

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 7, 2021

QUARRY PARK EUCALYPTUS FUEL BREAK

Project No. 21-040-01
Project Manager: Hilary Hill

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,000,000 to San Mateo Resource Conservation District to establish a shaded fuel break and remove hazardous trees along fire roads within Quarry Park in El Granada, San Mateo County, and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

LOCATION: Quarry Park, El Granada, San Mateo County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: County of San Mateo Routine Maintenance Program Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR), available at <https://publicworks.smcgov.org/projects/county-san-mateo-routine-maintenance-program>

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 million dollars (\$1,000,000) to San Mateo Resource Conservation District (“the grantee”) to establish a shaded fuel break and remove hazardous tree along fire roads within Quarry Park in El Granada, San Mateo County.

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) a detailed work program, schedule, and budget.

2. The grantee shall submit evidence that it has permission to implement the project from the project site landowner.
3. 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.
4. The grantee shall comply with all Best Management Practices and Mitigation Measures outlined in the County of San Mateo Routine Maintenance Program Final Environmental Report (EIR).

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.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the County of San Mateo Routine Maintenance Program Final Environmental Report (EIR) and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) certified by the San Mateo County Planning Commission on September 9, 2020 pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”). The Conservancy finds that the proposed project as designed and mitigated avoids, reduces, or mitigates the potentially significant environmental effects to a less-than-significant level, and that there is no substantial evidence based on the record as a whole that the proposed project may have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 Cal. Code Regulations Section 15382.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$1,000,000 grant to San Mateo Resource Conservation District (RCD) to establish a shaded fuel break and remove hazardous trees along fire roads within San Mateo County Park Department’s Quarry Park, located in El Granada in coastal San Mateo County. Fuel and fire behavior models have identified this area as one of the highest priorities for fire mitigation in San Mateo County.

Quarry Park is identified as a Very High Fire Severity Zone due to its 314-acre Eucalyptus forest, which is located on steep slopes directly adjacent to approximately 100,000 residents of the Midcoast region of San Mateo. Quarry Park’s forest is densely overcrowded and unhealthy due to drought and disease. Rapid response is required to reduce the fuel load in Quarry Park and improve fire resiliency in the event of a wind-driven wildfire. Residents of this community and surrounding area are demanding immediate action.

Quarry Park was identified in the 2019 Governor's 45-day plan to protect California's more fire-vulnerable communities as a CAL FIRE Priority Fuel Reduction Project and initial work was implemented, creating 100 acres of shaded fuel breaks. The proposed project builds on this work, implementing 45 more acres of shaded fuel breaks and is identified as a priority project in San Mateo County Park Wildfire Fuel Management Program's 5-Year Priority Project List.

The proposed project will implement shaded fuel breaks along fire roads within Quarry Park, buffering fire roads up to 100 feet on either side, and remove hazardous trees that pose danger to ingress/egress of the fire road during an emergency. The San Mateo RCD will work with San Mateo County Parks field staff and contractors to treat a total of 45 acres utilizing manual and mechanical methods (Exhibit 1). Felled trees and other vegetation will be chipped, and the wood chips will be removed and disposed of off-site when feasible or else distributed on site to assist with erosion control and weed suppression. Trees too large to for the chipper will be cut into smaller segments and disposed of off-site when feasible or else left on site.

These strategic fire road fuel breaks are critical to allow quick emergency access into Quarry Park. This protects first responder's ability to access a fire and conduct fire containment and suppression activities, thereby protecting the community from fires starting near or spreading to the residential area. Ultimately, complete eucalyptus removal and habitat conversion to native chaparral may be the long-term best option for this area, however such a project is not yet developed and will be extremely costly (estimated \$150-\$200 million for total removal). Rapid response is needed now to improve fire prevention conditions in this densely overgrown forest and reduce fire danger to the community. This project is ready to begin in August 2021 and will immediately help reduce risk for the coming fire season.

