Guidelines Section 15333 (14 Cal. Code Regs. §15333) because the work proposed is a minor alteration to vegetation which does not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees and is consistent with Categorical Exemptions Class 4 - Minor alteration to Land. Upon Conservancy approval of the proposed project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption for these portions of the project.

Thornewood Preserve

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's *2021 Wildland Fire Resiliency Program, Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Report* (EIR) was prepared for the program pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and is attached as Exhibit 2. The EIR is a programmatic environmental impact report that analyzes the potential environmental effects of implementing the Wildland Fire Resiliency Program on a regional and project-level scale. No additional CEQA documentation is anticipated for the activities associated with this project.

Under CEQA whenever measures are required and adopted to mitigate or avoid the significant effects on the environment of an approved project, the agency must also prepare and adopt a mitigation monitoring or reporting program designed to ensure compliance with the required mitigation during project implementation (Public Resources Code Section 21081.6).

Midpeninsula ROSD adopted a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) for the program on May 12, 2021. The MMRP can be found in pages 249-280 in Exhibit 2 and attached as Exhibit 3.

The EIR identified and addressed potentially significant effects of the programmatic activities with respect to the following: Aesthetics, Air Quality, Biological Resources, Geomorphology, Hydrology and Water Quality, Noise, Human Health and Safety, Transportation, and Cultural Resources. Where potential impact was found, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpeninsula ROSD) has integrated the relevant mitigation measures from the MMRP (Exhibit 3). With respect to the Thornewood Preserve project activities have been found to have significant and unavoidable impacts for Aesthetic, Air Quality, and Greenhouse Gas even after mitigation measures have been implemented as discussed below. A summary of the potentially significant environmental effects and mitigation measures are summarized as follows:

Significant Effects Reduced to Less-Than-Significant Levels by Mitigation

The areas in the EIR which have been identified to potentially have less-than-significant effect through mitigation measures specified in the EIR are: Biological Resources; Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources; Geology and Soils; Hazards, Hazardous Materials, and Wildland Fire;

Hydrology and Water Quality; Noise; Recreation; and Transportation. Each of these areas and their associated mitigation measures are summarized below:

Biological Resources

Potentially significant impacts on Biological Resources may result from programmatic activities that include vegetation management, especially in sensitive habitat or during specific times of year when nesting or migratory activities occur for various wildlife. The impact may be direct harm to the species, its habitat, or disturbance during a sensitive part of its lifecycle. The EIR identifies 20 measures which include training, pre-surveys, buffers, avoidance, and other adaptive management or compensatory mitigation to mitigate impact to less than significant.

Biology-1. Training, Monitoring, and Reporting – A qualified biologist or biological monitor will conduct onsite biological surveys and monitor program activities and work areas that have potential impact to biological resources, including listed species of concern. All work areas will be surveyed before work to assess conditions, flag areas to be avoided and implement best management practices biologically sensitive areas. All personnel will attend training for environmental awareness, best management practices, and protocol for when a species of concern is identified. Any incident of injury, mortality, or incidental capture of a special status species will be reported within 3 working-days in accordance with state permit conditions.

Biology-2. Special Status Plants – To mitigate impact to special status plants, the abundance and distribution of special status plants will be recorded by a GPS unit and entered onto a GIS database. Avoidance and mitigation measures will be implemented based on the type of work to be done in the area. Measures include spatial buffers, conducting work during less sensitive stages of plant life, salvaging plant seeds if it is determined they may be permanently impacted, provide compensatory mitigation, and buffering burn piles by at least 50 feet from sensitive plant areas.

Biology-3. Compensatory Mitigation for Impacts to Special-Status Plants – All compensatory mitigation projects will have a mitigation plan that outlines a strategy approved by the CDFW, and that identifies what success thresholds are depending on the plant population and site conditions. Habitat enhancement would occur at a ratio of 6:1 (6 acres compensation for each acre impacted) and on Midpeninsula ROSD's property if possible. A monitoring plan will also be implemented, along with annual reports for planting success for up to 5 years. A mitigation project will be considered a success if a qualified botanist or biologist determines the success threshold is achieved. To achieve success Midpeninsula ROSD will source appropriate plant establishment material, maintain less than 10% cover of invasive plants, restrict public access until plants are established, and conduct regular inspections.

Biology-4. Invasive Plants and Soil Pathogens –Midpeninsula ROSD will collect data on invasive weed species, particularly those on the CDFW noxious weed list, in work areas and along access roads. Species that occur within or adjacent to the boundaries of the work area will be removed prior to work unless the work is designed to control those species already (such as grazing). Midpeninsula ROSD will determine a disposal location that will minimize the potential to spread. Midpeninsula ROSD will also revegetate areas with native plants. For prescribed burns a biologist will determine if burn areas need to be reseeded with natives to speed up recovery.

