

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 1, 2023

WILDFIRE RESILIENCE PROGRAM 2023-2024

Project No. 22-089-001, 23-019-01, 23-023-01, 23-028-01,
23-029-01, 23-030-01, 23-031-01, 23-032-01, 23-033-01

Project Managers: Lilly Allen, Vanessa Aczon, Joel Gerwein, Mark Kalnins, Shalini Kannan,
Kostoula Vallianos, Morgan Wright

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$4,983,994 to a Tribe, four nonprofit organizations, three resource conservation districts, and the Regents of the University of California for nine wildfire resilience projects.

LOCATION: Various locations in coastal watersheds and in the San Francisco Bay area (see Exhibit 1)

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes grants in a total amount not to exceed four million nine hundred eighty-three thousand nine hundred ninety-four dollars (\$4,983,994) to nine entities to increase wildfire resilience of California's natural lands and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. The nine grantees are as follows (presented in alphabetical order):

Diablo Fire Safe Council: Three hundred seventy-four thousand eight hundred dollars (\$374,800) to conduct wildfire resilience planning and develop a process to prioritize projects in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties.

Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District: Nine hundred ninety-nine thousand one hundred thirty-six dollars (\$999,136) to expand their targeted grazing program in high fire risk public and private lands throughout Sonoma County and provide technical, educational, and financial support to public land stewards and livestock grazers.

Humboldt County Resource Conservation District: Three hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$350,000) to conduct planning for a multi-phased fuel reduction project along and adjacent to the crest of Mail Ridge in southern Humboldt and northern Mendocino counties, and to conduct associated community outreach, tribal engagement, and workforce development.

The Regents of University of California: Seven hundred and fifty-eight thousand dollars (\$758,000) to conduct wildfire resilience planning, project development, and environmental review in San Benito County.

Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County: One million one hundred thirty-one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,131,500) to conduct wildfire resilience planning, project development and permitting, implementation of demonstration projects, and education and outreach in Santa Cruz and San Mateo Counties.

Save Mount Diablo: One hundred and fourteen thousand five hundred dollars (\$114,500) for the purchase of two chippers for use by Save Mount Diablo and Mount Diablo State Park to conduct fuel reduction projects on their respective lands in Contra Costa County.

Scott River Watershed Council: One hundred and ninety-one thousand dollars (\$191,000) to treat approximately 139 acres by prescribed fire, specifically burning piles that were created in a large, shaded fuel break, in Siskiyou County.

Smith River Alliance: Four hundred and ninety-nine thousand eight hundred and fifty dollars (\$499,850) for vegetation management to enhance wildfire resilience in dense and drought-stressed forests on approximately 120 acres in Del Norte County.

Tamien Nation: Five hundred sixty-five thousand two hundred and eight dollars (\$565,208) to train and equip a crew of approximately five people to conduct fire resilience vegetation management in Santa Clara County.

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. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
5. Any other agreements that the Conservancy's Executive Officer determines are necessary 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 projects are consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The proposed grantees that are nonprofit organizations are organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$4,983,994 under the Conservancy's Wildfire Resilience Program to one Tribe, four nonprofit organizations, three resource conservation districts, and the University of California for nine projects that develop, plan, and implement vegetation management activities to increase wildfire resilience of natural lands and reduce fire risk to communities.

The Conservancy's Wildfire Resilience Program supports local partners to develop and implement projects to increase wildfire resilience through improved management of natural lands and open space. Conservancy grants support a wide range of activities to accelerate future project implementation, including planning and capacity building. An overarching goal of the Wildfire Resilience Program is to build organizational capacity at the local and regional level to implement vegetation management and fire risk reduction projects. Healthy natural lands are less likely to burn and projects that increase fire breaks or clear ladder fuels help prevent isolated fires from becoming catastrophic wildfires. The proposed projects plan for or implement vegetation management activities to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire in areas where people are living near wildlands.

