



**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: October 5, 2021
Placement: Administrative
Estimated Time:
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Mark A. Hartwig, Fire Chief / Fire Warden, 805-681-5500
Director(s)
Contact Info: Rob Heckman, Deputy Fire Chief, 805-681-5501
SUBJECT: Grant Agreement #21-008 between the State of California State Coastal Conservancy and the Santa Barbara County Fire Department

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) Adopt a Resolution (Attachment A) authorizing the Fire Chief or designee to approve and execute an Agreement (Attachment B) with the State of California State Coastal Conservancy for the acceptance of \$396,000 in grant funds to implement a fuel reduction project in the San Antonio Creek area from the grant approval date through March 31, 2025; and
- b) Determine this action is categorically exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15304 Minor Alterations to Land and Section 15301 Maintenance of Existing Facilities and approve the filing of a Notice of Exemption on this basis.

Summary Text:

The Agreement allows the Santa Barbara County Fire Department to use \$396,000 in State grant money to execute the "San Antonio Creek Community Defensible Space Project".

The project proposes 70 acres of combined treatments to reduce the impacts of wildfires to this area by thinning live vegetation, removing dead vegetation, providing improved safe separation distance for firefighters, reducing potential fire ignitions, and providing opportunities for access to keep fires smaller, thereby reducing the release of carbon into the environment.

This project is consistent with the California Strategic Fire Plan, the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Plan, the California Forest Carbon Plan, and the Santa Barbara County Unit Strategic Fire Plan. The project supports the goals and objectives of the Santa Barbara County Vegetation Management Program, was identified as a high priority project in the 2019 San Marcos Pass-Eastern Goleta Valley Community Wildfire Protection Plan, and has broad support from the community as well as the Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council.

Background:

In April of 2021, the Santa Barbara County Fire Department submitted a California State Coastal Conservancy Forest Health and Wildfire Resilience Program Grant Application requesting grant funding to support the “San Antonio Creek Community Defensible Space Project”.

The proposed project consists of 10 shaded fuel reduction treatments totaling 70 acres located in the San Antonio Creek area of San Marcos Pass community in the foothills between Santa Barbara and Goleta. These treatments will reduce the potential for loss of life, property loss, and environmental damage during a wildfire. The project will utilize hand crews to remove dead vegetation, reducing ladder fuels, and to selectively thin standing vegetation. The existing fuel is predominately mature oak woodland with scattered chaparral. Crews will limb mature trees and prune off dead branches. The cut material will be chipped and spread uniformly on site. The shrub dominated areas will be treated with a residual mosaic approach, leaving scattered shrubs and islands of intact formation comprising approximately 50% of the original cover. No mature trees will be removed. No work will occur within 50 feet of a riparian corridor. The project will utilize the Santa Barbara County Fire Department hand crew to complete the fuel treatments.

The project areas lie within the planning area of the San Marcos Pass/Eastern Goleta Valley Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) in the vicinity of San Antonio Creek. This planning area covers approximately 2,024 acres of mostly private property that borders wildland open space and contains 761 single-family homes, a park, a reservoir, substation, and a retirement community. The project will take place on ten smaller County-owned open space sites varying in size from three to 17 acres surrounding suburban residential neighborhoods which connect to more dense neighborhoods adjacent to the cities of Santa Barbara and Goleta. These foothills have burned multiple times in the past two decades in the Painted Cave (1990), Jesusita (2009), and Cave (2019) fires. The foothills in this area are especially vulnerable during sundowner wind events given the community’s location at the bottom of San Marcos Pass. The winds are naturally funneled by topography directly into the foothills, with gale force winds, high temperatures, and low relative humidity often reaching Red Flag Warning criteria. A range of fuel conditions exist in the surrounding area, including grassland, agriculture, oak woodlands, riparian, and moderate to heavy chaparral. Ornamental vegetation is a significant factor in this community. Several large agricultural properties with permanent orchards provide portions of the community some significant separation from wildland fuels. The public San Antonio Creek Trail runs the length of one of the open space areas and is heavily utilized for outdoor recreation. Two other areas contain County facilities, including Fire Department Headquarters and the Santa Barbara County Emergency Operations Center.

The Department will conduct community outreach and engagement as part of the project. Property owners, environmental groups, and agencies have differing ideas on how to protect property and natural habitats, but all have experienced the community-wide trauma of record wildfires in recent years. Local

community members and stakeholders identified through the 2016-18 CWPP process will be invited to attend an informational meeting describing the project and offered opportunities to provide input on project elements and ways to engage in community resilience building and disaster preparedness education efforts. The Department will retain a biologist to monitor each site before treatment to flag sensitive species and nesting birds so vegetation crews can avoid them.

The project directly limits overall greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the potential 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 \$396,000.

Project Implementation Plan:

The Santa Barbara County Fire Department will manage this project and use its fire hand crew to complete the 70 acres of fuel reduction over an approximate 26-month period. The project will be ready to implement upon Board approval. It is anticipated that the project will require 118 crew days to complete. The grant funding will require the Fire Department to maintain hand crew staffing during the winter months outside of high fire season to complete the project work. The Fire Department has Fire District funds to cover the initial cost of the project and a 5% retention that will be released upon completion of the grant. The goal is to complete the project by the end of calendar year 2022. The fuel treatments will be revisited after the grant period as needed for maintenance activity.

CEQA Compliance:

The Santa Barbara County Fire Department has completed environmental review of the project. All components of the proposed project were determined to be categorically exempt from further environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines at California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15301 and 15304.

Section 15304 (Minor Alterations) exempts projects that consist of minor alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry and agricultural purposes.

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 the site. Such projects include, but are not limited to, management of existing landscaping or native growth.

A Notice of Exemption for this project is included as Attachment C.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

This grant will provide funding for the specific actions required to meet the grant objectives and there are no facilities impacts.

Fiscal Analysis:

<u>Funding Sources</u>	<u>Current FY Cost:</u>	<u>Annualized On-going Cost:</u>	<u>Total One-Time Project Cost</u>
General Fund			
State	\$ 200,000		\$ 396,000
Federal			
Fees			
Other: Fire District			
Total	\$ 200,000	\$ -	\$ 396,000

Narrative: This is a multi-year grant that will be completed by the Fire Crew. The FY 21/22 costs, which will be reimbursed by the grant, are anticipated to be \$200,000 with the remainder of the expenditures and reimbursements to occur in FY 22/23 for total grant expenditures and reimbursements of \$396,000. There are no matching funds required by this grant. However, there is a 5% retention that will be reimbursed upon completion of the grant.

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 to the Fire Department, attention: Rob Hazard.

Attachments:

- A. Grant Resolution
- B. San Antonio Creek Community Defensible Space Project Grant Agreement #21-008
- C. Notice of Exemption

Authored by:

Rob Hazard, Fire Marshal/Division Chief

cc:

Shawna Jorgensen, Chief Financial Officer
Rob Heckman, Deputy Fire Chief of Administration