Biology-5. Invasive Plant Detection and Response – Midpeninsula ROSD will routinely monitor work areas and use quadrants to assess invasive plant cover in accordance with Early Detection Rapid Response protocol in the Integrated Pest Management Plan (Appendix C of the EIR) every 3-5 years both before and after impact from work activity. Success criteria are (1) eradication of invasive species designated as noxious or (2) cover of non-natives is equal to or less than cover of natives in 5 years' time.

Biology-6. San Francisco Garter Snake Protection Measures, Biology-7 California Red-Legged Frog Protection Measures, Biology-8 Foothill Yellow-Legged Frog Protection Measures, Biology-9 Western Pond Turtle Protection Measures, Biology-10 California Giant Salamander, Santa Cruz Black Salamander, and Red-Bellied Newt Protection Measures, Biology-11 Nesting Bird Protection Measures (With the Exception of Marbled Murrelet), Biology-12 Marbled Murrelet Nest Protection Measures, Biology-13 Special-Status Insect Host Plant Protection, Biology-14 Salmonoid Protection Measures, Biology-15 Monarch butterfly Overwintering Aggregation Protection. For action affecting these species or their habitats, Midpeninsula ROSD will follow protective measures detailed in the EIR and approved by USFWS and CDFW, as appropriate. Measures can include using pre-construction surveys, using handheld equipment to avoid injury, relocating species, allowing animals to escape, and preserving essential nesting habitats or food resources.

Biology-16. Prescribed Burns and Biological Resource Avoidance - All participants in the burn will be briefed by a Resource Advisor on the special-status species, where they would likely be found, and who to contact if one is sighted. No more than 24 hours prior to conducting prescribed fires, visual surveys will be conducted by walking transects throughout the proposed burn area to locate individual special-status species. Immediately following each prescribed fire, the permittee searches the area to identify dead or injured species.

Biology-17. Sensitive Natural Communities - Before a Program activity is implemented, a Midpeninsula ROSD approved botanist will: (1) assess the site- and project-specific threats to each sensitive natural community that might be impacted by the project activity; and (2) recommend spatial buffers or other management actions that will reduce potentially significant impacts on the sensitive natural community to less than significant levels.

Biology-18. Compensatory Mitigation for Impacts to Sensitive Natural Communities - The baseline ratio for impacts 3:1 (e.g., 3 acres compensation for each acre impacted) or 2:1 depending on community groups and several factors that may dictate the need for a higher ratio. A list of factors in the EIR are mitigation strategy, temporal loss, uncertainty, distance, kind, and other impacts. Projects designed to mitigate significant impacts to sensitive natural communities are considered successful once a qualified botanist will implement Rapid Assessment vegetation sampling techniques defined by CDFW to monitor community development at mitigation sites until the site achieves threshold criteria (e.g., percent cover)

Biology-19. Wetlands and Other Potential Jurisdictional Aquatic Resources - Midpeninsula ROSD will not conduct any work activities that might directly or indirectly impact jurisdictional wetlands and waters unless they have permits from the appropriate State and federal regulatory agencies. Midpeninsula ROSD will avoid direct and indirect impacts to wetlands and other jurisdictional waters. If complete avoidance is not possible, a biologist with expertise in

wetland science will document baseline conditions according to the California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM). CRAM is a standardized, cost-effective tool for assessing the health of wetlands and riparian habitats. The assessment will be used (1) to monitor the how effective the buffer is in preventing impact to wetlands; and/or (2) to ensure compensatory mitigation replaces the wetland functions impacted by the work activity.

Biology-20. Significant and Heritage Tree Ordinances –A biologist or other personnel qualified in tree identification will identify any County or local protected and heritage tree ordinances that are relevant to the work area and mark the tree to be left alone or remove the tree. Trees in CalTrans right of-way must have an Encroachment Permit and be reviewed by CalTrans. CalTrans may require tree replacement in its permit terms.

Cultural Resources

Vegetation management activities may potentially disturb or impact archeological, historical, or cultural resources, or human remains. The following mitigation measures propose to avoid areas of known resources if possible, or a tribal consultation will be initiated for other alternatives (such as relocation or collection of data on the resources).

Cultural Resources-1. Pre-Activity Surveys and Avoidance of Impacts to Cultural Resources - the work areas will be compared against Midpeninsula ROSD's GIS data to determine if it has been surveyed and if cultural resources have been identified in the area. For areas not surveyed, a qualified archaeologist will conduct an initial study and literature review to assess the site's cultural resources. If cultural resources are abundant, alternate methods that do not disturb these resources will be used and/or the project will stop to allow time for cultural resources to be recovered by archeologists, and erosion control measures will also be designed to avoid damaging cultural resources.

