Legislation Text

File #: 2022-0551, **Version:** 1

To: Board of Directors, Sonoma County Water Agency
Department or Agency Name(s): Sonoma County Water Agency
Staff Name and Phone Number: Jay Jasperse 707-547-1959
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:
Fire Risk Reduction Decision Support Framework

Recommended Action:
Authorize Sonoma County Water Agency's General Manager to execute the First Amended and Restated Agreement for Development of Fire Risk Reduction Decision Support Framework with Conservation Biology Institute to provide fire science, risk modeling, decision support tool development, and related services in a form approved by County Counsel. The amended agreement increases the amount by $259,500, expands the scope of work to add tasks to refine the decision support tool, and extends the agreement term by 2.5 years for a new not-to-exceed agreement total of $739,500 and end date of December 31, 2024.

Executive Summary:
On December 15, 2020, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors (Board) authorized funding from Sonoma County's PG&E settlement funds to develop a Decision Support Framework (DSF) and tools to guide vegetation management activities for fire risk reduction. Specifically, the Board authorized: (1) $1,000,000 for Sonoma County Water Agency (Sonoma Water) to develop a landscape-level prioritization tool; and (2) $600,000 to the U.C. Cooperative Extension (UCCE) to complete work and conduct outreach on a parcel-level decision support tool. The DSF is the synthesis of these decision support tools into a comprehensive framework that will identify areas where fire risk mitigation projects should be prioritized to protect high risk built and natural assets and then assist landowner and project proponents on the best mitigation measures at a parcel-level basis.

The overarching goal of the DSF is to focus limited funding in a way that maximizes the effectiveness of publicly funded fire mitigation measures to protect high risk built and natural assets in a science-based and transparent manner. It is also anticipated that the DSF will promote grant and third-party funding for fire mitigation projects. Sonoma Water and UCCE are coordinating the development of the DSF and working closely with the new centralized vegetation management position housed in the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. The amended agreement will continue to support Sonoma Water's efforts to implement its portion of the DSF as described above.

Discussion:
HISTORY OF ITEM/BACKGROUND
The Sonoma Complex Fires of October 2017 (Tubbs, Nuns, Pocket) collectively burned 110,000 acres, destroyed 5,300 homes, and took the lives of 24 County residents. The Tubbs fire, destroying 4,658 homes and

five percent of Santa Rosa's housing stock, was the most destructive blaze of the three. More than 2 million tons of debris were hauled away, and over 950 fire departments and agencies from around the world responded to the fires. The County sustained extensive transportation infrastructure damages including damages to roads, signs, retaining walls, guardrail, trees, and culverts. In addition, the County expended numerous resources to respond to the fires and mitigate damages, including preventing debris flow and pollution from entering the County's waterways and water supply.

Since then, and as the County has suffered significant additional fires in the following years, the need for more outreach and education for vegetation management has been identified. Many groups have volunteers ready to do the work but desire more guidance ("clear, friendly rules") and training. Individual landowners also want to prioritize their resources. Land and natural resource managers need prioritization tools to determine timing and appropriate vegetation management activities.

Understanding this need, UCCE and Sonoma Water are leading the development of a DSF which has two components. Component 1, led by Sonoma Water, will help identify where to conduct vegetation management activities to ensure that limited resources achieve the most benefit to protecting built and natural assets in a transparent manner. Component 2 is being led by UCCE to identify what vegetation methodologies are most appropriate on a parcel-level. Sonoma Water is also developing an interface between the two components of the DSF.

Component 1 of the DSF involves developing a tool that synthesizes science-based wildfire modeling with the locations of natural and built assets to evaluate risks to these assets and guide prioritization of mitigation projects intended to improve watershed resiliency to fire risks. This component evaluates areas of high fire risk against built assets (e.g., roads, Wildland Urban Interface density, water supply systems, telecommunications, etc.) and natural assets (e.g., streams, habitat, sensitive species). An integral part of this project is a robust stakeholder program to inform the development of the DSF. Sonoma Water, in coordination with Conservation Biology Institute, intends to track local, regional, state, and federal objectives, legislation and funding to assure adaptations to the DSF are aligned with future funding eligibility. Sonoma Water has retained a facilitator to assist with the outreach activities including conducting a stakeholder assessment and convening series of stakeholder meetings to provide input to the DSF developers. Input from stakeholders and community will be incorporated, with emphasis on local knowledge and data to develop prioritization criteria in the tool-building phase. In addition, a technical advisory committee was formed, comprised of scientists and fire prevention regulatory experts in development of modeling tools to guide the technical components of the DSF. This tool will complement and work in conjunction with the Sonoma County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, and other local planning efforts.

Sonoma Water and Conservation Biology Institute entered into an agreement to provide fire science, risk modeling, decision support tool development, and related services, dated June 1, 2021, in the amount of $480,000. (Original Agreement).

Development of the DSF will be phased. The Original Agreement included tasks for Phase 1 of DSF development. Phase 1 resulted in a beta version of the DSF. Phase 2 will include additional functionality and modifications based on input from users of the beta DSF. Phase 3 includes model input data updates, tool maintenance, and end-user support.

Sonoma Water and UCCE are developing an integrated set of tools to inform decision making and prioritization. Work progress includes the following: data collection and analysis, stakeholder outreach, partner and team meetings to develop tool, convening and working with technical advisors, and development of a story-map and beta version of software model of landscape level tool. All Phase 1 work is on track to be completed by June 1, 2022, per schedule.

SELECTION PROCESS
A competitive selection process was not completed, and a Single/Sole Source Waiver was obtained from the County of Sonoma, General Services Department, Purchasing Division.

SERVICES TO BE PERFORMED
Under the proposed amended agreement, Conservation Biology Institute will continue work on technical services for two important components of the DSF: (1) a landscape-level prioritization tool; and (2) an interface between the prioritization tool and the parcel-level decision support tool (under development by UCCE).

This first amended agreement increases the amount by $259,500 and expands the scope of work to include the following tasks to refine the decision support tool: science advising/lead development of demonstration projects; data and modeling updates; decision support web application updates; hosting, maintenance, and technology transfer. This first amended agreement also extends the agreement term by 2.5 years for a new, not-to-exceed agreement total of $739,500 and end date of December 31, 2024.

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 2: Expand outreach and education on vegetation management and provide additional resources to landowners to help mitigate fire risk.
>
> The Decision Support Framework provides publicly available, science-based information to inform decision making to prioritize strategic investments in vegetation management and other climate resiliency projects.
>
> **Sonoma Water Strategic Plan Alignment**
> Climate Change, Goal 1: Continuing improving our ability to respond and adapt to climate change.
>
> The Decision Support Framework and tools improve our ability to prioritize investments and inform decision making to plan, develop, protect, and upgrade our infrastructure for climate resiliency.

Prior Board Actions:
06/01/21: Approved agreement between Sonoma Water and Conservation Biology Institute to develop a Decision Support Framework and tools to guide vegetation management activities for fire risk reduction. Cost $480,000; term end June 30, 2022.
12/15/20: Allocation of Pacific Gas and Electric Settlement Funds for Transportation, Utilities

Undergrounding, Communications, Safety, and Preparedness Infrastructure Investments.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	**FY 21-22 Adopted**	**FY22-23 Projected**	**FY 23-24 Projected**
Budgeted Expenses	$259,500		
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures	$259,500		
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF	$259,500		
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
Total Sources	$259,500		

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:
Budgeted amount of $259,500 is available from FY 2021/2022 appropriations for the Sonoma Water General Fund. No additional appropriation is required.

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

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):
N/A

Attachments:
None.

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:
None.

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