



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

Department Name: Community Services
Department No.: 057
For Agenda Of: October 6, 2020
Placement: Administrative
Estimated Tme: N/A
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from: N/A
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department George Chapjian, Community Services Director
Director(s) (805) 568-2467
Contact Info: Ashley Watkins, Division Chief
(805)568-3514
**SUBJECT: California Department of Conservation Local and Regional Planning Grant
Program: TerraCount**

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence: Risk Management

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Recommended Actions:

Staff recommends that the Board of Supervisors take the following actions:

- a) Approve and authorize the Chair to execute an Agreement for Services of Independent Contractor with Rincon Consultants, Inc. in an amount not to exceed \$110,000 for consulting services (Attachment A);
- b) Determine that the recommended actions do not constitute a project subject to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15306, as the actions consist of basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource, and Section 15378(b)(4), as the actions are the creation of government funding mechanisms or other government fiscal activities which do not involve any commitment to any specific project, and Section 15378(b)(5), as the actions are the organizational and administrative activities of governments that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Summary Text:

On July 16, 2019, your Board adopted Resolution No. 19-199 approving the submittal of an application for the California Department of Conservation’s Local and Regional Planning Grant. Funding for this grant program is made available through the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68). The Department of Conservation subsequently awarded the County \$154,327 to:

1. Develop a carbon accounting framework for natural and working lands;
2. Engage stakeholders;
3. Adopt TerraCount to model potential land use and management scenarios; and
4. Develop and integrate a natural and working lands component into the County’s 2030 Climate Action Plan (CAP)

Due to their experience previously with TerraCount and their knowledge of natural and working lands as a component of climate action planning, staff recommends approving the selection of Rincon Consultants, Inc. to provide technical support for the tasks outlined above. Rincon Consultants, Inc. will provide project management, technical assistance, and peer review services to the County. With the approval of this contract, the County will better understand the links between land management, conservation, and greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions.

Background

According to the California Air Resources Board, in 2014, natural and working lands (NWL) store an estimated 5.5 billion metric tons of total ecosystem carbon in above and below-ground biomass statewide. The vast amount of carbon stored within NWL highlights the importance of promoting and maintaining carbon sinks as a strategy for addressing climate change. The important role of NWL in carbon sequestration has prompted the State to set a minimum target to drawdown and reduce 15 to 20 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents utilizing the NWL sector by 2030.

Carbon sequestration is the process by which carbon dioxide is removed from the atmosphere and stored over time in carbon sinks. This process can occur naturally or through sound land management practices. In Santa Barbara County, natural and working lands account for 85 percent of the total land area and provides a valuable opportunity for implementing carbon sequestration activities. Activities that support carbon sequestration can help the County meet its aggressive 2030 GHG reduction target while offering a wide range of co-benefits, such as, healthier soil, higher crop yields, and groundwater recharge.

While the County has developed strategies to reduce GHG emissions in other sectors, it has yet to include natural and working lands as part of that scope. Thus, to optimize GHG reductions and public benefits, the Sustainability Division applied for the Local and Regional Planning Grant. The grant aims to protect, restore, and enhance natural resources of critical importance to the State by supporting the planning, development, and implementation of climate adaptation and resiliency projects on NWL.

One of the primary components of this project is TerraCount, a land use planning tool developed by the Department of Conservation and the Nature Conservancy for use by cities, counties, districts, land use planners, and decision-makers. TerraCount models the greenhouse gas and natural resource implications of different development patterns and management activities. TerraCount allows planners and stakeholders to evaluate the application of certain NWL management activities, such as agricultural cover cropping, riparian restoration, and conversion of grazed land to cultivated land or agricultural land to developed land. Integrating TerraCount with the County’s climate action planning efforts will allow the County to better understand the potential GHG reduction and carbon sequestration opportunities on NWL lands.

Consultant Selection

On June 5, 2020, staff released a Request for Proposals for a qualified consultant to provide project management, technical assistance, and peer review services for the grant. Based on the experience, innovation, and budget of the proposal, staff recommend selecting Rincon Consultants, Inc in an amount not to exceed \$110,000. Staff selected Rincon due to their experience working with the County of Merced to implement TerraCount and their knowledge of natural and working lands as a component of climate action planning. Rincon’s project team also includes the original developer of the TerraCount tool which was considered a key benefit given its complexity. .

Rincon Consultant, Inc. will assist the County with developing a carbon accounting framework that identifies existing and future conditions, implementable strategies, and protocol for measuring progress. The framework includes a landscape inventory that quantifies the carbon stock and carbon emissions of various land covers (e.g., forests, wetlands, grasslands, row crops, orchards, vineyards, and urban lands). The inventory provides the basis for identifying baseline and forecast scenarios for emissions analysis, and potential strategies to reduce or sequester additional emissions through natural and working lands.

A team of Master Candidates from the UCSB Bren School of Environmental Science & Management will primarily be responsible for data collection and analysis of the modeling generated by TerraCount. Part of the scope of Rincon will be to provide quality assurance and quality control for the work conducted by the Bren School team.

To ensure that data inputs are reflective of existing conditions, Rincon Consultant, Inc. will assist with engaging stakeholders in the project. Stakeholder engagement will ensure that data parameters and CAP implementation strategies are appropriate and tailored to the region.

Rincon Consultant, Inc. will assist with integrating this project into the broader 2030 CAP. An NWL component of the County’s 2030 CAP will identify a set of GHG emission reduction measures as well as potential carbon sequestration opportunities.

Performance Measures:

N/A

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: Yes

Key Contract Risks:

Rincon has provided environmental consulting services in Santa Barbara County for 26 years. Rincon has previous and existing contracts for work on a variety of projects for the County. It has previously integrated natural and working lands into Merced County's Climate Action Planning.

Special Instructions:

Please send two copies of the signed agreement and one copy of the minute order to Frank Chen.

Attachments:

Attachment A: Agreement for Services of Independent Contractor

Authored by:

Frank Chen, Sustainability Division, (805)568-3557