This recommendation describes nine projects proposed for funding under the Wildfire Resilience grants program that the Conservancy has determined to be exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). An additional four projects will be recommended for grants at the same time but in separate staff reports listing their respective CEQA findings. The projects are arranged alphabetically by grant applicant. Each project summary includes the grant applicant; project name; recommended funding amount; geographic region of the project; a brief project description; and information concerning project compliance with the CEQA. Project consistency with the Conservancy's project selection criteria, enabling legislation, Strategic Plan, and the proposed funding source are provided in the pages following the project summaries.

To date, the Conservancy has provided over \$32 million to support projects that reduce fire risk in the areas where wildfire poses the most risk to people. Funding for the Conservancy's

Wildfire Resilience Program comes from two sources: direct appropriations to the Conservancy for this work and a block grant from the Department of Conservation to implement its Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFCP). The block grant covers projects from Marin County south to Ventura County.

Projects are a mix of planning projects that will help increase the pace and scale of vegetation treatments; capacity building projects that will facilitate on the ground vegetation treatments through the purchase of equipment such as chippers; and implementation projects that will clear understory, thin trees and prune forested areas, thereby decreasing the fuel load and interrupting vertical and horizontal continuity to reduce ground to forest canopy and tree to tree transmission in the event of a fire.

DIABLO FIRE SAFE COUNCIL

\$374,800

Alameda and Contra Costa Wildfire Regional Prioritization Plan Phase 2

Bay Area

Alameda and Contra Costa Counties

In 2019 the Conservancy authorized a grant to the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District in partnership with the Alameda County Resource Conservation District to coordinate a multi-agency planning process and develop a Regional Priority Plan (RPP) for forestry, fire protection and forested watershed improvements that spans both counties. The Alameda and Contra Costa RPP compiled baseline information and a total of 177 projects from existing stakeholder plans and participants in the RPP. The projects cover all large public lands in both Counties.

The stakeholder participants did not prioritize projects for a number of reasons including lack of clarity about how prioritization would be used, differing funder requirements, questions around the benefit of ranking the projects, stage of project plans, and concerns over scale of projects. The project recommended for funding consists of the development of a project-focused process to prioritize projects and identify funders and resources. Diablo Fire Safe Council will develop the process in consultation with Alameda and Contra Costa County stakeholders. The project will create a pipeline of wildfire resilience projects ready for future funding. Carrying out the project will also increase the Diablo Fire Safe Council's capacity and enable them to hire personnel.

Funding: The proposed source of funding is a block grant to the Coastal Conservancy from the Department of Conservation's RFFCP. The RFFCP seeks to develop Regional Prioritization Plans that prioritize and develop projects that improve forest health and fire resiliency. Consistent with the anticipated funding source, the proposed project will implement the next phase of the Alameda and Contra Costa RPP by developing a process to prioritize projects identified in the RPP.

CEQA: The proposed project is statutorily exempt under 14 CCR Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies) because it involves planning for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded. The proposed project is also categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15306 (Information Collection) because it involves data collection and research activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

GOLD RIDGE RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

\$999,136

LandSmart Grazing Program for Community Resilience

Bay Area

Sonoma County

In partnership with Sonoma Resource Conservation District, Gold Ridge Conservation District’s LandSmart Grazing Program will work to reduce fuel load through the utilization of targeted grazing on high fire risk public lands and private lands adjacent to public lands throughout Sonoma County. The program includes: 1) financial support for landowners in the form of a rebate to implement targeted grazing for fire resiliency, 2) educational and technical assistance for public land stewards on vegetation management, and 3) technical, educational, and grant support for grazers. Previously developed and proven feasible through a pilot project, the project recommended for funding consists of expanding this program to support treatment of 200-240 acres on twelve sites through the rebate program and an additional 500-1,300 acres through technical, educational and infrastructure support, and grants.

Funding: The anticipated source of funding is an appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of wildfire resilience. Consistent with the anticipated funding source, the proposed project will support grazing throughout Sonoma County to reduce wildfire risk.

CEQA: The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304 (Minor Alternations to Land) because it involves minor alterations to the condition of vegetation without the removal of healthy, mature, or scenic trees.

