

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 21, 2024

EAST BAY WILDFIRE RISK REDUCTION

Project No. 24-040-01
Project Manager: Chere Erickson

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$250,000 to Civicorps to purchase equipment to support Civicorps' East Bay Wildfire Risk Reduction project, consisting of providing workforce development and removing vegetation from high fire hazard areas in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties.

LOCATION: Alameda and Contra Costa Counties

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Support Letters](#)

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 and fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) to Civicorps to purchase equipment to support Civicorps' East Bay Wildfire Risk Reduction project, consisting of providing workforce development and removing vegetation from high fire hazard areas in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties ("the project").

Prior to commencement of the project, Civicorps 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. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.

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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.
3. Civicorps is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a grant of an amount not to exceed \$250,000 to Civicorps to purchase equipment to support Civicorps' East Bay Wildfire Risk Reduction project, consisting of providing workforce development and removing vegetation from high fire hazard areas in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties ("the project") (see Exhibit 1 for project location).

Civicorps has performed fuel reductions in Alameda County since its founding in 1983. Its first contract came from East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD), who requested much needed support in reducing fuel load in its parks. Since then, Civicorps has managed an annual average of 726 acres of land for fuel management while also expanding its partnership network. In 2022, Civicorps opened its first satellite job training center in Pittsburg, allowing it to expand its services to Contra Costa County.

Today, Civicorps works in close partnership with several public land management agencies across the East Bay to reduce wildfire risk by removing dead, damaged, and invasive vegetation. These partners contract with Civicorps to complete fuel reductions on their land. This not only increases local wildfire resilience, but also provides on the job training for Civicorps members. Currently, Civicorps partners with the following agencies: EBRPD, East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD), Alameda County Flood Control (ACFC), John Muir Land Trust (JMLT), Contra Costa Water District (CCWD), and Zone 7 Water Agency. With this project, there is potential for Civicorps to expand its network and partner with additional land management agencies throughout Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

The project consists of purchasing a chipper, a chipper truck, an electric truck, and other necessary equipment to utilize the chipper. With this equipment, it is anticipated that Civicorps will annually remove an estimated 680,000 cubic feet of fuel load from approximately 720 acres of high fire hazard areas throughout Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. The electric pick-up truck will primarily transport Civicorps members from the Civicorps office to work sites. Many Civicorps members encounter barriers to transportation and cannot drive themselves to work sites.. Overall, these equipment purchases will increase Civicorps' capacity to complete hazardous fuel load reduction projects throughout the East Bay.

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Civicorps' mission is to re-engage young adults, age 18-26, to earn their high school diplomas, gain job skills, pursue college, and embark on family sustaining careers. Civicorps primarily serves low-income, young, people of color who are disconnected from employment and education opportunities. Civicorps provides members the opportunity to explore green collar careers while gaining industry-recognized licenses and certifications. The project could result in up to 50 Civicorps members attaining their chipper certification over the course of a 12-month period.

This project is necessary because the climate crisis has increased the risk of catastrophic wildfires in Bay Area communities. Many of these communities exist within the wildland-urban interface, putting an estimated 2 million people at greater risk of wildfires. Public land management agencies, such as the ones listed above, are overwhelmed by the vast acreage in need of fuel reduction, and often request additional support from their partners. This project will directly support Civicorps' East Bay Wildfire Risk Reduction project that fills this needed support by providing on-the-ground fire teams to reduce fuel loads across the East Bay.

The East Bay Wildfire Risk Reduction project will also protect, restore, and enhance the biologically diverse habitats and environmentally suitable vegetation types that are drought resistant and resilient, creating habitats characterized by low-fire hazard vegetation, optimal ecological functioning, and biodiversity. By reducing the chance of a catastrophic wildfire through fuel load management, Civicorps is also reducing the likelihood of post fire-sediment displacement into local watersheds.

Site Description: Civicorps will focus its efforts on two key ecosystems for wildfire risk reduction work. The first is the Alameda Creek Watershed, which spans 660 square miles and is the largest watershed in the East Bay. It includes diverse habitats such as grasslands, coastal scrublands, oak woodlands, and riparian forests. The watershed is home to a range of wildlife, including Tule Elk (in the Ohlone Wilderness Regional Preserve), nesting bald eagles, anadromous steelhead trout, and many others.

The second ecosystem is the East Bay Hills. This is a 39-mile-long, 2.5-mile-wide band known for its ecological diversity and fire hazards. The area contains seven distinct plant communities: grassland, north coastal scrub, oak/bay woodland, pine groves, redwood forest, and disturbed areas. These ecosystems face challenges, including some of the most severe wild-land urban interface fire risks in the Bay Area. Civicorps' efforts will help support habitat restoration, fire risk mitigation, and biodiversity conservation in these critical East Bay regions.