Site Description: Quarry Park is part of the San Mateo County Park system and is located directly upslope of the town of El Granada, a residential community near the City of Half Moon Bay on the San Mateo Coast. Quarry Park covers approximately 517 acres of hillside and is densely forested with Eucalyptus and Monterey pine. These stands were planted prior to 1905 and are thus over 100 years old. The park has an existing road system constructed in the 1980s for a subdivision that was never developed. These roads are now used as trails and for emergency access, but have become overgrown by the Eucalyptus and other invasive species. The forest is unhealthy as it is very dense (an estimated 20,000 trees per acre); it has been heavily impacted by the recent drought (over 25% of the trees are showing signs of decline); and parts of the forest are impacted by insect pests and disease. There have been several fires, including one during the early 1900s that resulted in several fatalities.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The San Mateo RCD serves approximately 157,000 acres in the western, coastal half of San Mateo County. With a staff of 18 people, the RCD has experience delivering award-winning natural resource management projects. The RCD's Forest Health and Fire Resiliency program coordinates Fire Safe San Mateo County which is the Fire Safe Council covering San Mateo County. The RCD is well-suited to carry out this project with their experience providing technical assistance and coordination of fire prevention projects such as fuel treatment, fuel breaks, and forest/vegetation management within San Mateo County. The RCD has a record of success implementing numerous Coastal Conservancy grants including a

Regional Forest and Fire Capacity project, Pescadero Marsh Restoration and Resiliency project, and as a subawardee of the Integrated Watershed Restoration Program.

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 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 well 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	\$1,000,000
Project Total	\$1,000,000

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.

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.

San Mateo County Parks will be providing \$42,000 of in-kind match of staff time for implementation of 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:

The proposed project is analyzed in the County of San Mateo Routine Maintenance Program Final Environmental Report (EIR) and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) certified by the San Mateo County Planning Commission on September 9, 2020, which covers routine maintenance conducted at County roads, trails, campgrounds, picnic areas, bridges, culverts, ditches, and marinas (Exhibit 3). Routine maintenance activities include but are not limited to culvert, bridge, and other storm drainage maintenance; roadside ditch and swale maintenance; sediment removal; bank stabilization; vegetation management; road and trail maintenance; and marina maintenance activities. The proposed project for Conservancy funding is covered under the vegetation management activities of the Routine Maintenance

Program, including fuel management and maintenance of fire breaks, hazard tree removal, mowing, trimming and pruning, and invasive plant removal.

The Environmental Impact Report includes within the analyzed project a lengthy list of Best Management Practices (BMPs). Even after including all these BMPs, the EIR determined that activities within the proposed Routine Maintenance Program have the potential to result in significant Air Quality, Biological Resources, Hazards, and Noise impacts, but that required mitigation measures will reduce potential impacts to less-than-significant levels. Because the Quarry Park fuel break and tree removal activities are not separately analyzed in the EIR, the following discussion summarizes all the potentially significant impacts identified in the EIR for the Routine Maintenance Program as a whole.

Significant Effects Reduced to Less Than Significant Levels by Mitigation

Air Quality

Impact AQ-4: Result in Other Emissions Such as Odors Adversely Affecting a Substantial Number of People

Mitigation Measure AQ-1 requires stockpiles of odorous materials and pile burning activities to be located as far as possible from sensitive receptors and to be covered if immediate off-site disposal is not feasible.

Biological Resources

Impact BIO-1: Potential Adverse Effects on Special-Status Plant or Animal Species: State and/or Federally-Listed Special-Status Plants, CRPR 1B or 2 Plants, CRPR 3 or 4 Plants, California Red-legged Frog and California Tiger Salamander, San Francisco Garter Snake, Western Pond Turtle, Burrowing Owl, Pallid Bat and Townsend's Big-eared Bat

Mitigation Measure BIO-1 requires compensatory mitigation for special status plant species by a combination of preservation and enhancement of those species' populations outside of program work sites.

Mitigation Measure BIO-2 requires that if ground-disturbing activities are proposed and unavoidable within 50 feet of an individual Butano Ridge cypress to be avoided, a tree protection zone (TPZ) will be established to protect those populations. Trees will be clearly marked and fenced and soil disturbance prohibited within this protection zone.

Mitigation Measure BIO-3 requires that for vegetation management activities that may provide long term benefit to special-status plant species (for example, invasive species removal, grazing for thatch removal, shrub/tree removal for fuel reduction), success criteria will be established and the population must show evidence that it is recovering in the first year following implementation. If recovery is not observed, a restoration plan will be developed either using salvaged plant material from the site or within the watershed.

Mitigation Measure BIO-4 and BIO-5 requires the County to compensate for long-term loss of habitat for the California red-legged frog, California tiger salamander, and/or San Francisco Garter Snake via the restoration, enhancement, and/or management of

suitable habitat, financial contribution to restoration or improvement projects, or by purchase of credits from an approved conservation bank.

