

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
June 7, 2021

**FIRE FUEL MANAGEMENT AT ARROYO HONDO PRESERVE**

21-018-01  
Project Manager: Fanny Yang

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$23,588 to the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County to implement prescribed herbivory to reduce fuel loads and create a buffer to prevent wildfire spread in the southern portion of Arroyo Hondo Preserve in Santa Barbara County.

**LOCATION:** Arroyo Hondo Preserve, Santa Barbara County

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Site Map](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed twenty-three thousand five hundred eighty-eight dollars (\$23,588) to the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County (“the grantee”) to implement fire fuel management through the use of prescribed herbivory to reduce fuel loads and buffer wildfire spread in the southern portion of Arroyo Hondo Preserve located in Santa Barbara County.

Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.

3. If the grantee uses the grant funds to purchase equipment costing \$5,000 or more, the grantee shall use such equipment for wildfire-related purposes for the duration of the useful life of the equipment.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Climate Ready Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The Land Trust for Santa Barbara County is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

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## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$23,588 grant to the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County ("LTSBC") to use prescribed herbivory as a fire fuel management method in southern portions of Arroyo Hondo Preserve ("Preserve"). The proposed project will also result in a buffer to prevent wildfire from spreading to the eastern slopes of the Preserve.

The project area consists primarily of fine fuels such as mustard and grasses which are notorious for their ability to spread wildfires ignited along Highway-1 or from other sources. The risk of wildfire endangers sensitive riparian habitat, previous extensive restoration work, and historic infrastructure on the site. By implementing prescribed herbivory to reduce fire fuel loads in the Preserve, the expected outcome of the proposed project is a reduction of fine fuels by approximately 70%, effectively removing the threat of fire, and creating a standing buffer to prevent spread of wildfires to the Tajiguas landfill bordering the Preserve to the east.

Prescribed herbivory is the use of livestock (i.e., cattle, sheep, goats, or a combination) grazing to treat flammable vegetation or to change plant species composition prior to a fire season. Using grant funds, LTSBC will contract with Cuyama Lamb, LLC, to utilize 400-600 sheep to intensively graze both the western and eastern slopes within the canyon in the Preserve; the animals will graze in each area on the slopes until 60-70 percent of standing vegetation is removed or trampled. If there is regrowth, the sheep will be returned to each portion of the site for a second time to provide treatment. Temporary fences will be constructed in each targeted grazing area to manage sheep herds.

LTSBC will prepare signage at the site to explain the grazing project, advertise the goals and results of the treatment in their online publications, and encourage visitors of the Preserve to see the sheep. Visitors of the Preserve come primarily from Santa Barbara County, mostly

from between the Cities of Lompoc and Ventura.

**Site Description:** LTSBC has owned and managed Arroyo Honda Preserve since 2001 as a natural and historic preserve. The entire Preserve consists of 782 acres, contains six miles of hiking trails, and is a pristine canyon with a diverse set of habitats. Chaparral covers the high rocky ridges and slopes of the canyon; the area’s diverse rock types give rise to a number of soil types contributing to different microhabitats and a range of plant and animal species. Coast live oak woodland, riparian woodland, coastal sage scrub, grassland, and giant chain fern wetland are found on site.

The property is bordered by the County-owned Tajiguas Landfill to the east, private ranch land to the west, Highway 1 and the Pacific Ocean to the south, and the Los Padres National Forest to the north. The proposed project site is located within the Preserve canyon and totals 77 acres (35 acres on the western slope and 42 acres on the eastern slope). Historic structures on the site include a house and a barn which are located between the two proposed grazing areas.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The LTSBC has a long history of conserving, protecting, and restoring land resources in Santa Barbara County. Protecting over 27,000 acres of natural and agricultural lands since 1985, LTSBC builds partnerships with landowners and conservation groups and manages large, public grants from county, state, and federal agencies to achieve its vision of retaining open spaces for present and future generations. LTSBC has a dedicated staff managing the operations and maintenance of Arroyo Hondo Preserve and the implementation of the proposed project through a contractor. LTSBC has access to a committed crew of volunteers and community members that assist in habitat restoration and trail maintenance projects in the Preserve.

