



R-24-125
Meeting 24-28
October 23, 2024

AGENDA ITEM 5

AGENDA ITEM

Award of Multiple Contracts for Native Plant Propagation and Seed Services

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Authorize the General Manager to enter into an agreement with Central Coast Wilds of Santa Cruz, CA to provide California native plant propagation and seed services in an amount not to exceed \$125,000 over two years, with the option to extend the agreement for two additional years for a total not to exceed \$250,000 over four years.
2. Authorize the General Manager to enter into an agreement with Grassroots Ecology of Palo Alto, CA to provide California native plant propagation and seed services in an amount not to exceed \$125,000 over two years, with the option to extend the agreement for two additional years for a total not to exceed \$250,000 over four years.
3. Authorize the General Manager to enter into an agreement with Heritage Growers of Chico, CA to provide California seed services in an amount not to exceed \$220,000 over two years, with the option to extend the agreement for two additional years for a total not to exceed \$440,000 over four years.

SUMMARY

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) restores and revegetates disturbed natural lands through the installation of California native plant species, propagated in specialty nurseries, and locally collected propagules (seeds, plant divisions, cuttings, bulbs). Nursery plants and propagules are installed at District restoration and capital improvement project sites to repair disturbances, reestablish native vegetation, fulfill permit requirements, and return the natural balance of the ecosystem. Vegetation restoration work assists in restoring the ecological function in areas disturbed by natural events or anthropogenic activities and is essential to District efforts in recovering and enhancing populations of rare, threatened, and endangered animal populations.

The General Manager recommends awarding two-year contracts for native plant and seed services to Central Coast Wilds in an amount not to exceed \$125,000, Grassroots Ecology in an amount not to exceed \$125,000, and Heritage Growers in the amount not to exceed \$220,000, with an option in each contract for the District, at its sole discretion, to extend each term for up to two (2) additional years.

BACKGROUND

To meet the increase in restoration and capital improvement projects in recent years, and the associated increase in native plant and propagules required for these projects, a supply of native plants and propagules specific to each of the project sites is required to meet the project goals and associated permit requirements. This allows for site specific restoration by collecting propagules within the same watershed as the project site to ensure nursery plants propagated and propagules are appropriate and well adapted to help ensure their establishment.

The discovery of water mold-like pathogens in the genus *Phytophthora* in California nurseries in 2012 has changed how the District completes revegetation of sites. These pathogens infect a wide variety of plant hosts and can cause disease on plants across many plant families and in many different habitats. To continue revegetation work using nursery plants, the District follows strict Best Management Practices developed by the *Phytophthoras* in Native Habitats Working Group. The group revised and published their *Guidelines to Minimize Phytophthora Pathogens in Restoration Nurseries* in March 2021. This guide includes 98 Best Management Practices (BMPs) for professional growers who manage California native plant nurseries that supply plants for wildland projects. Given the importance and sensitive nature of these habitats, these BMPs support the highest standards and best practices to exclude *Phytophthora* and other soil-borne pathogens from nursery stock to the greatest extent possible.

DISCUSSION

Staff issued a Request for Proposals and Qualifications (RFQP) to provide nursery plant propagation and seed services via Periscope on August 14, 2024. These services include the collection and processing of seed, seed amplification, seed procurement, nursery plant propagation, nursery plant maintenance (until outplanting), and testing for *Phytophthora* and *Pythium* species.

Staff posted the RFQP on the District website and directly contacted six native plant nurseries and seed suppliers via email. Five firms submitted proposals: Pacific Coast Seed, Heritage Growers, Grassroots Ecology, The Watershed Nursery, and Central Coast Wilds. Staff evaluated the qualifications of each proposer, the quality of their proposal, the proposed approach, and overall team qualifications and expertise. During the week of September 23, 2024, District staff completed site inspections of Grassroots Ecology's and Central Coast Wilds' native plant nurseries for verification of the implementation of the Best Management Practices outlined by the Working Group for *Phytophthoras* in Native Habitats in their *Guidelines to Minimize Phytophthora Pathogens in Restoration Nurseries*. A site inspection was not required for Heritage Growers because they were selected to provide seed and not selected to provide nursery propagation services.

The evaluation criteria outlined in the RFQP included the quality of the proposal, proposed implementation of the services, and staff qualifications and expertise. Firms providing educational opportunities to the public, especially students or young professionals, was an additional consideration outlined in the evaluation criteria.

Central Coast Wilds, Grassroots Ecology, and Heritage Growers were deemed the most qualified and best suited firms for the project based on their responses to the RFQP, proposed project approach, qualifications, and fair and reasonable pricing. Central Coast Wilds and Grassroots

Ecology follow all best management practices for nursery plant propagation services, offer public educational opportunities, and included cost savings measures in their proposals, therefore both firms were selected to provide nursery propagation services. In addition, they will provide some seed services, including seed collections and smaller seed amplifications. Heritage Growers specializes in seed services, including processing of seed, large scale seed amplifications, and seed procurement, and was ranked as the only qualified firm for those services.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is partial funding in the current budget to cover the cost of the recommended contract awards. A budget adjustment may be required in Fiscal Year 2024-25 depending on how much of the scope of services is completed through June 30, 2025. Funds for future year costs will be recommended in future fiscal year budgets as a part of the annual Budget and Action Plan process.

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

This item was not previously reviewed by a Board Committee.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. Public notice was sent to the Resource Management interested parties by postal or electronic mail.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

Actions under the recommended contract as described herein are exempt in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines section 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land). Individual projects that include restoration or mitigation planting covered under this recommended contract will undergo appropriate evaluation pursuant to CEQA before they are implemented.

NEXT STEPS

Following Board approval, the General Manager will execute agreements with Central Coast Wilds of Santa Cruz, California; Grassroots Ecology of Palo Alto, California; and Heritage Growers of Chico, California for a two-year period beginning FY2024-25, with the option to extend for two additional years.

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