HUMBOLDT COUNTY RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

\$350,000

Mail Ridge Wildfire Resilience Planning Project

North Coast

Humboldt and Mendocino Counties

Humboldt County Resource Conservation District will conduct planning for a multi-phased fuel reduction project along and adjacent to the crest of Mail Ridge, a prominent feature in southern Humboldt and northern Mendocino counties, to increase wildfire resilience and protect vulnerable communities. The project seeks to make significant progress towards the restoration of the traditional role of low-intensity fire on the landscape. The project includes project scoping and development, community outreach, and capacity building. Project scoping and development will involve technical experts planning prescribed fire and forest health/fuels reduction treatments for 2,000-2,600 acres, conducting baseline cultural and biological resource investigations, identifying environmental compliance pathways, and preparing a project description for future CEQA documentation.

Project partners including TREES Foundation, Eel River Wailaki, Native Health in Native Hands, the Round Valley Indian Tribe, and the Briceland Volunteer Fire Department will conduct community outreach and capacity building activities. These activities will include planning and hosting educational events, developing educational materials, supporting capacity building and

securing funding for tribal organizations to develop an Indigenous-led fuels reduction and cultural fire crew, training qualified firefighters, conducting less than 5 acres of fuel management at Southern Humboldt Community Park as part of training activities, and providing a minimum of 6 trainings in wildland firefighting through the Briceland Volunteer Fire Department to volunteer firefighters, cultural burn crew members, and community members

Funding: The proposed source of funding is an appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of wildfire resilience. Consistent with the anticipated funding source, the proposed project will plan for a wildfire resilience project in the Mail Ridge area and increase local capacity to implement future fuel treatments.

CEQA: The project is categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15304 because fuel management at Southern Humboldt Community Park involves minor alterations to the condition of vegetation without the removal of healthy, mature, or scenic trees. The project's planning activities are categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15306 (Information Collection) because they involve data collection and research activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Planning activities are also statutorily exempt under Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies) because they involve planning for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded.

The REGENTS OF UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
San Benito County Wildfire Resilience Program

\$758,000
Central Coast
San Benito County

San Benito County is located south of Santa Clara and east of Monterey County. It is topographically diverse with elevation ranging from 140 feet to 5,200 feet above sea level, varying from steep rugged terrain to flat farmland. Ranching and farming communities contribute significantly to the county's character. Large portions of San Benito County are in high to very high fire threat areas according to CALFIRE's Fire and Resource Assessment Program.

While some wildfire resilience planning has been completed in the past, San Benito County needs countywide wildfire resilience planning. The proposed project consists of developing a Wildfire Resilience Regional Prioritization Plan and portfolio of priority projects as well as an update to San Benito County's Community Wildfire Protection Plan. To carry out these planning tasks, the University of California Extension will work in coordination and partnership with San Benito Resource Conservation District, and the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust and will convene stakeholders and community members. In addition, five prescribed burn plans will be developed and environmental documentation for four to eight priority projects will be completed as part of this project.

To assist landowners and to develop wildfire resilience programming, the project includes the part-time hire of one 50%-time staff person each at the San Benito Resource Conservation District and San Benito Agricultural Land Trust for two years.

Funding: The anticipated source of funding is a block grant to the Coastal Conservancy from the Department of Conservation’s RFFCP. The RFFCP seeks to increase capacity to prioritize, develop, and implement projects that improve forest health and fire resiliency. Consistent with the anticipated funding source, the proposed project will plan for future wildfire resilience projects in San Benito County and support hiring of additional staff at the San Benito Resource Conservation District and San Benito Agricultural Land Trust.

CEQA: The proposed project is statutorily exempt under 14 CCR Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies) because it involves planning for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded. The proposed project is also categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15306 (Information Collection) because it involves data collection and research activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY	\$1,131,500
Santa Cruz and San Mateo Wildfire Resilience Capacity Building Program	Central Coast
	Santa Cruz and San Mateo Counties

In 2019 the Conservancy provided funding to the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County in coordination with three other resource conservation districts to build regional capacity and technical expertise and to serve as local hubs to support ecologically focused forest health and wildfire adapted communities. Through that funding, the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County and San Mateo Resource Conservation District have successfully spearheaded regional forest health and wildfire capacity building by increasing staff dedicated to forest health and wildfire resiliency, collaborating with partners to develop a Regional Prioritization Plan framework and criteria to prioritize Forest Health and Fire Prevention projects across the Santa Cruz Mountains, streamlining forest health and fuels management permitting in the coastal zone through the Coastal Commissions Public Works Plan process, and coordinating with a variety of partners on a number of projects.

