



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:** Fire  
**Department No.:** 031  
**For Agenda Of:** December 14, 2021  
**Placement:** Administrative  
**Estimated Time:**  
**Continued Item:** No  
**If Yes, date from:**  
**Vote Required:** Majority

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**TO:** Board of Supervisors  
**FROM:** Department Mark Hartwig, Fire Chief / Fire Warden, 805-681-5500  
Director(s)  
Contact Info: Rob Heckman, Deputy Fire Chief, 805-681-5501  
**SUBJECT:** Grant Agreement #5GA20114 between the State of California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE) and the Santa Barbara County Fire Department

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**County Counsel Concurrence**

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence: Risk Management

As to form: Yes

**Auditor-Controller Concurrence**

As to form: Yes

**Recommended Actions:**

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Approve the attached Resolution (Attachment A) authorizing the Fire Chief or designee to approve and execute an Agreement (Attachment 1 to the Resolution) with the State of California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection for the acceptance of \$6,440,879.00 of grant funds to implement a fuel reduction project in the area designated by the Agreement from the grant approval date through March 15, 2025 and conduct all negotiations, execute and submit all documents, including but not limited to, agreements, amendments, payment requests and so on, which may be necessary for the completion of the aforementioned project;
- b) Determine this action is exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15378(b)(4), finding that the action is a 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. The Agreement requires a copy of the CEQA document must be approved by and provided to the State before any grant funds are made available for any Project activity that could directly impact the environment.

**Summary Text:**

The Agreement allows the Santa Barbara County Fire Department to use \$6,440,879.00 in State grant funding to execute the “Tepusquet VMP” (Vegetation Management Program) project.

The project, which involves a variety of treatments, proposes 2,815 acres of combined treatments to reduce the impacts of wildfires to this area by mitigating fuel continuity, providing improved safe separation distance for firefighters, providing opportunities for access to keep fires smaller and improving egress along transportation corridors, thereby reducing the release of carbon into the environment.

This project is consistent with both the California Strategic Fire Plan, Santa Barbara County Unit Strategic Fire Plan and supported by the Santa Barbara County FireSafe Council. The project supports the goals and objectives of the Santa Barbara County Vegetation Management Program.

### **Background:**

In May of 2021, the Santa Barbara County Fire Department submitted a California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) California Climate Investment (CCI) Fire Prevention Program Grant Application requesting grant funding to support the “Tepusquet VMP”, a multi-faceted fuel reduction project in the Tepusquet Canyon and the nearby areas of Sisquoc and Cuyama valleys.

This multi-year project benefits at least 42,130 acres in an area of Santa Barbara County with a history of large wildland fires. The planned treatments include 32.5 miles of roadside fuel reduction along Tepusquet Rd., Colson Canyon Rd., Ruiz Canyon Rd., Blazing Saddle Dr. and Autumn Rd., in addition to several unnamed private access roads; 2,064 acres of prescribed fire; 399 acres of herbivory; 138 acres of strategic fuel break treatments; the implementation of a community chipping program and the creation community defensible space zones (CDSP) where possible when the occasional group of homes presents themselves within the project boundary. These fuel treatments will create strategic locations to provide firefighter access, safety zones and staging areas, while improving community egress.

The planned fuel and roadside treatments are intended to protect communities and residential clusters, reduce the number of ignitions, and limit the size and intensity of fire occurrences in older age class fuel beds in Tepusquet Canyon and the nearby areas of Sisquoc and Cuyama valleys. The project directly limits overall greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the size and intensity of future wildland fires.

The Santa Barbara County Fire Department has been selected to receive the state grant in an amount not to exceed \$6,440,879.00.

### **Project Implementation Plan:**

The Santa Barbara County Fire Department (SBC) will manage this project and use its Fire Crew, Construction Section, GIS Section, dedicated SBC Fuels Crew, contractors, and possibly outside agency crews (e.g. California Conservation Corp, Cal Fire, Ventura County Fire) in order to complete the 2,815 acres of fuel reduction over an approximate 36 month period. Work will begin with the 32.5 miles of roadside fuel treatments which will result in 214 acres of overall fuel reduction under existing CEQA Notice of Exemptions (NOE’s), while a contracted consultant develops a project specific CEQA document relying in part on the VMP Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the remaining project treatments requiring environmental review.