#### PROJECT FINANCING

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$23,588</b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$23,588</b>

The anticipated source of funding is a Fiscal Year 2020-21 special appropriation of General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of wildfire risk reduction. The proposed project is consistent with the anticipated funding source.

#### CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The recommended project would be undertaken pursuant to Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy’s jurisdiction (Section 31113(a)).

Pursuant to Section 31113(b), the Conservancy is authorized to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects that include reducing greenhouse gas

emissions, and addressing extreme weather events, sea level rise, flooding, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources.

Pursuant to Section 31113(c), the Conservancy must prioritize grants for projects that maximize public benefits and have one of several purposes, including reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.

Consistent with these sections, the proposed project maximizes public benefits and is a priority because it facilitates the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from increased wildfires due to climate change. Besides reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the public benefits include improvement of forest health and protection of life, property, public health, water quality, and natural resources.

The proposed project addresses resources within the Conservancy's jurisdiction by improving forest health and reducing the risks of wildfire that would adversely impact water quality and habitat in a coastal watershed (Chapter 5.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2018-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 8, Objective C** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will implement projects to increase resilience to climate change impacts using nature-based solutions and other multi-benefit strategies.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on October 2, 2014, in the following respects:

**Required Criteria**

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:**

The proposed project will help implement:

- [California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan](#) (Governor's Forest Management Task Force, January 2021), which calls for activities such as fuels reduction, forest thinning, vegetation management, prescribed fire, shaded fuel breaks, defensible space, and enhancement of fire-prone habitats to reduce fire risk.

- The California Forest Carbon Plan (CNRA, 2018), which calls for restoration of natural fire regime and forest composition through a multitude of approaches including thinning, prescribed burns, invasive vegetation management, and shaded fuel breaks.
  - The Community Wildfire Prevention & Mitigation Report (Cal Fire, 2019), which urges state and local agencies to implement the goals of the Carbon Forest Plan and lays out recommendations to agencies to increase the scale and pace of management and mitigation actions to improve forest health and resiliency.
  - The Forests and Rangelands Companion Plan, California State Wildlife Action Plan Update (CDFW 2015), which encourages projects that seek to create a healthier and more resilient forest ecosystem.
  - The Environmental Goals and Policy Report “A Strategy for California @ 50 Million, Supporting California’s Climate Change Goals” (OPR, 2015), Goal 6 of the Steward and Protect Natural and Working Landscapes section, which calls on the State to “Build resilience into natural systems and prioritize natural and green infrastructure solutions”.
4. **Support of the public:** There is enormous public support for wildfire risk reduction. A statewide poll last fall found that 74% of surveyed voters believe that wildfire threat is greater now than in the past.
  5. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the Coastal Conservancy’s jurisdiction.
  6. **Need:** California is facing unprecedented fire risk due to climate change and a growing populace. The proposed funding was approved to accelerate fire risk reduction projects in advance of next year’s fire season. This funding is needed to initiate this work as soon as possible.
  7. **Greater-than-local interest:** Minimizing wildfire risk is of statewide significance.
  8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The subject land is situated well above current and projected Year 2100 sea levels.

**Additional Criteria**

9. **Urgency:** California is facing unprecedented fire risk due to climate change and a growing populace. The 2020 fire season broke numerous records. The proposed project is urgently needed to reduce fire risk in advance of the upcoming fire season.
10. **Resolution of more than one issue:** This project addresses two major issues: it seeks to reduce wildfire risk and improve forest and ecosystem health.
11. **Readiness:** The project is ready to begin work immediately.
12. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** The project will address fire resiliency in the context of anticipated climate change. Fire resilience is a critical issue due to increased average temperatures, reduced marine fog and longer and more severe droughts.

- 13. Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** This project seeks to mitigate GHG emissions from catastrophic wildfires by lessening the fire risk, improving resilience to fire, and improving carbon sequestration.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

All components of the proposed project are categorically and statutorily exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines at California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15304 and 15269.

Section 15304 (Minor Alterations) exempts projects that consist of minor alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry and agricultural purposes.

Section 15269 (Emergency Projects) exempts emergency projects, including: emergency repairs to serviced facilities necessary to maintain service essential to the public health, safety, or welfare, including those repairs that require a reasonable amount of planning to address and anticipated emergency; and specific actions necessary to prevent or mitigate an emergency.

Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.