Building on the momentum of these successes, the project consists of 1) Using the Regional Prioritization Plan framework and criteria to evaluate projects and develop priority project lists; 2) Developing five Forest Management Plans; 3) Identifying two projects to undergo permitting through approved Coastal Development Public Work Plans; 4) Planning and permitting a eucalyptus management and biomass utilization project; 5) Implementing approximately three demonstration projects focused on benefiting wildland urban interface communities and the broader landscape, such as chipping programs and vegetation management; 6) Creating community outreach materials and hosting community workshops; 7) Training staff on prescribed burns, cultural burns, forestry, forest health fire adapted communities, and wildland urban interface wildfire preparedness.

Funding: The anticipated source of funding is a block grant to the Coastal Conservancy from the Department of Conservation’s RFFCP. The RFFCP seeks to increase capacity to prioritize, develop, and implement projects that improve forest health and fire resiliency. Consistent with the anticipated funding source, the proposed project includes planning for future wildfire resilience projects, implementation of fuel management demonstration projects, and staff training on matters related to wildfire resilience.

CEQA: The proposed project is statutorily exempt under 14 CCR Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies) because it involves planning for possible future actions that have not been approved or funded. The proposed project is also categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15306 (Information Collection) because it involves data collection and research activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The three demonstration projects are categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15304 because they involve vegetation management without the removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees.

SAVE MOUNT DIABLO

\$114,500

Mount Diablo Wildfire Resilience Project

Bay Area

Contra Costa County

Save Mount Diablo will use the proposed grant to purchase two chippers that will be shared with Mount Diablo State Park to implement high priority fuel reduction work on both their properties. The chippers will be used to treat approximately 2,000 acres of shaded fuel breaks around select routes along the park perimeter, paved roads, and fire roads identified in the Mount Diablo State Park Wildfire Management Plan. Shaded fuel breaks involve thinning vegetation to reduce fire potential and providing responders with a fuel break where they can implement fire suppression.

The treatment areas are generally located on the north side of Mount Diablo, extending from Riggs Canyon through Knob Cone Point to Wall Point, and include portions of a massive Knob Cone pine and manzanita die-off that presents fire danger for sensitive habitats and heavily populated towns around the foot of Mount Diablo. Knob Cone Point is habitat for endangered and rare species including Alameda whipsnakes, golden eagles, peregrine falcons, California tiger salamanders, Mount Diablo globe lilies, Mount Diablo manzanitas. The project will follow best management practices included in the California Department of Parks and Recreation Standard Project Requirements in order to protect these species, and to ensure no negative adverse effects occur to sensitive resources. The Standard Project Requirements mandate contractor trainings regarding sensitive resources likely to be present in the work areas, pre-construction detection surveys, flagging and avoidance measures, and reporting measures if sensitive resources are found. The standards also directly prohibit any rare or endangered plant harm.

Save Mount Diablo and Park staff are carefully collaborating on all proposed activities and are utilizing volunteer teams from both groups to conduct the work. Both organizations plan to share the chipper equipment as needed to complete the vegetation treatments. Having this equipment will expedite the work in order to reduce fire danger this summer. After the project is complete, Save Mount Diablo will either donate (or loan at no charge) the second chipper to Mount Diablo State Park, enhancing the Park's ability to complete wildfire resilience projects in the future.

Funding: The proposed source of funding is an appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of wildfire resilience. Consistent with the anticipated funding source, the project will implement much-needed fuel treatments on public and private land in the Mount Diablo area.

CEQA: The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304 (Minor Alternations to Land) because it involves minor alterations to the condition of vegetation without the removal of healthy, mature, or scenic trees. The proposed project is also exempt under Section 15301 (Existing Facilities), because it involves maintenance of existing landscaping and native growth and existing fire roads.