Cultural Resources-2. Treatment of Unavoidable Resources - For any resources either discovered, and unable to be avoided, a treatment and data recovery plan will be implemented, and tribes consulted.

Cultural Resources-3. Human Remains –known locations of human remains will be avoided and activity ceased if human remains are uncovered, and they will be protected. A treatment and data recovery plan will be implemented, and tribes consulted.

Geology and Soils

Vegetation management may destabilize soils and increase the likelihood of erosion or other hazards. The measure below proposes to mitigate erosion and other hazards by implementing measure to reduce likelihood of destabilization.

Geology-1. Prescribed Herbivory Land and Trail Control – Livestock herbivory will not occur within 100 ft of lakes. Reservoirs, or other riparian habitat and measures will be implemented to prevent congregation of livestock in one place, and any bare areas will be remediated.

Geology-2. Erosion Control and Slope Stability Measures – work areas will be assessed prior to work to determine if slopes would be destabilized by vegetation removal and specific control

measures will be implemented to reduce destabilization and erosion, such as using mats or replanting vegetation to stabilize soils after work is done.

Geology-3. Fire Lines During Prescribed Burns – existing barriers such as roads, trails or wet lines will be used as much as possible for barriers. When existing barriers are not possible, fire lines that are no longer used will be replanted. Burn boundaries will avoid erodible soils as much as possible.

Geology-4. Soil Assessment for Construction of New Water-Supply Pipelines - Water supply pipeline construction will avoid expansive soils as much as possible using GIS data, or be replaced with non-expansive soil for construction fill.

Hazards, Hazardous Materials, and Wildland Fire

The nature of the work and proposed work areas has potential to expose workers and the public to hazards. The following mitigation measures propose to avoid areas, provide public notice and buffers, and other safety precautions that if followed will mitigate to less than significant.

Hazards, Hazardous Materials, and Wildland Fire-1. Avoidance of Contaminated Sites - Contaminated sites will be avoided, or in cases where they cannot be avoided, excavation of soil will be avoided.

Hazards-2. Fire Risk Reduction for Stockpiling and Pile Burning- Pile burning will only be allowed when risk of fire spreading is low, and in locations that fires can be feasibly controlled. Fires will be set back from public roads to avoid disturbance to recreation, and all requirements of Cal-Fire and Bay Area Air Quality Management Dist. will be met.

Hazards-3. Safety Around Prescribed Burns -Access to burn areas to the public will be closed within 500 ft of burns. Temporary fencing, blockades and notices will be put out to deter the public. As much as possible, burns will be 500 ft from open roads and will be coordinated with law enforcement and people to facilitate flow of traffic away from burn areas.

Hydrology and Water Quality

Hydrology and Water Quality-1. Water Quality Protection During Waterway Crossing or Work Near Waterbodies - vehicles with heavy equipment will avoid creating any new instream crossings, or crossings will be done when stream are dry. All soils will be replaced, and beds revegetated, as needed.

Noise

Noise-1. Noise Restrictions – Midpeninsula ROSD will apply noise standards based on where work is being done, according to local noise ordinances, and buffer zones established based on the equipment being used. If restrictions cannot be implemented, Midpeninsula ROSD will provide notices to residents within a week or more of the disturbance.

Transportation

Transportation-1. Emergency Responders and Access- Midpeninsula ROSD will notify authorities and emergency responders of the location of any blockades for work being done.

People will be present at blockades with wo-way radios for communication, and during emergencies blockades will be removed for emergency responders.

Conservancy staff have independently reviewed and considered the Final EIR. The Final EIR analyzes several alternative ways to achieve the programmatic objectives of the Wildland Fire Resiliency Program which outlines a comprehensive approach to vegetation management, including pre- and post-response activities to wildland fire on Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District lands. Staff recommends the Conservancy find that the mitigation measures identified in the EIR for Biological Resources, Geomorphology, Hydrology and Water Quality, Noise, Human Health and Safety, Transportation, and Cultural Resources adequately avoid, reduce, or mitigate significant environmental effects of the project to a less-than-significant level.

Significant Effects and Statement of Overriding Considerations

In the event a project has unavoidable significant effects, the CEQA Guidelines require the decision-making agency to balance, as applicable, the economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of a proposed project against its unavoidable environmental risks when determining whether to approve the project (14 Cal. Code of Regulations, Section 15093). If the specific project benefits outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects of the project, a Statement of Overriding Considerations may be adopted and the project approved, despite its adverse environmental effects. This section serves this function.

Significant Unavoidable Impacts

The EIR found some impacts may not be reduced to less-than-significant even after implementation of project-specific mitigation measures, as described below:

Aesthetics

The vegetation management areas will need to be expansive in order to be effective. Although the mitigation measures will plan to design areas to preserve vegetation where visible from scenic points, vegetation needs to be cleared for effective wildland fire reduction.

