



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

# Memorandum

DATE: August 12, 2020

MEMO TO: Board of Directors

THROUGH: Ana Ruiz, General Manager *AR*

FROM: Sophie Christel, Management Analyst I, Project Manager  
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SUBJECT: Updated Scope and Timeline for the Science Advisory Panel

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## SUMMARY

This memorandum is brought to the Board of Directors (Board) to keep them apprised of recent activities regarding the work of the Science Advisory Panel (SAP), which allow for an additional research topic to be added to the scope of work during year two and a potential slight increase in costs to account for additional time needed in fully scoping out the first two years of SAP work and to address disruptions related to early COVID-19 restrictions.

## BACKGROUND

On August 28, 2019 (R-19-120), the Board awarded a contract to the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) to form the Science Advisory Panel (SAP), enhancing the scientific validity of open space management decisions and providing an important resource to inform regional land management topics. Additionally, the SAP will provide an independent science-based review of land management practices and decisions by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District). The District selected two locally-esteemed science institutions, SFEI and Point Blue Conservation Science (Point Blue), to comprise the SAP. These institutions were described at the Board Retreat (R-18-148) and further discussed by the Board on March 27, 2019 (R-19-32).

The initial responsibility of the SAP is to prepare summary white papers on three key topics of interest to the District, as approved by the Board on January 8, 2020 (R-20-05):

**Topic 1.** How can the District effectively and efficiently monitor changes in priority plant and animal populations at the landscape scale?

**Topic 2:** What are the visitation and recreational use benefits and trade-offs to fulfilling District goals, including natural resource protection and ecologically-sensitive public enjoyment and education?

**Topic 3:** Review cattle grazing benefits and impacts:

- What is the net climate impact of cattle grazing (e.g., potential increase in soil carbon minus cattle methane emissions)? What are the options, such as grazing regimes or dietary additives, to reduce emissions from cattle grazing?

- What are the current scientific results on the effectiveness of managing grasslands and reducing fire risk with cattle grazing?
- How does cattle grazing as a land management strategy compare to alternatives in achieving District goals including climate protection and what are the trade-offs?

### **Revised Cost Estimate**

The original Board authorization with SFEI was for \$200,000: \$100,000 for an initial phase of topic selection and research, with an additional \$100,000 to be added for a second phase pending General Manager approval upon satisfactory progress and demonstrated benefits. Following the Board approval, the scoping process took longer than anticipated due in part to COVID-19. This extended scoping process, as well as scope changes (including more meetings and coordination with the District to better achieve an institutional learning during the SAP process) have increased the total cost to an estimated \$219,000 for both rounds of research. Staff will return to the Board for a contract amendment if and when the General Manager authorizes the second round of research and this amendment will include the anticipated \$19,000 in increased costs. Staff does not expect costs for the first phase of research to exceed the authorized amount of \$100,000.

### **PROGRESS AND NEXT STEPS**

SFEI and Point Blue have commenced research on the three Board-selected topics. District staff teams have attended kickoff meetings with SFEI and Point Blue staff, and a Technical Advisory Committee has been selected for the Grazing topic, comprised of academic and practitioner experts. Additional meetings will be held in August and September prior to development of draft deliverables.

In November, SFEI and Point Blue will present the final results of their research on the Grazing topic to the Board, and preliminary results from the first phase of research on the Recreation and Monitoring Topics are anticipated to be presented later in November or December. Following these presentations, the General Manager will determine whether to authorize the second phase of research and bring the contract to the Board for the amendment. If the second phase of research proceeds, the Board will be able to select a fourth research topic from the topics recommended in 2019. Research results for the second round are anticipated to be shared with the Board between June and December 2021.

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