SCOTT RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

\$191,000

Scott Valley Community and Forest Wildfire Resilience Project

North Coast

Siskiyou County

Scott River Watershed Council will use the proposed grant to treat 139 acres by burning piles that were generated by fuel management to create a shaded fuel break. Project activities will include burn planning, mapping, implementing permit requirements, coordination for burn operations, post burn mop-up, and monitoring.

The treatment areas are located in mixed conifer forest privately owned by Ecotrust Forest Management. Although this is private land, 60% of the land was permanently protected by a conservation easement in 2020, with the remaining 40% scheduled to be protected by another conservation easement in 2023. Both easements will be held by the Siskiyou Land Trust. The project area lies between the Scott Valley communities of Greenview and Etna and the Klamath National Forest. The project will increase the resilience to wildfire of Greenview and Etna, disadvantaged communities within the Wildland Urban Interface areas that have been designated in the National Fire Plan as having extreme fire risk.

The project will be implemented through the Siskiyou Prescribed Burn Association, and will bring together multiple partners to build capacity for future prescribed burns. Scott River Watershed Council will provide project management, reporting, and coordination. The Quartz Valley Indian Reservation will provide traditional ecological knowledge and related monitoring, as well as personnel for burns and fire related equipment. The Shasta Resource Conservation District will provide personnel to assist with preparing burn units, burning, and post burning monitoring. The Siskiyou Prescribed Burn Association will coordinate with Association members to assist with preparation and burning activities and will supply an equipment trailer necessary for implementation of burning activities. The Scott Valley and Etna Fire Departments will provide personnel and equipment for prescribed burns. The CALFIRE Siskiyou Unit will provide personnel and fire suppression if needed. Ecotrust Forest Management will provide access and forestry and permitting services through its forestry contractors.

Funding: The anticipated source of funding is an appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of wildfire resilience. Consistent with the anticipated funding

source, the proposed project will reduce wildfire risk by burning piles of vegetation created by previous fuel management work.

CEQA: The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15304 (Minor Alternations to Land) because it involves minor alterations to the condition of vegetation without the removal of healthy, mature, or scenic trees.

SMITH RIVER ALLIANCE

\$ 499,850

Rock Creek Community Wildfire Resilience Project

North Coast

Del Norte County

The Rock Creek Community Wildfire Resilience Project addresses an urgent need for fuel reduction work in a very high wildfire-risk area to benefit a low-income rural community and surrounding national forest land. The project will implement at least 120 acres of manual fuel reduction and slash treatments in unnaturally dense, drought-stressed forests to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires. Shaded fuel breaks and defensible space treatments connecting private parcels in this State Responsibility Area will significantly reduce the likelihood of a fire starting on private lands and spreading to the adjacent public lands. Treatments will be implemented through manual thinning, pruning, and disposal of slash by chipping, hand pile burning, firewood utilization, and other actions that prepare the site for prescribed fire.

The project will be implemented by Smith River Alliance in partnership with the Del Norte Fire Safe Council and the Tolowa Dee-Ni' Nation and includes trainings for Cal Poly Humboldt students. The grant will also fund the purchase of a chipper that will be utilized by the Del Norte Fire Safe Council for fuel management in other parts of the County. The project will restore fire-adapted lands, reduce the risk of wildfire impacts, protect water quality and quantity, and support a sustainable workforce and training program. Project outcomes consist of 68 acres of shaded-fuel breaks and understory pile burning, and 52 acres of defensible space treatments.

Funding: Conservancy funds for this project are expected to come from the General Fund appropriation to the Conservancy for the purpose of wildfire risk reduction. The proposed project is consistent with this fund source because it will implement fuel treatments that reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

CEQA: The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304 (Minor Alternations to Land) because it involves minor alterations to the condition of vegetation without the removal of healthy, mature, or scenic trees.

