



Legislation Text

File #: 2021-1204, **Version:** 1

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
Department or Agency Name(s): Regional Parks
Staff Name and Phone Number: Steve Ehret, 707-565-1107
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisorial District(s): First

Title:

Acquisition of the Cougar Landing Property - Addition to Hood Mountain Regional Park & Open Space Preserve

Recommended Action:

Adopt a resolution of the Board of Supervisors authorizing those actions necessary for the County to purchase the 120-acre Cougar Landing Property, located at 7777 Cougar Lane, Santa Rosa, as an addition to Hood Mountain Regional Park & Open Space Preserve. (First District)

Executive Summary:

Regional Parks is proposing to acquire the 120-acre Cougar Landing property for a purchase price of \$1,020,000 to incorporate into Hood Mountain Regional Park & Open Space Preserve ("Hood Mountain Park & Preserve").

Discussion:

The Cougar Landing property (the "Property" or "Cougar Landing") is located at 7777 Cougar Lane in unincorporated Santa Rosa. The Property is surrounded on three sides by Hood Mountain Regional Park and is a strategic acquisition for natural resource protection and wildlife habitat connectivity, public recreational use and trail connectivity, and will support local wildfire defense strategies.

Sonoma County Regional Parks ("Regional Parks") attempted to purchase the Property, twice before, once with the previous landowner and once with the current landowner who has owned it since 2003. After much of the Property burned in the 2020 Glass Fire, the landowners placed it on the market. Regional Parks has negotiated a Purchase and Sale Agreement for a Purchase Price of \$1,020,000, subject to conditions including approval of the acquisition by the Board of Supervisors and completing due diligence on the Property. The Purchase Price is based on an independent appraisal commissioned by Regional Parks.

Funds for the acquisition will come from the Parks for All Measure M (\$500,000), Park Mitigation Fees (\$10,000), and the Regional Parks Foundation (\$540,200). The Parks Foundation grant funds will require that a deed restriction be placed in the Grant Deed, restricting the use of the property for Park purposes.

The proposed Board Resolution would (1) approve the acquisition of the Property by the County subject to the deed restriction; (2) authorize the execution of a Certificate of Acceptance; (3) direct the filing of a Notice of Exemption in compliance with CEQA; and (4) authorize all other actions necessary to complete the transaction.

Property.

Natural Resources. Cougar Landing sustained some fire impacts from the 2017 Nunns Fire and burned entirely in the October 2020 Glass Fire. Although the Property burned, it continues to include extensive stands of Douglas-fir, California bay and oak forest, all of which support rich native understory diversity and connect to large swaths of similar habitat beyond the property. Native grasslands are also present in a serpentine-influenced band with dense growth of perennial bunchgrasses. The Property provides extensive resources for many common wildlife species and has the potential to support special-status species.

Recreational Resources: At 1,883 feet in elevation, the summit on Cougar Landing provides spectacular unobstructed 360-degree views of the Santa Rosa Plain, Sonoma Valley and beyond. The Property will provide opportunities to develop trail connections between the adjacent popular Azalea Creek and other use areas of Hood Mountain Regional Park.

Scenic Resources: Due to its high elevation and open grassland vegetation, Cougar Landing is an important component of the viewshed from both outside and inside Hood Mountain Park & Preserve. The Property is highly visible from Highway 12, the City of Santa Rosa, and Sonoma Valley. It is also very visible to park visitors hiking, cycling, or riding the recently developed Lawson Trail and other locations throughout the Park.

Wildfire Response and Defense Values: Cougar Landing's high point provides a 360-degree view of the surrounding area, which can support early detection of new fire starts. Regional Parks is collaborating with the Department of Emergency Services on the future installation of a fire camera at this site in time for the 2022 fire season. The Property contains a critical section of the Hood Mountain-Santa Rosa "First Ridge" Fire Break which was instrumental in preventing the 2017 Nuns Fire from expanding into heavily populated Rincon Valley, Oakmont and the Santa Rosa Creek watershed. Due to its strategic location with connections to rural roads in this mountainous area, the road through the Property has been used to provide access to emergency responders during floods and fires. The Property also contains three high-volume wells which can provide water for fire-fighting purposes. Protecting the property and incorporating it into the Park & Preserve will prevent additional residential development in the Wildland/Urban Interface zone.

A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment has been completed and no significant environmental issues were discovered. The field work for the boundary survey has been completed and no encroachments were discovered. An appraisal has been completed and dated May 1, 2021. Regional Parks will be responsible for paying the premium for a title insurance policy and escrow and closing fees, estimated at \$6,700. Combined, Regional Parks estimated costs for the acquisition are \$1,050,200.

The Grant Deed will restrict the Property to general park use. Allowable uses are limited to public recreational and park use, educational opportunities and scientific research. In allowing these uses, Regional Parks shall ensure compatibility with the conservation, protection and restoration of the Property's ecological functions. No significant new additional management costs are anticipated to result from the acquisition.

Following acquisition, Regional Parks will install boundary signs, provide interim public access, and seek grant funding to support an access and resource management plan, building off the existing Hood Mountain Parks &

Preserve master plan.

California Environmental Quality Act. The Board must make findings under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Regional Parks' acquisition of the Property is categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15316(b) (transfer of ownership of land in order to create parks).

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 5: Maximize opportunities for mitigation of climate change and adaptation through land conservation work and land use policies

Objective: Objective 2: Develop policies to maximize carbon sequestration and minimize loss of natural carbon sinks including old growth forests, the Laguna de Santa Rosa, and rangelands. Encourage agricultural and open space land management to maximize sequestration.

This acquisition will protect forest and rangeland, expand Hood Mountain Park & Preserve, and would be managed to maximize sequestration.

Prior Board Actions:

August 31, 2021 by Resolution No. 21-0947 Board of Supervisors declared its intention to purchase the Property and publish a Notice of Intent pursuant to Government Code Section 25350.

FISCAL SUMMARY

| Expenditures | FY 21-22 Adopted | FY22-23 Projected | FY 23-24 Projected |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Budgeted Expenses | \$1,050,200 | | |
| Additional Appropriation Requested | | | |
| Total Expenditures | \$1,050,200 | | |
| Funding Sources | | | |
| General Fund/WA GF | | | |
| State/Federal | | | |
| Fees/Other | \$1,050,200 | | |
| Use of Fund Balance | | | |
| Contingencies | | | |
| Total Sources | \$1,050,200 | | |

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

Acquisition and closing costs associated with the transaction are estimated at \$1,050,200 and financed by \$500,000 of Measure M, \$10,000 of Park Mitigation Fees, and \$540,200 of Regional Parks Foundation. The FY 21-22 First Quarter Consolidated Budget Adjustment included the remaining funds from the Regional Parks Foundation that were not previously budgeted.

| Staffing Impacts: | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Position Title (Payroll Classification) | Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step) | Additions (Number) | Deletions (Number) |
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Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

None

Attachments:

1. Resolution
2. Map

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

1. Certificate of Acceptance
2. Notice of Exemption
3. Grant Deed