



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 1/27/2026

To: Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and Board of Supervisors of Sonoma County

Department or Agency Name(s): Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and County Executive's Office

Staff Name and Phone Number: Misti Arias, 707-565-7360; Kim Batchelder, 707-565-7355; Christina Rivera and Christel Querijero, 707-565-2431

Vote Requirement: 4/5th

Supervisorial District(s): County-wide

Title:

2026 Vegetation Management Program Grant Recommendations and Staffing Request

Recommended Action:

Board of Supervisors:

- A. Accept recommendations for projects and funding amounts for the 2026 Vegetation Management Grant Program Cycle and authorize the County Executive or designee to execute vegetation management grant agreements for projects that are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act or which have fully satisfied environmental compliance and mitigated impacts under a Vegetation Treatment Program (VTP), after approval of County Counsel as to form, for a total of \$1,511,000.
- B. Authorize the use of \$297,021 from 2017 PG&E Settlement Funds set aside for vegetation management, to extend 1.0 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) time-limited APOSD Program Manager (Vegetation Management Coordinator) through October 4, 2027.

Board of Supervisors and Board of Directors:

- C. Adopt a Concurrent Resolution amending the Department Allocation List of the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District extending the 1.0 FTE Program Manager (Vegetation Management Coordinator) through October 4, 2027, effective January 27, 2026.
- D. Adopt a Concurrent Budget Resolution amending the Non-Departmental Budget, which houses the 2017 PG&E Settlement Fund which includes the Vegetation Management set aside, and the Ag + Open Space budget to reflect the recommended actions to this Board item.

(4/5th Vote)

Executive Summary:

This item proposes investing \$1,511,000 on ten projects through the Vegetation Management Grant Program funded with the \$25 million in PG&E settlement funds identified for vegetation management projects overseen by Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space). These projects were selected to enhance a wide range of projects in the communities and landscapes most

threatened by wildfire. The projects will link critical access for firefighters along ridgelines, between communities, and around critical infrastructure and remove large and highly volatile fuel loads. These projects will also support workforce development training and practical implementation at the Santa Rosa Junior College and in Foothill Regional Park and help provide environmental compliance for 131,500 acres and initiate the first phase of a 700-acre treatment within the Sonoma Valley.

Since the Board's \$25 million PG&E Settlement Funds assignment, \$12.5 million have been used to partner with organization to deliver 74 projects resulting in 6,845 acres treated for fuel reductions and over 3,500 individuals trained in vegetation management. Of the funds spent thus far approximately \$5.3 million has financed staffing, data management and technical software, workforce development, technical assistance, and support services. If the recommended actions of \$1.5 million are fully funded, remaining balance would be \$5.7 million

This item also seeks the Board's approval to use available PG&E settlement funds set aside for vegetation management efforts to extend the time-limited Vegetation Management Coordinator through October 2027.

Discussion:

Since 2021, the Vegetation Management Grant Program, funded by PG&E settlement funds, has provided grant funding for community-based vegetation management projects. Projects were selected through a competitive grant process by which the Program has successfully supported 74 grant projects for community organizations, fire districts, and non-profit organizations and provided valuable lessons applicable for future wildfire resilience projects.

On November 7, 2023, the Board of Supervisors approved \$2 million for the Vegetation Management Grant Program for projects to be selected through the competitive grant process (Track 1) and through a series of workshops and site visits conducted in 2024 and 2025 (Track 2). On May 21, 2024, \$1 million was awarded to nine projects through the Track 1 process.

Staff is requesting to utilize the remaining \$1 million in addition to \$511,000 in savings for a total of \$1,511,000 to fund ten new projects that were selected through Track 2. All of these funds have been previously allocated to support Vegetation Management Grant projects via prior Board actions. The \$511,000 savings is due to a \$1.84 million CALFIRE Wildfire Prevention Grant (Board item approved on October 22, 2024) that was awarded in 2024. The grant offset the cost of three previously awarded community projects, called the Northside Russian River Shaded Fuel Break project in Guerneville, Guerneville, Rio Nido and Hacienda. These projects were originally approved during the 2021 Vegetation Management Grant Phase 1A (Board item approved on July 13, 2021).

The Track 2 projects have been developed through close collaboration between fire professionals, local community-based and environmental organizations, and state and county entities. For example, in Sonoma Valley, Sonoma Valley Fire District, Sonoma Ecology Center, CALFIRE, Ag + Open Space, Greenbelt Alliance and Sonoma Resource Conservation District (RCD) have been strategizing on how to break up volatile fuels on the eastern side of the valley above the communities of Agua Caliente and Sonoma. As a result, a proposed Track 2 project will have Sonoma RCD prepare a regional VTP analysis for 131,500 acres across Sonoma Valley, and Sonoma Ecology Center aspires to use the Governor's Emergency Proclamation to expedite the work.

