

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 7, 2021

East Bay Regional Park District North End Fuels Treatment

Project No. 21-032-01
Project Manager: Avra Heller

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$290,600 to the East Bay Regional Park District to expand on-going fuel treatments and fuel breaks and conduct biological surveys on East Bay Regional Park lands, specifically in two recommended treatment areas: Tilden Regional Park - T1002a and Wildcat Canyon Regional Park - WC005.

LOCATION: Wildcat Canyon and Tilden Regional Parks, Contra Costa County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [October 17, 2019 Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program Staff Recommendation](#)

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 two hundred ninety thousand six hundred dollars (\$290,600) to the East Bay Regional Park District (“the grantee”) to expand on-going fuel treatments and fuel breaks and perform biological surveys on East Bay Regional Park lands, specifically in two recommended treatment areas: Tilden Regional Park - T1002a and Wildcat Canyon Regional Park - WC005 (Exhibit 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:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. In implementing the proposed project, the grantee shall comply with all applicable mitigation measures and monitoring and reporting requirements in the **Final Environmental Impact Report Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the 2010 Wildfire Hazard**

Reduction and Resource Management Plan (see Exhibit 2 to the October 17, 2019 staff recommendation attached as Exhibit 2) and in any permits, approvals or additional environmental documentation required for the project.

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 a \$290,600 grant to the East Bay Regional Park District (“EBRPD”) expand on-going fuel treatments and fuel breaks and perform biological surveys on East Bay Regional Park lands, specifically in two recommended treatment areas: Tilden Regional Park - TI002a and Wildcat Canyon Regional Park - WC005 (Exhibit 1).

The most serious wildfire hazards in the San Francisco Bay Area’s East Bay hills exist where homes interface with wildland vegetation in regional parks, open space, and undeveloped canyons. As the manager of over 125,000 acres of these open spaces / wildland urban interfaces, the East Bay Regional Park District is actively working to reduce wildfire risks throughout their properties. There are over 12,350 households (33,659 people) adjacent to the broader project influence areas of Wildcat Canyon and Tilden Regional Parks, representing property values exceeding \$10 billion (average property value over \$800,000).

Over the past several years, EBRPD’s Operations and Fire Departments have been implementing EBRPD’s Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan. In accordance with the Plan, they have thinned several eucalyptus stands and removed large trees near developed areas and powerlines in the proposed project areas. With the recommended grant, EBRPD will continue to implement the Plan by undertaking the proposed project in Tilden Regional Park - TI002a and Wildcat Canyon Regional Park - WC005. The proposed project includes removing large trees as well as particularly flammable vegetation types. Those vegetation types include north coast scrub where the age and continuity of shrubs create high fuel loads, oak-bay woodland where understory fuels create fuel ladders into tree canopies and, and groves of blue gum eucalyptus and Monterey pine planted in the early 1900s that are fire hazards targeted for selective removal, along with the reduction of ground and ladder fuels.

More specifically, the proposed treatment actions for treatment area T1002a in Tilden Regional Park will target approximately 120 to 150 hazard trees near structures and developed areas, such as the Environmental Education Center, the bathroom near Jewel Lake, and the Wildcat View and New Woodland group camps. Additionally, EBRPD will carry out fuels management on approximately 43 acres in T1002a. Grant funds will be used to reduce the following vegetation/fuel types throughout those 43 acres: 1) understory, ladder fuels (vegetation that can carry a fire burning in low-growing vegetation to taller vegetation - examples of ladder fuels include low-lying tree branches and shrubs and trees under the canopy of a large tree), and accumulated surface fuels (such as fallen leaves and branches, shrubs and grasses) in the dense eucalyptus forests, 2) brush and low hanging tree branches near fire roads, and 3) eucalyptus overstory amid the well-established oak-bay woodlands.

Treating the wildland fuels in T1002 will provide safer egress and ingress during a wildland fire incident, reduce fuel loading and fire intensity, and minimize the potential for long-range spotting via embers cast from the eucalyptus forest to land on homes in Kensington, less than a half mile to the west.

The proposed treatment actions on Wildcat Canyon Regional Park - WC005, include the removal of overstory pines and eucalyptus, thinning of the mixed bay and brush understory, reduction of “flashy” fuels (vegetation such as shrubs and grasses which ignite readily and are consumed rapidly when dry) along the roadways, and the removal of trees obviously infected with Sudden Oak Death (SOD). Management actions for this project site will also include goat grazing over approximately 22 acres as part of its fuels treatment program.

Finally, this grant will provide funding for the Park District to hire consulting biologists to conduct surveys to confirm presence/absence of California red-legged frogs, nesting birds, and dusky-footed woodrat nests; general resources surveys which are required annually for each project area.

Site Description(s): WC005 covers 44 acres surrounding the Alvarado Staging Area in Wildcat Canyon Regional Park, in Richmond, Contra Costa County. T1002a covers 109 acres of Tilden Regional Park near the park’s Nature Area including the Environmental Education Center, the bathroom near Jewel Lake, and the Wildcat View and New Woodland group camps, in Contra Costa County (Exhibit 1).

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The East Bay Regional Park District manages a system of parklands and trails in Alameda and Contra Costa counties to the east of San Francisco. The system comprises nearly 125,000 acres in 73 parks, including over 1,250 miles of trails and 55 miles of shoreline. EBRPD is currently managing an existing regional forest and fire capacity program grant of funds the Conservancy received through California Natural Resources Agency’s Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (Conservancy Project Number 19-10-01).

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 Contra Costa County, which is a county within the 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 well above current and projected Year 2100 sea levels.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$290,600
Project Total	\$290,600

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. EBRPD has not identified specific matching funds for this grant. However, EBRPD has invested a significant amount of its resources in developing its Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan and invests over \$2,000,000 annually (on average) to implement the plan.

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:

On October 17, 2019, the Conservancy independently reviewed and concurred with the **East Bay Regional Parks District Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan Environmental Impact Report**, ("EIR") finding that the Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan ("Plan"), as mitigated, avoids or reduces to less than significant all potentially significant environmental effects, except for one temporary significant and unavoidable impact to Visual Resources. With respect to this potential unavoidable effect, the Conservancy found that the public safety, air quality, natural resource, and community benefits of the EBRPD project outweighed the one unmitigated and unavoidable environmental effect of the project and adopted a statement of overriding considerations. (Exhibit 2).

All activities to be carried out under this project are within the scope of the EIR and will be conducted in accordance with the mitigation measures identified in the EIR and in the Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program. There have not been any project changes, new information, or changed circumstances that trigger the need for additional documentation under CEQA. Therefore, this authorization remains consistent with the October 17, 2019 findings and statement of overriding considerations.