All work will take place on public land. Currently, Civicorps works on land owned by the following partners: EBRPD, EBMUD, ACFC, JMLT, CCWD, and Zone 7 Water Agency. By purchasing an additional chipper and related equipment, Civicorps hopes to increase its capacity and expand its network by partnering with new public land management agencies.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Civicorps was founded in 1983 as the East Bay Conservation Corps, it is a local conservation corps. Civicorps' Operations Coordinator maintains records on all vehicles and confirms regular maintenance occurs to ensure the longevity and safe operation of the fleet. Staff are trained to do daily vehicle inspections and to report any minor repairs needed on their assigned vehicle. They use a similar process for tools and personal protective

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equipment. Crews are required to complete regular inventory checks and perform daily tool maintenance. As such, the equipment purchased via this grant will be well maintained.

Civicorps manages many federal, state, and local government grants. The Director of Development and the Grants Contracts Coordinator oversees grant management. This team works to ensure the timely submission of all grant financial reports and progress reports. Internal staff helps to gather program data, ensure funding compliance, and prepare invoices. A portion of this funding will go towards supporting grant management.

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:

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 project is a good investment of state funding. The project is feasible, has a reasonable budget, and addresses a demonstrated need. Through the purchase of necessary equipment, the project supports Civicorps' East Bay Wildfire Risk Reduction project, which implements many statewide wildfire and forest resiliency goals. Civicorps' East Bay Wildfire Risk Reduction project is 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 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.

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

Through the purchase of necessary equipment, the project supports Civicorps' East Bay Wildfire Risk Reduction project, which will reduce wildfire risk throughout high fire hazard zones in the East Bay. Warmer temperatures coupled with increased drought exacerbate the need for fuel reduction in these highly populated areas. Civicorps will work to reduce fuel load in the East Bay, thereby reducing the chance of ignition and limiting the spread of wildfires. This will create

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a more wildfire resilient Bay Area landscape by returning the ecosystems to a more natural fire regime.

Equipment purchased with this grant will be monitored by Civicorps' Operations Coordinator and crew. Crew will be trained on how to properly maintain the equipment and will complete daily vehicle inspections. These procedures will ensure the longevity of the equipment.

Civicorps will commit to using equipment during its useful lifespan for fuel reduction projects.

Aside from ecosystem benefits, this project will allow Civicorps to further strengthen its local partnerships. This project will increase partner capacity to reduce fuel load, while providing Civicorps members with job training.

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

In addition to reducing the risk of wildfire, Civicorps' East Bay Wildfire Risk Reduction project will improve the health of local habitats, protect public lands, and employ members of systemically excluded communities.

The project will occur on a wide range of habitats throughout the East Bay such as grasslands, coastal scrublands, oak woodlands, riparian forests, and redwood forests. Protecting and maintaining these ecosystems will provide high quality habitat to several species. In addition to improving species habitat, reducing fuel load ensures the protection of public land by reducing the likelihood of catastrophic wildfires. Land maintained by Civicorps will be safer for the public during high fire danger days. Additionally, these lands are more likely to recover from fires, allowing the public to return sooner than they would if fuels were not reduced.

Most of the anticipated project sites exist near houses and other community structures. If a wildfire were to start on these sites, the nearby residents would be at severe risk of losing their homes or lives. By providing this service, Civicorps will protect an estimated 2 million people throughout the East Bay from catastrophic wildfires.

Finally, with the equipment funded through this project, Civicorps will provide workforce development to members of systemically excluded communities. Civicorps will use the equipment to train primarily low-income youth of color who are disconnected from employment and education opportunities. Civicorps partners with major regional employers such as EBMUD, EBRPD, and ACFC. These partnerships build trust and relationships between Civicorps and the partner organizations while also providing Civicorps members with paid job training, work experience, and networking opportunities that serve as bridges to careers in land management, climate change mitigation, and conservation.

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

Civicorps will provide wildfire fuel load reduction to the East Bay. Most of Civicorps' members are East Bay community members. Hiring local residents to complete this project reduces greenhouse gas emissions in terms of reduced commuting needs, strengthens communities by providing local jobs, and improves stewardship of the project since the community will understand the important project benefits.

PROJECT FINANCING

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Coastal Conservancy	\$250,000
Project Total	\$250,000

The anticipated source of funding is the Fiscal Year 2022-2023 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of wildfire risk reduction (The Budget Act of 2022, SB 154 as amended by AB 178). The proposed project is consistent with the anticipated funding source because it will help reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

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:

Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code 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) and 31113(c), 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. Civicorps is a nonprofit organization that will conduct a project to reduce wildfire impacts associated with climate change.

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. The project will provide multiple benefits including ecosystem enhancement, workforce development, and wildfire resilience to habitats and communities. In helping the Bay Area's natural lands increase resiliency to catastrophic wildfires, the project may ultimately reduce greenhouse gas emissions released from increased wildfires due to climate change.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.4 Incorporate Workforce Development in Our Projects**, the proposed project could result in up to 50 Civicorps members receiving their chipper certification annually as well as train them in fuel reduction protocols to increase wildfire resilience.

Consistent with **Goal 4.2 Wildfire Resilience Projects**, the proposed project will support the removal of approximately 68,000 cubic feet of fuel load from high fire hazard areas over a 12-month period, thereby reducing wildfire risk in the wildland-urban interface.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304 (Minor

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Alterations to Land) because it consists of equipment purchases to enable minor alterations to the condition of vegetation without the removal of healthy, mature, or scenic trees.

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