Many of the projects capitalize on investments the County has already made to meet environmental compliance. Projects have been carefully planned and are high priority treatment areas that protect critical infrastructure and help connect networks of ridge lines. These projects include the Cloverdale Road to Geysers Road (Northern Mayacama) fuels treatment (126 acres), Siri Tower (18 acres) and Padmasambhava Peace Institute (46 acres). The projects completed environmental compliance analysis and surveys in 2024-2025 supported by Permit Sonoma or Vegetation Management Program grants.

Three projects will help launch regionally significant fuel treatments, such as Gold Ridge RCD's Bohemian Highway South project will complete a treatment from Bohemian Highway to Fiori Lane (south of Occidental) and Sonoma RCD and Sonoma Ecology Center will implement the Sonoma Springs Wildfire Resilience project from Agua Caliente to Norrbom Road (Sonoma). Coast Ridge Community Forest continues to expand fuel treatments in the Sonoma Coast Collaborative by adding 150 acres to their VTP treatment area.

The recommended projects also serve as a demonstration to neighboring communities on how they can reduce their wildfire risk. For example, Harmony School anchors eight adjoining property owners where Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District (RCD) has designed a variety of forest thinning, ladder fuels and brush removal, and prescribed burns across 65 acres. The project will also provide education and outreach through additional workshops and site visits to neighbors on Jonive Road, Occidental, and the Bohemian Highway, and links two Potential Operational Delineations designated by CALFIRE as strategically important access points in the event of a wildfire.

Finally, projects will continue a focus on workforce development, building on the \$500,000 awarded by the Board of Supervisors in 2021 to help initiate a workforce development training program at Santa Rosa Junior College. A new grant this year will help ensure three more years of internships, six new graduating classes, and up to 100 new trained employees to provide services to State Parks, Regional Parks, Measure H crews, local RCDs and private companies in vegetation management.

The proposed grant funding for all proposed projects will be matched by 90% from State, private and local sources, including landowners (~\$1.36 million).

From the \$25 million set aside, in the first four years of the Vegetation Management Grant Program, 74 projects have been funded for a total of \$12.5 million. Approximately \$5.3 million has been invested in staffing, data management and technical software, workforce development, technical assistance, and support services. If the recommended actions of \$1.5 million are fully funded, remaining balance would be \$5.7 million.

Based on the contents of the applications that were received, Staff have determined that the following projects meet full environmental compliance and recommend that the Board authorize the execution of grant agreements for each of these vegetation management projects:

1. Cloverdale Road to Geysers Road Fuels Reduction Project - Northern Mayacama (Northern Sonoma County Fire Protection District) - \$250,000
2. Sonoma Springs Wildfire Resilience Project (Sonoma Ecology Center) - \$200,000
3. Southern Mayacamas Environmental Compliance (VTP) (Sonoma Resource Conservation District) - \$100,000
4. Padmasambhava Peace Institute (PPI)-Muniz Ranches Shaded Fuel Break - \$300,000

5. SIRI Repeater Tower Defensible Space Project (Environmental Resource Solutions) - \$75,000
6. Southern Bohemian Highway Fuels Reduction Project (Gold Ridge RCD) - \$100,000
7. Coast Ridge VTP (Coast Ridge Community Forest) - \$50,000
8. Montebello-Carriage Lane Eucalyptus Treatment project (Sonoma County Fire District) - \$108,500
9. Foothill Regional Park Fuel Break Extension project (Conservation Corps North Bay) - \$177,500
10. Wildfire Resilience Workforce Development Program (Santa Rosa JC Foundation) - \$150,000

Staff Support

To continue to foster good working relations and coordination with the various wildfire resilience initiatives like Measure H, Napa Firewise, North Coast Resource Partnership, Sonoma and Gold Ridge RCDs, and California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force, staff proposes the extension of the time-limited Vegetation Management Coordinator position until October 4, 2027. This extension will enable the County to continue monitoring the current grant-funded projects, seek new funding opportunities and coordinate the large-scale projects described above. The extension of the Vegetation Management Coordinator position will continue to be funded by PG&E settlement funds.

Vegetation Management Funding Overview

On October 6, 2020, the Board of Supervisors allocated \$25,000,000 of the 2017 PG&E settlement award toward Vegetation Management. The table below provides an update on how these funds have been designated since that time and illustrates that \$5,673,447 of the original \$25,000,000 would remain pending approval of the recommended actions in this item.

Project	Board Date	Budgeted Amount
Allocate \$25M to Vegetation Management	10/6/2020	\$25,000,000
Wildfire Resilience Planner Tool (Sonoma Water)	3/23/2021	-\$1,000,000
2021 Vegetation Management Grant program (Ph. 1)	3/23/2021	-\$3,725,494
Wildfire Resilience Training (Santa Rosa Junior College)	3/23/2021	-\$500,000
Vegetation Management Coordinator Salary & Benefits (3 years)	3/23/2021	-\$660,000
Environmental Compliance support (Permit Sonoma)	7/13/2021	-\$300,000
2021 Vegetation Management Grant program (Ph. 1A) set aside for projects pending CEQA compliance*	7/13/2021; update	-\$2,000,000
2022 Vegetation Management Grant program (Ph. 2)	4/19/2022	-\$3,300,000
Technical Assistance for community grants	4/19/2022	-\$500,000
2023 Vegetation Management Grant program (Ph. 3)	1/10/2023	-\$3,000,000
Community Outreach and Education	1/10/2023	-\$600,000
Data Planning Mapping and Prioritization	1/10/2023	-\$150,000
Organizational Structure and Funding	1/10/2023	-\$400,000
Programmatic and Administrative Support	1/10/2023	-\$290,000

