



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 7/12/2022

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

Department or Agency Name(s): Sonoma County Regional Parks; Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

Staff Name and Phone Number: Minona Heaviland 707-291-7669; Sheri Emerson, 707-565-7358

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): First and Fifth Districts

Title:

Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation restoration projects at Sonoma Valley Regional Park, Laguna de Santa Rosa Trail, and Haroutunian South (Ag + Open Space property)

Recommended Action:

Approve a resolution authorizing the Director of Regional Parks and the General Manager of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District to enter into a 10-year agreement with Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation to enhance vernal pool ecology, propagate and spread endangered plant species, maintain native plants, and conduct community engagement and outreach related to vernal pools at Sonoma Valley Regional Park, Laguna de Santa Rosa Trail, and Haroutunian South (Ag + Open Space property).

Executive Summary:

Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation ("Laguna Foundation") was awarded grant funding from California State Coastal Conservancy ("Conservancy") to improve the ability of the Sonoma County vernal pool ecosystems and adjacent human communities to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change, by managing the thatch, propagating and spreading the endangered species and raising awareness about the critical importance of these threatened places. As a condition of funding, the Conservancy requires the landowners, Sonoma County and the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, to grant access to the sites at issue for 10 years to both the Conservancy and Laguna Foundation. This item will grant the Regional Parks' Director and the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District's General Manager authority to enter into landowner agreements and revocable license agreements to run concurrently at identified locations with Laguna Foundation for the 10-year term as required by the Conservancy.

Discussion:

The Laguna Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that has been stewarding the recovery of vernal pool habitat and the rare, endemic species they support on the Santa Rosa Plain for more than 10 years. Over this time, staff at the Laguna Foundation has documented the decline of 3 endangered plant species and degradation of vernal pool habitat in the Plain likely exacerbated by a combination of drought and a lack of disturbance such as grazing, mowing, or prescribed fire.

Four years ago, the Laguna Foundation expanded its long-term monitoring program and began actively managing vernal pools on the Santa Rosa Plain through a combination of raking, mowing, and grazing to

remove “thatch” or the accumulation of dead and senescent annual grasses. The goals are to (1) steward the recovery of three critically endangered plants that live exclusively in vernal pool habitats (2) actively manage a network of discontinuous preserves scattered throughout the Santa Rosa Plain and (3) educate the community about this important resource. Most of the new vernal pools that are being preserved today are protected through the Endangered Species Act as mitigation for development elsewhere on the Plain. This grant allows Laguna Foundation to expand their management expertise to public land and increase their public education work about the Santa Rosa Plain vernal pools.

This item will grant Regional Parks’ Director and Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District’s General Manager the authority to enter into access agreements with Laguna Foundation for a 10-year duration as required by the Conservancy. Activities authorized on each property include the following:

- Sonoma Valley Regional Park and Laguna de Santa Rosa Trail. Authorized activities will include removal of thatch and non-native vegetation on a small-scale using mowing, grazing, prescribed fire, and limited mechanical and chemical control measures; restoration and revegetation of wetland and upland habitats using genetically appropriate native species; monitoring restoration areas; and educational and stewardship events relating to the present habitats and management practices. Endangered vernal pool species seed may be collected, propagated, and planted following CDFW guidance.
- Haroutunian South. Authorized activities will include mapping and removal of invasive species, minimal application of herbicide, string trimming, grazing, and reduction of accumulated thatch through grazing and possibly prescribed fire; restoration and revegetation of wetland and upland habitats using genetically appropriate native species; and educational and stewardship events relating to the present habitats and management practices.

While the agreements will run for 10 years, the bulk of project activities will occur within the first 3 years with the later term work generally limited to photo monitoring. Sonoma Valley Regional Park, and the Laguna de Santa Rosa Trail, are both owned by Regional Parks and are open to the public. Haroutunian South is owned by the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and is not open to the public. Neither of the landowner agreements impede regular function of any of the properties, visitor access, or have budgetary implications.

CEQA

The proposed projects are exempt from CEQA pursuant to Code of Regulations Title 4, § 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land). A minor alteration to land consists of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water and/or vegetation, which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes. Each of the three projects described above involves removal of thatch and non-native vegetation on a small-scale using mowing, grazing, prescribed fire, and limited mechanical and chemical control measures. Native plants will be introduced to replace the removed vegetation as appropriate. Accordingly, the Regional Parks Director and the General Manager will file notices of exemption pursuant to 15062 of the CEQA Guidelines.

Strategic Plan:

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N/A

Prior Board Actions:

None.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 22-23 Adopted	FY23-24 Projected	FY 24-25 Projected
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures			
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
Total Sources			

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

None.

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:

Resolution

Access Agreement: Laguna de Santa Rosa and Sonoma Valley

Access Agreement: Haroutunian South

Coastal Conservancy Authorization

Photos of Project Sites

Map 1. Laguna de Santa Rosa and Sonoma Valley Project Sites

Map 2. Haroutunian Project Site

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

None