TAMIEN NATION

\$ 565,208

Tamien Nation Cultural Fire Stewardship Program Phase 1

Bay Area

Santa Clara County

The Tamien Nation Cultural Fire Stewardship Program was developed and is being led by Tamien Nation leadership and citizens. The program consists of multi-partner cooperative capacity-building and project implementation focused on restoring cultural burning and wildfire resilience on Tamien Nation ancestral lands. The Tamien Nation started this program to gain

the training, equipment, and partnerships needed to safely and effectively manage their homeland with fire.

The proposed project consists of the professional training and purchase of equipment needed for an approximately five person Tamien Nation Cultural Fire Burn Crew. This crew will build the Tribe's capacity to steward lands in their ancestral territory, as well as assist agencies and other tribes with prescribed burn projects and during wildfire emergencies. The crew will receive training and mentorship from CALFIRE, local fire agencies, and traditional ecological knowledge practitioners. The expertise they will develop will uniquely combine California Certified Burn Boss qualifications with traditional cultural and indigenous knowledge. Equipment purchases will include tools such as personal protective equipment, chainsaws, hand tools and larger equipment such as a chipper or vehicle, which would be used into the future for similar purposes.

The proposed project also includes the flagship crew's implementation of two vegetation management projects at Henry W. Coe State Park, in partnership with California State Parks. As part of the Hobbs Road Maintenance and Fuel Reduction Project, crews will assist with vegetation management activities within 50 meters of either side of Hobbs Road, covering 185-195 acres of treatment. The crew will also assist with the Ponderosa Prescribed Burn Complex project which aims to help maintain native plant biodiversity in 9 plots covering 275-285 acres in Henry W. Coe State Park through plot preparation, implementation of fire prescription, and rehabilitation of the fire line. The plots will be burned at varying intervals depending on the vegetation response. Henry Coe State Park has also committed to collaborating with the Tamien Nation to ensure their land management practices better align with Tamien Nation's traditional cultural land stewardship practices.

Funding: Conservancy funds for this project are expected to come from the General Fund appropriation to the Conservancy for the purpose of wildfire risk reduction. The proposed project is consistent with this fund source because it will implement fuel treatments and help reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

CEQA: The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304 (Minor Alternations to Land) because it involves minor alterations to the condition of vegetation without the removal of healthy, mature, or scenic trees.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

Selection Criteria

1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.

See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Strategic Plan" section below.

2. Project is a good investment of state resources.

The proposed projects are a good investment of state funding because they are feasible, have reasonable budgets, and address a demonstrated need for wildfire resilience. The projects implement many statewide wildfire and forest resiliency goals. The proposed projects are also consistent with several state plans, and specifically with the following:

- **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** (California Natural Resources Agency, 2018), which calls for restoration of the 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** (CALFIRE, 2019), which urges state and local agencies to implement the goals of the Forest Carbon Plan and provides recommendations to agencies to increase the scale and pace of management and mitigation actions to improve forest health and resiliency.

3. Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area.

The recommended authorization includes a grant to Tamien Nation to fund the equipment and training of Tamien Nation Cultural Fire Stewardship crew members. This grant seeks to build the Tribe's capacity to steward lands in their ancestral territory. The crew will work with California State Parks' crews to complete vegetation treatments in Henry Coe State Park.

In addition, several grant applicants will work with Tribes in carrying out their projects. Diablo Fire Safe Council, Regents of the University of California, and the Santa Cruz Resource Conservation District will include and collaborate with Tribes in their wildfire resilience planning efforts. The Rock Creek Community Wildfire Resilience Project will fund the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation resource field crew to perform forest work activities on ancestral lands in a culturally significant project area. The Wildfire Resiliency Planning for Mail Ridge project includes Tribal partners and activities such as securing funding for Tribal organizations to create an Indigenous-led fuels reduction and cultural fire crew.

4. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.

All of the proposed projects will help increase 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. California is facing unprecedented fire risk due to climate change, a growing populace, and an increasing number of people living

in high fire risk areas, including areas adjacent to wildlands. While 2022 had a relatively mild wildfire season, both the 2020 and 2021 fire seasons broke numerous records.