Aesthetics-1. Reduction of Visual Impacts from Scenic Roads, Corridors, Trails, and Viewpoints from Vegetation Management Areas (VMA)- Midpeninsula ROSD will reduce impact by conducting desk top survey of any planned VMA's during their annual planning that could potentially be visible from a scenic road, corridor, or trail. If the VMA falls into view of the scenic area, Midpeninsula ROSD will assess alternatives that have the same fire reduction impact. If no alternatives are feasible, Midpeninsula ROSD will strategically preserve vegetation at the edge of the treatment area to help screen public views of the treatment area.

Aesthetics-2. Guidelines for Design of Roads, Landing Zones, or Staging Areas - New roads, landing zones, and staging areas for firefighting will be designed away from ridgelines, with

maximum natural conditions (such as mowed grass instead of paved surface), minimal contouring of natural topography, and avoid large rocks and mature healthy trees.

Air Quality

Vegetation management and equipment required will be impact to the air quality during programmatic activities in order to effectively remove potential wildland fire fuel. To reduce impact, a variety of protocols are in place to reduce impact or ensure safety depending on the type of activity being done.

Air Quality-1. Fugitive Dust Control Measures for Infrastructure Installation - Midpeninsula ROSD will reduce impact on air quality by watering exposed surfaces when conditions are dry enough create dust, covering stored loose sediment, removing any sediment into the public road during any excavation or contouring activities, reducing unpaved road speeds to 15 mph, minimize idling time of equipment to 5 minutes or less, and providing contact information on public facing signs that provide a number to call regarding dust. Any reported concerns will be addressed within 48 hours.

Air Quality-2. Burn Emission Reduction Techniques - Midpeninsula ROSD will limit pile burning to 8.8 tons in any one day and minimize burning to those that provide the desired habitat benefit and to vegetation that cannot be removed by grazing, when there is appropriate moisture content, and when there is no spare-the-air burn ban. Midpeninsula ROSD will provide public notification at least 48 hours in advance of a burn less than 50 acres to individuals and jurisdictions within one mile, and at trailheads and access roads leading to an area with piles proposed for burning. Notice will extend to a larger region if it is appropriate. The public notification will include current contact numbers to the appropriate burn coordinator.

Air Quality-3. Asbestos Management - GIS will be used to determine if any soil disturbing activities (such as pulling or trenching) will disturb serpentine soils or rock formations. If they do, measures developed by CARB Asbestos Airborne Toxic Control Measures will be implemented. These measures include watering down the ground to reduce airborne materials, avoid using compressed air for cleaning, reduced speed limits (15mph), and for mowing the mower head will be set 6 inches above the ground.

Air Quality-4. Midpeninsula ROSD Employee Protection from Prescribed Burn Air Pollutants - Midpeninsula ROSD employees may be exposed to CO and other pollutants while managing prescribed burns. To reduce exposure, Midpeninsula ROSD will avoid heavy fuel burn loads, when possible (such as large logs), firefighters and fire lines will be placed where there is less fuel exposure, CO monitors will be used on equipment, workers will be trained to be aware of smoke hazards and rotate personnel out of heavy smoke areas and monitor smoke exposure. The workers will wear appropriate equipment which include N95 or N100 masks and a bandana to be worn voluntarily and required recommended by a Burn Boss.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

GHG emissions would be generated from mechanical equipment and vehicle emissions, pile burning. Mitigation measures summarized under Air Quality would minimize the emissions, but the impact remains potentially significant. The potential impact is:

Greenhouse Gas -1: Generation of GHG emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment.

Project Benefits Justifying Overriding Considerations

The overall environmental benefits of the proposed project as detailed above and in the EIR recommend that the Conservancy approve the project even though not all of the potentially significant environmental effects of the project are mitigated.

The project would provide the following public benefits that justify proceeding with the project despite the environmental cost of the unavoidable significant effects:

- Reduce wildland fire risk by strategically managing vegetation, as proposed in the EIR. This type of management reduces wildfire intensity and severity, which enhances public safety and improves ecosystem recovery.
- Improve wildland fire resiliency and ecosystem health by implementing prescribed burns under controlled conditions at a lower severity, which leave trees and large shrubs alive. Some special status species are well-adapted and benefit from fires of lower intensity and severity than wildfires.
- Controlled burns limits air quality issues and reduces greenhouse gas emission than if a wildland fire were to burn vegetation.
- Vegetation management is cost effective because it helps avoid the cost associated with wildfires.

There are no alternatives that would meet the program goal of reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfires and further avoid or reduce the potential impacts to Aesthetics, Air Quality, and Greenhouse Gases. For these reasons, the specific public safety, economic and environmental benefits of the Project proposed in the EIR, as described in the Project Benefits section above, outweigh the unmitigated or unavoidable environmental effects of the project, thereby warranting its approval of the project.

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