



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-18-136
Meeting 18-40
November 28, 2018

AGENDA ITEM 3

AGENDA ITEM

Award of Contract for Biological Services: American Badger and Burrowing Owl Habitat Suitability Study

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Authorize the General Manager to approve a contract with San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and sub-consultant Pathways for Wildlife to provide biological studies that will inform management actions for protecting American Badger and Burrowing Owl, for a base contract amount not to exceed \$214,250 over a three-year period.
2. Authorize a 10% contingency of \$21,425 to be reserved for unanticipated issues, for a total contract amount not-to-exceed \$235,675.

SUMMARY

Baseline ecological information is critical to inform the management and protection of two California Species of Special Concern (SSC) found on Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) lands: American badger and burrowing owl. The American Badger and Burrowing Owl Habitat Suitability Study (Study) will generate this valuable baseline data. Staff released a Request for Qualifications and Proposals (RFPQ) on September 24, 2018 for biological services to conduct the study, resulting in six proposals. Staff reviewed all proposals and selected San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and sub-consultant Pathways for Wildlife based on their thorough methodology, proficiency, and local expertise. The General Manager recommends awarding the contract to San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and sub-consultant Pathways for Wildlife for a base contract amount of \$214,250 and authorizing a 10% contingency amount of \$21,425. Sufficient funds for the Project are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018-19 Budget and the project is included in the three-year Capital Improvement and Action Plan for FY2019-20 and FY2020-21. Work is scheduled to begin January 2019.

DISCUSSION

Ecological Background

The American badger (*Taxidea taxus*) is one of the least understood mammals in North America because of its nocturnal and underground lifestyle, and lack of historical data. It has undergone population decline throughout its North American range due to habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, misinformed trapping, and excessive poaching. As a result, it was listed as a SSC in 1986 by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). SSCs occur in small, isolated populations of fragmented habitat. This CDFW listing encourages attention to and research of the species at risk in order to prevent further decline.

Badger inhabit grassland and oak woodland communities, relying on areas with loose soils to dig their burrows where they spend the majority of their time. Their burrows also provide habitat for many native species, including snakes, salamanders, and burrowing owls. Badgers play an important role in balancing ecosystems by controlling rodent populations, which, if otherwise left uncontrolled, could put excessive strain on native plant communities. Badgers are known to have a range of resource requirements and preferences, like territory size, prey type/availability, and habitat preference, which are dictated by local conditions.

Badger are known to occur within grasslands on nine District preserves, but presence is only opportunistically documented and not well understood, which limits the District's ability to effectively manage the species. Research focused on populations within District lands would significantly improve our ability to protect their local resource requirements within the San Francisco peninsula.

Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) are another California SSC at risk from habitat loss and fragmentation. They are also found in grassland habitats and are known to use unoccupied and/or abandoned badger burrows to nest and roost. Burrowing owls are known to occur within grasslands on four District preserves, and also similar to American badger, the District has a limited understanding of their presence and distribution. To date only overwintering (non-nesting) use has been documented. Both breeding and wintering life stages are vital to burrowing owl survival, therefore the wintering habitat found in District preserves is important to steward as birds prepare for their upcoming breeding cycle. For these reasons, burrowing owl are included in the Study scope as a secondary species of consideration, with badger as the primary focus.

Benefits of the Study

Approximately 10% of all District properties are characterized as grassland habitat. Many other habitats are also maintained by the District that badger and burrowing owl may be using beyond our current understanding. Both species rely on habitats that are at risk of encroaching shrubby vegetation and with unnaturally high forest density due to the suppression of natural fire regimes. Understanding the distribution of these two species within District preserves as it relates to brush and forestland will inform the development of the District's Prescribed Fire Program, which is currently underway. Reliable badger and burrowing owl population data will help the District strategically select prescribed burn areas and/or the frequency of burns to maximize plant and animal biodiversity in support of these two sensitive species. As such, the Study supports the Board-approved Resource Management Policies (Wildlife Management policies WM-1 and 2) by identifying wildlife usage and movement patterns, and inventorying sensitive wildlife habitats to develop management strategies for their protection.

Contracting Process

Staff issued a Request for Qualifications and Proposals (RFPQ) on September 24, 2018 for a period of 28 days. Staff circulated the RFPQ using BidSync and the solicitation was posted on the District website. Six firms submitted proposals. Staff evaluated qualifications, quality of materials, proposed Study approach, and fee proposal using criteria determined prior to receiving submittals.

San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and sub-consultant Pathways for Wildlife were selected based on their thorough methodology, proficiency, and local expertise to provide biological

services at a fair and reasonable price. Their methods include creating a habitat suitability model in GIS, performing a habitat linkage analysis, collecting data with camera traps and field surveys, and running environmental DNA analysis. They will utilize volunteers for outreach and cost savings, and will incorporate Study information into larger region-wide projects.

FISCAL IMPACT

The Natural Resources FY2018-19 budget includes \$100,000 for services and supplies, and additional funds are indicated in the three-year Capital Improvement and Action Plan as outlined in the table below.

Initial project planning, desktop habitat assessments, equipment purchases, and two field-based surveys will occur in FY2018-19. The majority of field-based surveys (five), and ongoing project administration will occur in FY2019-20. Three final field-based surveys, all data and genetic analysis, reporting, and presentation preparation will occur in FY2020-21.

There are sufficient funds in the project budget to cover the recommended action and expenditures anticipated in FY2018-19.

Badger / Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessment, Project #80054	Prior Year Actuals	FY18-19	FY19-20	FY20-21	Total
3-Year Capital Improvement and Action Plan	\$0	\$100,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$250,000
<i>Spent-to-Date (as of 10/26/2018)</i>		\$0			\$0
Proposed Award of Contract (including 10% contingency)		\$94,270	\$70,702	\$70,703	\$235,675
Budget Remaining (Proposed):		\$5,730	\$4,298	\$4,297	\$14,325

The recommended action is not funded by Measure AA.

BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW

A Board Committee did not previously review this item.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This award of contract is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

NEXT STEPS

Following Board approval, the General Manager will execute a contract with the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and Pathways for Wildlife for a three-year period beginning in FY2018-

19. Natural Resources staff will oversee the Consultant for all aspects and duration of the contract period. Initial services include a desktop spatial analysis and design of field monitoring methods. Future services include execution of field monitoring, data analysis, reporting, and presentations to District staff and Board.

Responsible Department Head:

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