Mitigation Measure BIO-6 requires that prior to ground-disturbance in high-quality burrowing owl habitat, a focused pre-activity survey will be conducted for burrows occupied by migrant or overwintering burrowing owls by a qualified biologist no more than 14 days prior.

Mitigation Measure BIO-7 requires that if a tree containing a pallid or Townsend's big-eared bat maternity roost or a large non-maternity roost is to be removed, or program-related disturbance causes abandonment of the roost site, then a qualified bat biologist will design and determine an appropriate location for an alternative roost structure.

Impacts BIO-2 and BIO-3: Potential Adverse Effects on Riparian Habitat or Other Sensitive Natural Communities Identified in Local or Regional Plans, Policies, Regulations, or by California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), or National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and Potential Adverse Effects on Federally Protected Wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act

Mitigation Measures BIO-08 and BIO-09 requires that every year the County must notify relevant regulatory agencies of the year's planned maintenance activities and the County's proposal for providing compensatory mitigation for woody riparian vegetation or wetland, such as on-site mitigation to restore, preserve, and manage riparian or wetland habitats. If mitigation on-site is not possible, the County will acquire, preserve, enhance, or manage land off-site that provides similar ecological functions and values to the riparian or wetland habitat impacted.

Cumulative

Impact BIO-2: Cumulative Effects on Biological Resources

Mitigation Measures BIO-01 thru BIO-09 will be implemented to mitigate the potential cumulative impact on biological resources from proposed routine maintenance activities.

Hazards

Impact HAZ-1: Create a Significant Hazard to the Public or the Environment from the Routine Transport, Use, or Disposal of Hazardous Materials

Mitigation Measure HAZ-1 requires that prior to ground-disturbing activities the County will inspect, and if identified test, the soil, sediment, or groundwater for the presence of possible contamination and use proper handling and disposal techniques of contaminated soil, sediment, or groundwater.

Impact HAZ-4: Result in a Significant Hazard to the Public or the Environment from Location on a Known Hazardous Materials Site

Mitigation Measure HAZ-2 requires the County to review the proximity of proposed maintenance sites to existing known hazardous material clean-up sites and implement safety precautions.

Noise Impacts

Impact NOI-1: Substantial Temporary or Permanent Increase in Ambient Noise Levels in the Vicinity of Proposed Maintenance Areas in excess of Standards Established in Local General Plan or Noise Ordinance, or in other applicable Local, State or Federal Standards

Mitigation Measure NOI-1 requires the County to employ noise-reducing maintenance practices such as locating stationary equipment as far as possible from noise-sensitive land uses; using quieter equipment (i.e., electrified) when practical; using sound-control devices on equipment; using noise-reducing enclosures or installing temporary barriers to block sound transmission; and considering haul truck routes to reduce impact to sensitive receptors.

Mitigation Measure NOI-2 requires the County to provide advance notice to sensitive receptors located within 400 feet of maintenance sites.

Mitigation Measure NOI-3 requires where feasible that the County will limit nighttime and weekend construction noise so that no construction activities are conducted within 500 feet of a residence outside the hours of 8:00am-5:30p on weekdays.

Impact NOI-2: Generation of Excessive Ground-borne Vibration or Ground-borne Noise Levels

Mitigation Measure NOI-4 requires the County to implement vibration-reducing measures during construction activities such as using dampening devices, using electric stationary equipment, ensuring proper tuning of equipment, and implementing noise/vibration shields.

Impact NOI-3: Be Located in the Vicinity of a Private Airstrip or an Airport Land Use Plan Area, or within 2 miles of a Public Airport, and Expose People Residing or Working in the Project Site to Excessive Noise Levels

Mitigation Measure NOI-5 requires the County to require employees performing maintenance activities within an airport use personal protective equipment (i.e. noise reducing headphones or earplugs) and to perform work when the frequency of plane landings/takeoffs is minimal.

Staff has independently evaluated the County of San Mateo Routine Maintenance Program Final Environmental Report (EIR) and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) certified by the San Mateo County Planning Commission on September 9, 2020, and concurs that there is no substantial evidence that the proposed project will have a significant effect on the environment. Staff therefore recommends that the Conservancy find that the project as mitigated avoids, reduces or mitigates the possible significant environmental effects to a level of less-than-significant and that there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment as that term is defined by Title 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382.

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