



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER**

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Submitted on:

Department Name: BOS 1st District
Department No.: 011
Agenda Date: 03/4/25
Placement: Departmental Agenda
Estimated Time: 1 hour
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: 4/5

TO: Board of Supervisors Choose an item.
FROM: Supervisor Roy Lee, 1st District
Contact Info: Wade Cowper, Chief of Staff 1st District
SUBJECT: Enforcement at the Hot Springs Trailhead on Red Flag Warning Days Through 2025

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Direct County staff to coordinate with appropriate local, state and federal agencies, including Fire agencies and U.S. Forest Service as appropriate, to develop parking restrictions and trail closures on Red Flag Warning days through 2025 in the area of the Hot Springs Trail in the First District, and return to the Board for required approvals;
- b) Request that the Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Office implement enforcement measures for compliance with parking restrictions and trail closures once established;
- c) Request the Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Office work with the U.S. Forest Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife to implement enforcement measures following heavy rainfall on the Hot Springs Trail to prevent illegal watershed modification and unauthorized activity;
- d) Approve a Budget Revision Request No0010328 to increase appropriations of \$25,000 in the Sheriff General Fund for Salaries and Benefits from 990 fund balance for these enforcement efforts, funded on a reimbursement basis as required and approved by the County Executive Office.
- e) Determine that the approval of the action is not a project that is subject to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15378(b)(4) and (b)(5), finding that the actions are the creation of government funding mechanisms or other government fiscal activities which do not involve any commitment to any specific project

which may result in a potentially significant impact on the environment and are organizational or administrative activities of governments that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Summary Text:

Strengthening Enforcement at the Hot Springs Trail

The Hot Springs Trail in Montecito has seen a dramatic increase in visitors, creating significant public safety and wildfire risks, especially on days where forecasted weather could bring the threat of a Red Flag Warning. To address this issue, the Board is being asked to direct staff to return with necessary actions to restrict parking and request the Sheriff provide enforcement during Red Flag warning days through 2025 as a pilot project.

An appropriation of up to \$25,000 is being requested to pay for the increased enforcement by the Sheriff's Office.

Unregulated access in remote areas during extreme fire weather has contributed to past wildfire disasters in other jurisdictions, and illegal activity following storms can cause erosion and impact flood safety. Without action, these risks could threaten the community, emergency responders, and natural resources.

This proposal provides a simple, proactive solution to increase safety, reduce fire hazards, and protect the watershed while ensuring visitors and residents alike can continue to enjoy the Hot Springs Trail responsibly.

In 2012, the County designated an area in Mission Canyon for restricted parking during Red Flag Warning events which included no parking and tow away zones during National Weather Service or County Fire Chiefs declared "Red Flag Warnings" and installation of signage at trailheads. This would be a similar effort.

Background:

Over the past several years, the Hot Springs Trail in Montecito has seen a dramatic increase in visitors, particularly driven by social media exposure. What was once a quiet trail used by locals has become a high-traffic destination, attracting tourists from outside the area. This surge in visitation has exacerbated safety concerns, particularly regarding fire risk, emergency response challenges, and traffic congestion.

Montecito has a long history of catastrophic wildfires and disaster events, including the Tea Fire (2008), Thomas Fire (2017), and the devastating 2018 Debris Flow, which claimed 23 lives. The risk of human-caused ignition in this high-fire hazard area is significant, with past wildfires sparked by careless activity, including illegal campfires. The Hot Springs Trail is particularly vulnerable under fire emergencies due to narrow roads, dry vegetation, steep terrain, and strong sundowner winds that can rapidly spread fire.

In response to these increasing risks, the Montecito Fire Protection District has conducted emergency evacuation analysis and planning, emphasizing the importance of reducing ignition risks and ensuring clear evacuation routes. Increased visitor traffic, particularly during high fire risk days, further strains emergency response capabilities and could hinder first responders during a wildfire evacuation.

While current regulations prohibit parking in some locations near the trailhead, enforcement remains inconsistent and difficult, given the surge in visitors and the remote nature of the trailhead. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms for parking violations and trail closures during Red Flag Days will help efforts to reduce wildfire risk and improve community safety.

This effort aligns with broader countywide wildfire prevention and public safety initiatives, enhancing enforcement tools that visitors clearly understand and comply with fire safety regulations.

Fiscal Analysis:

For this pilot project, \$25,000 one-time funding is being requested to pay for Sheriff’s Office estimated overtime costs. This was calculated using \$90/hour for Sheriff’s Deputy overtime and assuming 20 Red-Flag Weather days.

It will be funded from funds held in General County Programs Contingencies fund balance that had previously been set aside for a parking study of the trail area in 2021 that was not used. Funding will be allocated to the Sheriff’s Office on a reimbursement basis, consistent with current budget processes for department expansions or special projects.

Budgeted: No. #0010328

A Budget Revision Request is attached to this Board letter seeking the appropriation.

| Funding Source | FY [2024-25] | FY [<i>fiscal year 2</i>] | FY [<i>fiscal year 3</i>] | Total |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| General Fund | \$25,000 | | | \$25,000 |
| State | | | | |
| Federal | | | | |
| Fees | | | | |
| [<i>Other Source</i>] | | | | |
| Total | \$25,000 | | | \$25,000 |

Special Instructions:

Please provide a minute order to: wcowper@countyofsb.org once approved.

Attachments:

Attachment A – Budget Revision Request #0010328

Authored by:

Wade Stewart Cowper, wcowper@countyofsb.org

Chief of Staff

Supervisor Roy Lee, 1st District

CC: CDS, PW, Sheriff’s Office, Montecito FD, U.S. Forest Service, CHP