



Board Report

File #: RES 24-107, **Version:** 1

Public Hearing to consider:

- a. Finding the pilot project for wildfire prevention and removal of eucalyptus trees ("Pilot Project") is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to Section 15269(c) of the CEQA Guidelines because the Pilot Project includes specific actions intended to prevent or mitigate risks of fire;
- b. Approving the Pilot Project for eucalyptus trees located within the defensible space of roads and structures in the unincorporated areas of Supervisorial District 2. The Pilot Project would finance 50% of the costs of trimming and/or removing eucalyptus trees on eligible private properties in the North Monterey County area;
- c. Approving a Coastal Development Permit for the areas covered by the Pilot Project that are located in the coastal zone; and
- d. Approving and authorizing the Housing & Community Development Director or their designee to execute a three-year Standard Agreement in the amount of \$990,000 with the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County to provide administration of the Pilot Project for a term effective upon execution through June 30, 2027.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors:

- a. Finding the pilot project for wildfire prevention and removal of eucalyptus trees ("Pilot Project") is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to Section 15269(c) of the CEQA Guidelines because the Pilot Project includes specific actions intended to prevent or mitigate risks of fire;
- b. Approving the Pilot Project for eucalyptus trees located within the defensible space of roads and structures in the unincorporated areas of Supervisorial District 2. The Pilot Project would finance 50% of the costs of trimming and/or removing eucalyptus trees on eligible private properties in the North Monterey County area;
- c. Approving a Coastal Development Permit for the areas covered by the Pilot Project that are located in the coastal zone; and
Approving and authorizing the Housing & Community Development Director or their designee to execute a three-year Standard Agreement in the amount of \$990,000 with the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County to provide administration of the Pilot Project for a term effective upon execution through June 30, 2027.

SUMMARY:

According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection ("CalFire"), North Monterey County has large areas designated as High or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. Within this area there are rural residences surrounded by trees and vegetation creating the potential for significant impacts from wildfire. The area also contains stands of non-native Eucalyptus trees. Eucalyptus trees present a unique hazard due to natural shedding of leaves, bark, and limbs combined with flammable natural oils in these trees.

Recognizing the fire danger Senator John Laird and District 2 County Supervisor Glenn Church were successful able to secure grant funding (Grant Subaward No. LI2023-032) in the amount of \$1,000,000 for the creation of a wildfire mitigation and eucalyptus tree removal pilot project in Monterey County ("Pilot Project").

The intent of the Pilot Project is to reduce the impacts of wildfire by making funds available to financially assist property owners with trimming or removal of eucalyptus trees located in the defensible space of private structures and roads. Results of the Pilot Project will be shared with the State and reported to the Board of Supervisors with the intent of informing potential future funding and activities related to wildfire preparedness. Guidelines and the Application Process for the Pilot Project are attached to this report as **Attachment A**.

A large portion of Supervisorial District 2 is located within the coastal zone and is subject to the North County Land Use Plan. Within the coastal zone, a Coastal Development Permit is required to authorize removal of trees and other major vegetation. Because this Pilot Project involves the trimming and removal of trees (potentially as many as 200 trees based on an estimated cost of approximately \$5,000/tree), a Coastal Development Permit is included. The North County Land Use Plan (“LUP”) protects native trees and vegetation as well as vegetation communities that support sensitive habitat. Eucalyptus trees are not “native trees” to Monterey County and are not individually protected under the LUP policies; however, removal of eucalyptus trees or other vegetation in native monarch butterfly habitat, in wetland areas, or in riparian areas is prohibited to protect habitat for fish and wildlife. The LUP also encourages the County to support the efforts of various fire protection agencies and districts to identify and minimize fire safety hazards to the public. With habitat exemptions in place, the proposed Pilot Project balances the fire hazard policies of the LUP with forest and habitat protections. A draft resolution containing findings and evidence for the Pilot Project is attached to this report as **Attachment B**. This Coastal Development Permit is appealable to/by the Coastal Commission.

Provided the Coastal Development Permit and Pilot Project are approved, staff is recommending that the County partner with the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County (“RCDMC”) to carry out the Pilot Project. To do this, the County would make RCDMC a subrecipient of the grant funding awarded to the County and RCDMC would coordinate with the County and applicable Fire Department, coordinate biological site inspections with property owners, oversee financing and payments, and maintain records of work performed. An agreement with RCDMC to provide administration for the Pilot Project is attached to this report as **Attachment C**.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

This Pilot Project has been developed in coordination with the North County Fire Department and representatives from the RCDMC with input from staff at the District 2 Supervisors office.

FINANCING:

The Pilot Project is funded entirely by a grant from the California Office of Emergency Services in the amount of \$1,000,000. It is recommended that \$10,000 of that \$1,000,000 be reserved to cover HCD staff time for the preparation of the Pilot Project and for ongoing Pilot Project oversight. RCDMC will also recover their costs for program administration by allocating \$20,000 of the \$1,000,000 grant. RCDMC administration will include conducting site inspections, overseeing billing, and keeping records. The remaining \$970,000 will be used to pay for the work covered by this Pilot Project on private properties.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

The Eucalyptus Tree Removal Pilot Program utilizes grant funds for fire fuel mitigation in a high-risk area effectively using state and local resources.

Economic Development
 Administration
 Health & Human Services

Infrastructure
X Public Safety

Prepared by: Craig Spencer, HCD-Director, x5233

The following attachments are on file with the Clerk of the Board:

Attachment A - Pilot Project Guidelines and Application Process

Attachment B - Draft Resolution (Coastal Development Permit)

Attachment C - Agreement with RCDMC

Attachment D - Defensible Space Guidelines

Attachment E - Map of unincorporated areas of Supervisorial District 2

Attachment F - Monarch Butterfly habitat Map

Attachment G - State Grant application