Several projects include long-term investments that will enable wildfire resilience work to continue into the future.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The recommended projects were selected because they are multi-benefit projects that will reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire impacts to communities. Added benefits of these projects include: native habitat restoration, workforce training, public education, and development of data and plans to support future vegetation management.

6. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

Many of the proposed projects will engage with local communities to promote planning and implementation of these wildfire resilience projects.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$4,983,994
Others	\$385,638
Project Total	\$5,369,632

Conservancy funding for the projects is anticipated to come from two sources:

1. Fiscal Year 2021-22 and 2022-23 appropriations from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of wildfire risk reduction (The Budget Act of 2021, as amended by SB 170 (2021); The Budget Act of 2022, as amended by AB 178 (2022)). Projects funded by the General Fund appropriations are consistent with this funding source because they will help reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.
2. A block grant to the Coastal Conservancy from the Department of Conservation’s Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFCP). The Conservancy is one of nine recipients of RFFCP block grants. The goal of the RFFCP is to increase regional capacity to prioritize, develop, and implement projects that improve forest health and fire resiliency. The Conservancy’s block grant covers projects from Marin County south to Ventura County. Projects funded by the RFFCP block grant are consistent with the funding source because they include training, education, and purchase of equipment to increase local capacity to undertake wildfire resilience projects; regional planning, coordination, and data gathering activities to support future fuel management projects; and support for local entities in the environmental review and permitting process.

Unless specifically identified as “Required Match,” the other sources of funding and in-kind contributions described above are estimates. The Conservancy does not typically require matching funds or in-kind services, nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders or of in-kind services. Typical grant conditions require grantees to provide any funds needed to complete a project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The recommended projects 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 reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address 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 and preserving natural lands.

Consistent with these sections, the proposed projects will restore the health and resilience of California forests, grasslands, and/or natural lands and reduce fire risk to communities. The projects will help California's natural lands to be more resilient to catastrophic wildfires which may ultimately reduce greenhouse gas emissions released from increased wildfires due to climate change.

The proposed projects address the impacts of climate change on natural resources within the Conservancy's jurisdiction because they will occur in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area (Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code) and/or will improve forests, grasslands, and other natural lands and reduce the risk of wildfire that would adversely impact water quality and habitat in coastal watersheds (Chapter 5.5).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 1.4 Incorporate Workforce Development in Our Projects**, the Tamien Nation project includes workforce development as a key component of the project.

Consistent with **Goal 4.2 Wildfire Resilience**, the proposed projects include four wildfire resilience planning projects and will implement wildfire resilience projects on approximately 3,200 acres .

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

Conservancy staff reviewed the nine proposed projects for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.) and its implementing regulations (14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Sections 15000 et seq.).

All of the proposed projects are categorically and/or statutorily exempt under CEQA. Please see the "Project Summary" section above, for more information on each proposed project and why it is exempt from CEQA. Applicable CEQA exemptions are listed below.

14 CCR 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 a site. Such projects include, but are not limited to, management of existing landscaping, native growth, and roads. The projects that qualify for this exemption involve management of existing native vegetation through the removal of dead and dying trees, thinning, reduction of ladder fuels, grazing, and other similar activities; and maintenance of fire roads and emergency access roads.

14 CCR Section 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land) exempts projects that involve minor alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation without the removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees. The projects that qualify for this exemption involve management of existing native vegetation through the removal of dead, dying, and immature trees, thinning, reduction of ladder fuels, grazing, and other similar activities. These fuel management activities will not change the nature of the land or alter the basic character of the vegetation and habitat at the project sites.

14 CCR Section 15306 (Information Collection) exempts projects that involve basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a major disturbance to an environmental resource. The data gathering and research projects described in this staff recommendation qualify for this exemption.

Development of fuel management and fire resilience plans is exempt under 14 CCR Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies), which applies to planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions that have not been approved, adopted, or funded.

14 CCR Section 15269 (Emergency Projects) exempts projects that are necessary to prevent or mitigate an emergency, including certain fuel management projects that are necessary to prevent catastrophic wildfire.

Upon approval of the exempt projects, Conservancy staff will file Notices of Exemption for each project.