



Regional Parks. Like previous projects, this proposed shaded fuel break work at Monte Rio Redwoods is a highly leveraged, priority project supported by CALFIRE and local fire districts. The Monte Rio Redwoods Shaded Fuel Break Project utilizes funding from Measure M, a local tax measure supporting parks, to successfully compete for wildfire resilience funding from the State of California.

The project will be supported with about \$70,600 in-kind match from Regional Parks' Natural Resources staff working on planning, coordination, environmental compliance, and invasive species management. □

### **Discussion:**

The Coastal Conservancy's Forest Health and Wildfire Resilience Program supports projects that improve forest health and reduce the risk of catastrophic fire in areas where people are living near wildlands. Funding for this program came from a block grant from the Department of Conservation's Regional Fire and Forest Health Capacity Program, the California Climate Initiative Program, Proposition 68 and Proposition 84.

The Monte Rio Redwoods Shaded Fuel Break project was proposed by Regional Parks and selected by the Coastal Conservancy for funding because it met the following grant criteria:

1. Occurs within an area that has been identified by CAL FIRE as a High Wildfire Hazard area (See attached map, figure 2).
2. Is ready to be implemented under a CEQA Notice of Exemption (§ 15304 Minor Alterations to Land) starting in summer 2022.
3. Implements the *California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan (2021) Goal 2: Strengthen Protection of Communities* by increasing shaded fuel breaks, and specifically implementing action 2.9 to develop and maintain new fuels management projects.
4. Provides an access route to CAL FIRE to re-establish a regional ridgeline fuel break that has been identified by the local Fire Chiefs as a priority for community wildfire protection.
5. Provides protection for the communities along the lower Russian River, specifically the town of Monte Rio and surrounding areas that are considered Disadvantaged Communities (See attached map, figure 3.).
6. Provides an emergency access route and fuel break line to allow Regional Parks and partners to engage in prescribed fire for long-term sustainable management of public redwood forests.
7. Implements actions to protect a community at risk as identified in the current *Sonoma County Wildfire Protection Plan (2016)*.
8. Benefits public and protected lands of Regional Parks, nearby State Parks, and the adjacent lands of the Sweet Water Springs Water District.

Funding from the Coastal Conservancy Wildfire Resilience (2021) grant cycle supported fuel reduction projects at Shiloh Ranch and Taylor Mountain Regional Parks.

The Old Monte Rio Fire Break, a small section of which traverses the property, used to be a functional fire break. However, sections of the ridgeline fire break and various access routes to the ridge have fallen into disrepair and are overgrown with vegetation and downed woody debris. Every year there are numerous human-caused fire starts in the area, and the potential for severe fire to get out of control is high. This project would re-establish a vital access route to the Old Monte Rio Fire Break ridge and provide Regional Parks the

means to begin to address the high fuel loads found on the property to prevent the impacts of severe wildfire. Both fire chiefs view this project as being part of a larger Bohemian Highway Corridor project. The Monte Rio Redwoods Shaded Fuel Break Project is supported by the local communities along the Bohemian Highway Corridor, where there is considerable concern about catastrophic wildfire from CALFIRE and local fire departments. The local Monte Rio Fire Chief, Steve Baxman, and the CAL FIRE Pre-Fire Division Chief, Tom Knecht, both have provided letters of support for this project.

This project will provide access for firefighters to reach the ridgeline in the event of a wildfire and provide a safer location to extinguish fuels in front of advancing wildfires. Project tasks will include reduction of the horizontal and vertical continuity of fuel loads by removing small diameter trees and shrubs from the understory. The shaded fuel break will leave the biggest and healthiest trees that are more resilient to wildfires to provide shade and wildlife habitat. Contracted work crews will thin, lop, and scatter the woody material to create up to 27 acres of shaded fuel break along 1.7 miles of road and 100 feet on each side. The project includes the planning, coordination, permitting, and contractor oversight for the shaded fuel break, as well as invasive species management as part of an Early Detection Rapid Response program.

On September 22, 2022, the Coastal Conservancy Board approved 27 Wildfire Resilience Program projects across the State of California for the amount of \$10,996,600, including the award of \$297,000 to Sonoma County Regional Parks. The \$297,000 in grant funding will primarily be expended on contracted professional forestry crews to implement the identified priority shaded fuel break at Monte Rio Redwoods Regional Park. Tasks include thinning targeted understory up to 10 inches diameter at breast height along 2 miles of access road, lopping and scattering of cleared material across a larger area of forest floor. Chipping would be conducted along the road as funding allows.

Regional Parks will be committing \$70,600 as a match for Natural Resources staff working on planning, coordination, environmental compliance, and invasive species management at Monte Rio Redwoods Regional Park. This matching funding is for staff time that has already been included in the FY 2022/23 budget and/or will be budgeted in future year budgets, funded by Measure M, a tax measure approved by Sonoma County voters in 2018 to fund local parks.

Upon Board approval, Regional Parks staff will begin the process of executing the grant contract and then procuring services required to complete the contemplated work, consistent with state law and local procedures.

**Strategic Plan:**

This item directly supports the County's Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

**Pillar:** Climate Action and Resiliency

**Goal:** Goal 1: Continue to invest in wildfire preparedness and resiliency strategies

**Objective:** Objective 3: Leverage grant funding to support sustainable vegetation management program.

**Prior Board Actions:**

**Agenda Date:** 12/6/2022

August 17, 2021 by Resolution No. 2021-0562, authorizing the application for and implementation of the previous round of grant funds from the State of California's Coastal Conservancy Forest Health and Wildfire Resilience Program.

August 18, 2020 by Resolution No. 20-0308 accepted fee title to 515 acres of land in the lower Dutch Bill Creek Watershed near Monte Rio.

March 24, 2020 by Resolution No. 20-0101 declared intention to purchase real property from Michele McDonnell, Michael Torr, and Brian D. Torr for public park purposes.

## FISCAL SUMMARY

<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>FY 22-23 Adopted</b>	<b>FY23-24 Projected</b>	<b>FY 24-25 Projected</b>
Budgeted Expenses	\$20,000	\$50,600	
Additional Appropriation Requested	\$297,000		
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$317,000</b>	<b>\$50,600</b>	
<b>Funding Sources</b>			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal	\$297,000		
Fees/Other	\$20,000	\$50,600	
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
<b>Total Sources</b>	<b>\$317,000</b>	<b>\$50,600</b>	

**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

Staff costs for 22/23 were included in the Annual Budget. Additional appropriations for revenue and expenses related to this grant are requested with this Board item. Future labor costs for FY 23/24 will be submitted as part of the Regional Parks annual budget submission.

**Staffing Impacts:**

Position Title (Payroll Classification)	Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)

**Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**

None

**Attachments:**

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**Agenda Date:** 12/6/2022

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Grant Acceptance Resolution

Budget Resolution

**Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:**

Maps and Letters of Support