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2024 Vegetation Management Grant program (Ph. 4 - Track 1)	11/7/2023	-\$1,000,000
Staffing Request (Admin Aide (0.5) and Veg. Mgt. Coordinator to 10/2026	11/7/2023	-\$604,038
2026 Vegetation Management Grant program (Ph. 4 - Track 2) (Proposed)	11/7/2023	-\$1,000,000
Vegetation Management Coordinator Salary & Benefits (1 year) (Proposed)	1/27/2026	-\$297,021
Vegetation Management Allocations Made To date:	-\$19,326,	
Remaining Balance:	\$5,673,44	

* - The proposed funding for 2026 grant projects was approved on November 7, 2023 (Track 2 = \$1 million). In addition, only \$1,488,000 was used for grant activities from the \$2 million approved by the Board on July 13, 2021. Project costs were offset by the CALFIRE grant. The remaining \$511,000 are being applied to the 2026 Grant Recommendations.

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.

The ten recommended projects will continue the work started in 2021 to help protect communities throughout the county from wildfire. These projects will build capacity in applying a variety of skills and fuel treatments on landscape scales and engage local landowners to participate in enhancing our resilience to wildfire events.

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

No

Prior Board Actions:

October 22, 2024 - The Board of Supervisors accepted the CALFIRE Wildfire Prevention grant for \$1.8 million to implement the Northside Russian River Shaded Fuel Break project.

May 21, 2024 - The Board of Supervisors approved grant recommendations for Track 1 funding.

November 7, 2023 - Presented to the Board of Supervisors a two-track funding approach to provide \$2,000,000 in vegetation management grants to support community efforts in wildfire resilience in high priority areas. Track 1 would use a traditional Request for Proposal model. Track 2 would rely on projects generated from the Resilient Forests and Watersheds community workshop series. Staff proposed to the

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Board support for additional staffing and extension of the Vegetation Management Coordinator's contract to October 2026.

June 12, 2023 - Presented to the Board of Supervisors staff recommendations to fund 19 new vegetation management grant projects for 2023.

January 10, 2023 - Presented to the Board of Supervisors a summary of advances on the strategic goals and objectives laid out by the Center for Law, Energy and the Environment and local and regional stakeholders. Requested \$3,000,000 to continue to support community organizations.

April 19, 2022 - Presented to the Board of Supervisors funding recommendations for 26 vegetation management projects to be completed by December 31, 2023.

October 19, 2021 - Presented to the Board of Supervisors a PGE Settlement Funded Vegetation Management Grant Program informational update.

July 13, 2021 - Approved \$300,000 to Permit Sonoma for Extra Help to lead VTP and \$3,000,000 to support seven vegetation management projects and future projects.

March 23, 2021 - Approved up to \$4,000,000 for community grants for vegetation management projects and \$660,000 allocated to Ag + Open Space hire Vegetation Management Coordinator.

December 15, 2020 - Received County and community feedback on vegetation management priorities; allocated \$70,000 for CLEE groups and \$1,600,000 for expansion of fuel mapper decision support tool and outreach to parcel-scale decision support tool countywide.

October 6, 2020 - Allocation of \$25,000,000 from the PG&E settlement for vegetation management.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 25-26 Approved	FY 26-27 Projected	FY 27-28 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	\$1,511,000		
Additional Appropriation Requested	\$297,021		
Total Expenditures	\$1,808,021		
Funding Sources			
General Fund			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance	\$1,808,021		
General Fund Contingencies			
Total Sources	\$1,808,021		

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

The \$1,511,000 for the 2026 recommended grant projects was previously allocated in 2021 and 2023. These appropriations exist in the FY 25-26 adopted budget. Although the projects are expected to span multiple fiscal years, all grant funding in this item is expected to be expended in FY 25-26, as funds are advanced to contractors. Additional appropriations of \$297,021 in PG&E settlement funds are requested in FY 25-26 for the Vegetation Management Coordinator, to be expended in FY 26-27 and FY 27-28. These funds will be sent from the County Non-departmental budget to Ag + Open Space to manage and expend. Contracting expenses in future years are unknown at this time.

Staffing Impacts:			
Position Title (Payroll Classification)	Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)
APOSD Program Manager	\$11,793.97 - \$14,336.78	-	-

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

No new positions will be added. The 0.5 FTE Admin Aide time-limited position is fully funded until October 5, 2026, and will conclude. The Vegetation Management Coordinator time-limited position is fully funded until October 5, 2026, and is proposed to continue until October 4, 2027.

Attachments:

- 2026 Vegetation Management Grant Recommendations Table
- Department Budget Adjustment Resolution
- Department Position Allocation Resolution

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

None