Over the grant period, if the project moves forward, hand crews will average 245 days a year on this project, beginning with the roadside treatments. The County Fire Construction/Dozer Section or contractors will assist as needed with specialized equipment in certain portions of the roadside treatments. These treatments will be maintained for the life of the grant. Following the completion of the CEQA document, the SBC Construction/Dozer Section, and contractors will spend roughly 120 days a year utilizing dozers, masticators and livestock to prepare and complete the remaining portions of the project. SBC Construction/Dozer Section will work in conjunction with the SBC Fire Crews, the SBC Fuels Crew, contracted hand crews, other contractors, SBC engine personnel and overhead on the remaining portions of the project which include 2,064 acres of prescribed fire; 399 acres of herbivory; 138 acres of strategic fuel break treatments; a community chipping program and the creation community defensible space zones (CDSZ) where possible when the occasional group of homes presents themselves within the project boundary.

**CEQA Compliance:**

A requirement of the grant is compliance with CEQA and all other local, state, and federal environmental laws. CEQA compliance is required to be completed within one (1) year from the start date of the Agreement. All project activities proposed as part of the Tepusquet VMP will likely rely on CEQA Notice of Exemptions (NOEs) or other CEQA documents relying in part on the VMP PEIR completed by a contractor in the second half of 2022. Existing NOEs for applicable projects may be updated as needed and submitted to the state for review and posting. Additionally, with 2,797 acres identified for treatment within the State Responsibility Area (SRA), CEQA will be overseen by the State of California via CAL FIRE utilizing the established VMP PEIR process.

A copy of the completed CEQA document must be provided to and approved by the State before any grant funds are made available for any project activity that could directly impact the environment (e.g. cutting, piling or burning bush, masticating, dozer work, etc.).

Contractor selection will start in the first half of 2022 through a competitive process.

**Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:**

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) California Climate Investment (CCI) Fire Prevention Program Grant will fund 100% of grant eligible direct costs and will also fund a 12% administrative rate that will be applied to all direct costs with the exception of capital equipment costs. Currently, the SBC Fuels Crew is completing work on the Lompoc Valley Fuel Reduction Project (LVFRP). As a result, start-up costs including chainsaws, weed whips, blowers, hand tools, vehicles, uniforms, trailer lease etc. were incurred during the onset and during the implementation of the LVFRP. Limited startup costs are anticipated during FY 21/22 for the Tepusquet grant. As an example, an additional vehicle may be necessary to support the grant. To minimize costs, the Fire Department would retain a fully depreciated Assigned Status vehicle. The retained vehicle would be converted to an Operating Cost vehicle at a nominal one-time cost and would be assigned to the Fuels Crew. If an appropriate vehicle is not available, alternative options may need to be explored. This cost would be borne by the Fire Department/District.

First year FY 21/22 grant expenditures are estimated at approximately \$680,000. This includes salaries and benefits, services, supplies and an estimated \$171,000 for the purchase of a track-chipper.

**Fiscal Analysis:**

<b><u>Funding Sources</u></b>	<b><u>Current FY Cost:</u></b>	<b><u>Annualized On-going Cost:</u></b>	<b><u>Total One-Time Project Cost</u></b>
General Fund			
State	\$ 680,000.00		\$ 6,440,879.00
Federal			
Fees			
Other: Fire District			
Total	\$ 680,000.00	\$ -	\$ 6,440,879.00

**Narrative:**

Total state funding for this multi-year grant is \$6,440,879. Minimal ancillary Fire Department/District costs may be incurred as the grant work progresses.

**Staffing Impacts:**

In order to meet the terms of the LVFRP grant agreement, the County Fire Department created a dedicated Fuels Crew which is comprised of an Extra Help Project Manager, an Extra Help Crew Supervisor and 16 Extra Help Fuels Crew members to assist with the project. This Fuels Crew will remain intact at the end of the LVFRP in March 2022 and will transition to the Tepusquet VMP grant project.

**Special Instructions:**

Upon Board approval and execution, the Clerk is asked to please return a copy of the minute order and duplicate original Grant Resolution and Agreement to the Fire Department, attention: Frederick Tan. Once the State has executed the grant agreement via DocuSign, Chief Tan will return the fully executed copy to the Clerk of the Board.

**Attachments:**

- A. Grant Resolution and Tepusquet VMP Grant Agreement #5GA20114

**Authored by:**

Rob Hazard, Division Chief

**cc:**

Shawna Jorgensen, Chief Financial Officer

Rob Hazard, Division Chief

Fred Tan, Battalion Chief