

Healthy Forest Ad-Hoc Committee Quarterly Update

May to June 2022

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of the Healthy Forest Ad Hoc is to consolidate and coordinate the efforts of County departments/agencies to reach collective goals that protect and improve the conditions of our forests and natural landscapes while reducing the risk of wildfire throughout the county. The Ad Hoc will recommend actions for full Board consideration that can be taken in vegetation management, land protection and ecosystem services to ensure the ecological functions of our forested and natural landscapes are stable and improving over time. The Ad Hoc will provide input on department/agency activities such as the Vegetation Management Grant Program, Federally-funded wildfire resiliency efforts, parcel and landscape level planning tools, and County Tree Ordinance using the best available data to support these goals.

The Ad Hoc Committee will propose specific strategies to leverage and utilize the remaining funds from the PG&E Settlement Funds to best protect our communities and landscapes from large scale wildfires and improve the health of our natural resources. It is the intention of this Ad Hoc to meet monthly and prepare recommendations for full Board review in September or October of 2022.

Ad Hoc Members

Supervisor James Gore
Supervisor Lynda Hopkins

Attendees

County Staff

- Ag + Open Space (lead)
- Permit Sonoma
- Sonoma Water
- Regional Parks
- Climate Action and Resiliency Division
- UC Cooperative Extension
- County Administrator's Office
- County Counsel
- As-needed subject matter support may also be provided by other departments and staff

Meetings Held

4/28/2022 – Agenda topics: County department updates on all activities related to improving vegetation management treatments and related tools to help Sonoma County to identify highest priority areas for treatments to reduce the threat of wildfires. Lay out schedule of proposed meetings for summer and fall to develop a variety of proposed actions to the Board of Supervisors.

Status

The Healthy Forest Ad Hoc met on April 28, 2022 During the 40 minute session County Departments shared the progress being made by land managers like Regional Parks, Ag + Open Space, Sonoma Water and service providers like Permit Sonoma (chipper program and fire

mitigation programs) and Transportation and Public Works (roadside treatments) as well as planning tools (Sonoma Water and UC Cooperative Extension) and the grant program (Ag + Open Space) so that Board members and County colleagues are familiar with all efforts and opportunities to collaborate. This Ad Hoc session concluded with a proposed schedule for technical subcommittees to research and discuss a variety of strategies to be drafted and proposed to the Ad Hoc members and ultimately as recommendations to the full Board of Supervisors for consideration.

In the interest of time, the Ad Hoc agreed to review and address the draft charter offline and via email.

Vegetation Management Grant Program. Ag + Open Space received 38 proposals for 2022 grant funding by the deadline on January 23, 2022. An evaluation committee consisting of staff from Ag + Open Space, Permit Sonoma, Sonoma Water, Climate Action and Resilience, CALFIRE, and Fire Forward (all members of the Technical Advisory Committee without a conflict of interest) reviewed the proposals and scored each proposal based on technical capacity, high priority areas under threat of wildfire, sustainability and comprehensive nature of proposed treatments and quality of each proposal. A numerical score was accumulated for each candidate and the merits of each proposal were discussed in two meetings of the Evaluation Committee. 18 applicants were recommended for funding for a total of \$3.3 Million of grant funding. The Board of Supervisors approved these grants and enabled the Vegetation Management Coordinator to negotiate the final conditions of the grants to ensure that each project maximized the public benefit of this funding. Ag + Open Space administrative staff and Vegetation Management Coordinator finalized all 18 grant agreements by June 15, 2022. These grants will support new shaded fuel breaks, prescribed burn programs, prescribed grazing program, and a Handbook on the Principles and Practices of Vegetation Management for Sonoma County.

The Board of Supervisors also approved \$500,000 for technical assistance to unsuccessful applicants or projects that show good potential but need technical support in areas like environmental compliance, vegetation treatment prescriptions, project design, or grant writing. This grant program will be designed to provide between \$5,000 to \$50,000 in technical assistance to projects that meet the Grant Program's criteria and shows excellent potential to meet the County's goals to reduce the threat of wildfire and improve natural resources of Sonoma County. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) will assist Ag + Open Space to develop this program in the coming months to provide support to worthy projects.

Vegetation Management Grant Projects 2021. Monitoring of the 2021 grant projects continues as grantees will submit their second Monitoring Report of their 18-month grant agreement. Grantees will complete a template report highlighting the advances, if not completion, of their projects. Grantees are asked to report on any issues that might prevent them from completing their work on schedule. Thus far none of the grantees have expressed any issues that will prevent a timely completion of their work. Grantees will also submit a fiscal report listing the expenses paid by the grant versus any matching funds or in-kind contributions to their project. Monitoring reports will be due by July 15, 2022 – approximately 1 year from the execution of their Grant Agreement. The Vegetation Management Coordinator will complete site visits to verify completed work and discuss the progress of each of the 19 grant-funded projects.

Conditionally Approved Project Grant Agreements. In July of 2021, the Board of Supervisors set aside approximately \$3 Million to support seven "conditionally approved" projects along the Russian River corridor and Bohemian highway. These projects ranked high by the 2021 application

review committee but did not comply with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) so the Board requested that Ag + Open Space and Permit Sonoma work with these applicants to revise the project design and apply a new level of CEQA analysis called California Vegetation Treatment Program (CAL-VTP). In two of the cases, Permit Sonoma was able to adjust the treatment area so that the grantees could work under a Notice of Exemption (NOE). The other five projects sought to accomplish more with their projects, specifically ridgeline Shaded Fuel Breaks above the highly vulnerable communities within the Russian River corridor. Ag + Open Space worked with Permit Sonoma and CALFIRE and each community group to ensure landowner participation, technically sound treatment prescriptions, and collaboration with multiple organizations to expand each project to meet multiple goals. There are now four new Grant Agreements with each of these applicants and the fifth projects currently reviewing the final draft of their grant agreement.

It is anticipated that these projects will complete their CAL-VTP documentation by the end of the Fall 2022 in order to begin work on the proposed Shaded Fuel Break by the Winter.

Upcoming Meetings

- June 28, 2022 – Technical Advisory Committee meeting – Federal Grant funding rollout strategy (Permit Sonoma – lead), Technical Assistance grant program rollout strategy (Ag + Open Space – lead)
- July 14, 2022 – Technical Advisory Committee meeting – Review of new strategic tool (Wildfire Decision Support Tool) for landscape level priority setting treatments (Sonoma Water/UCCE – co-lead), Sonoma County Tree Ordinance discussion (Permit Sonoma – lead)
- July 28, 2022 – Healthy Forest Ad Hoc Committee (Tentative) – Review of proposed strategies and initiatives to support vegetation management, resilience to wildfire and healthy natural landscapes.
- August 31, 2022 – Technical Advisory Committee – Capacity building / Professional Development in fuel reduction, vegetation management, resource management.
- September 15, 2022 – Technical Advisory Committee – develop and discuss strategies and recommendations for Ad Hoc.
- September 28, 2022 – Healthy Forest Ad Hoc committee update
- October 13, 2022 – Technical Advisory Committee – Adjust and refine recommendations for full Board informational meeting highlighting potential initiatives.
- November 8 or 15, 2022 – Full Board informational session for recommendations.

Fiscal Update

Project	Board Date	Amount
Allocate \$25M PGE Settlement Funds to Vegetation Management	10/6/2020	\$25,000,000
2021 Community Grants for Vegetation Management	3/23/2021	-\$3,725,494
Santa Rosa Junior College Funding – Professional Development program	3/23/2021	-\$500,000
Vegetation Management Coordinator Salary & Benefits (3 years)	3/23/2021	-\$660,000
Permit Sonoma staffing for CEQA support	7/13/2021	-\$300,000
Conditionally Approved Projects (\$3,000,000 set aside only \$2,000,000 needed to fund Grant Agreements)	7/13/2021; updated 4/19/22	-\$2,000,000

Community grants for Vegetation Management - 2022	4/19/2022	-\$3,300,000
Technical & Planning Assistance for community grants	4/19/2022	-\$500,000
<i>Vegetation Management Allocations To Date:</i>		<i>-\$10,985,494</i>
<i>Remaining Balance:</i>		<i>\$14,014,506</i>