

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
DIRECTOR'S OFFICE
POST OFFICE BOX 944209
SACRAMENTO, CA 94244-2090



**CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT STATUTORY EXEMPTION FOR
RESTORATION PROJECTS
CONCURRENCE NO. 21080.56-2025-082-R6**

Project: Wildwood Canyon Wildfire Resilience Project
Location: San Bernardino County
Lead Agency: California Department of Parks and Recreation
Lead Agency Contact: Ken Kietzer; ken.kietzer@parks.ca.gov

Background

Project Location: The Wildwood Canyon Wildfire Resilience Project (Project) is located at the Wildwood Canyon State Park Unit (Park) in the foothills of the San Bernardino Mountains in the City of Yucaipa. The Park is accessed via 12241 Canyon Drive in Yucaipa, California. The latitude and longitude coordinates of the Project are 34.026736, -116.994902.

Project Description: The California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks), in partnership with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (IERCD), proposes to restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife. The Project is designed to benefit Crotch's bumble bee (*Bombus crotchii*), western burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*), western spadefoot toad (*Spea hammondi*), Yucaipa onion (*Allium marvinii*), and Parry's spineflower (*Chorizanthe parryi* var. *parryi*).

Restoration activities will include prescribed fire (pile and broadcast burning) with manual or mechanical site preparation; infrastructure protection via manual removal of vegetation; and vegetation management treatments, including mechanical thinning, mastication, and chipping. Any tree identified to be infested with goldspotted oak borer (*Agrilus coxalis*) will be removed and properly disposed of to reduce transmission throughout the Park.

Post treatment monitoring will include measures to ensure successful reestablishment of native vegetation, which may include seeding, planting, and if necessary, herbicide treatment. These restoration measures are designed to reduce and/or moderate future wildfire severity on approximately 161 acres of the 840-acre Park and restore native fire-adapted plant communities.

Tribal Engagement: Based on CAL FIRE's Native American Contact List (NACL), notification letters for the Project were sent on May 17, 2024, to approximately 70 contacts included in the "San Bernardino WEST" NACL. In addition, seven tribes listed on the Native American

Heritage Commission's list of tribal contacts for San Bernardino County were contacted directly via phone or email on November 5, 2025, to ensure they were aware of the Project and to address any questions or concerns. As a result of this engagement, meetings with the Yuhaaviatvam and Fort Yuma Quechan Tribe have been scheduled. Engagement with tribes will continue as the Project progresses.

Interested Party Coordination: The Project was in part initiated by local community members who wanted to see restoration and fire resiliency projects implemented in the Park. As part of this effort, State Parks, CAL FIRE, and/or IERCD have continued to collaboratively engage the local community and the City of Yucaipa Fire Chief about this Project. The community has also formed a local fire safe council called the Wildwood Watchers. State Parks, CAL FIRE, and/or IERCD attend all bi-annual Wildwood Watchers meetings and are in regular communication with the Wildwood Watchers leadership. On September 26, 2023, a site visit was performed with interested parties to initiate the collaborative planning process and identify potential restoration treatments together. At the Wildwood Watchers meeting held on October 22, 2023, IERCD staff provided initial information, including the Project background and need, involved partners, and preliminary treatment areas, and solicited feedback and questions from community members. Wildwood Watchers also provided a brief Project update at their meeting held on April 21, 2024. Most recently, interested parties attended the April 27, 2025, Wildwood Watchers meeting where updates were provided on the significant progress made in Project planning, including updates on environmental review processes with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and to solicit community feedback and answer questions about the Project. Coordination will continue with community members and the City of Yucaipa through the remainder of the planning process, as well as during the Project's restoration activities.

<u>Anticipated Project Implementation Timeframes:</u>	Start date: December 2025
	Completion date: December 2040

Lead Agency Request for CDFW Concurrence: On November 12, 2025, the Director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW Director) received a concurrence request from the Lead Agency pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (e) (Request). The Request seeks the CDFW Director's concurrence with the Lead Agency's determination on November 12, 2025 that the Project meets certain qualifying criteria set forth in subdivisions (a) to (d), inclusive, of the same section of the Public Resources Code (Lead Agency Determination). The CDFW Director's concurrence is required for the Lead Agency to approve the Project relying on this section of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). (Pub. Resources Code, § 21000 et seq.).

Concurrence Determination

The CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency Determination that the Project meets the qualifying criteria set forth in Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivisions (a) to (d), inclusive (Concurrence).

Specifically, the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project meets all of the following conditions: (A) the Project is exclusively to conserve, restore, protect, or enhance, and assist in the recovery of California native fish and wildlife, and the habitat upon which they depend; or is exclusively to restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife; (B) the Project may have public benefits incidental to the Project's fundamental purpose; (C) the Project will result in long-term net benefits to climate resiliency, biodiversity, and sensitive species recovery; and includes procedures and ongoing management for the protection of the environment; and (D) Project construction activities are solely related to habitat restoration. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (g), CDFW will post this Concurrence on its CEQA Notices and Documents internet page: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Notices/CEQA>.

This Concurrence is based on best available science and supported, as described below, by substantial evidence in CDFW's administrative record of proceedings for the Project.

This Concurrence is also based on a finding that the Project is consistent with and that its implementation will further CDFW's mandate as California's trustee agency for fish and wildlife, including the responsibility to hold and manage these resources in trust for all the people of California.

Discussion

- A. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (a), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project will exclusively conserve, restore, protect, or enhance, and assist in the recovery of California native fish and wildlife, and the habitat upon which they depend; or restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife.

The Project will contribute to the protection and restoration of native species and habitat within the Park by reintroducing and mimicking natural disturbance regimes related to fire. For example, restoring a more natural fire regime, through prescribed burning, would contribute to the restoration, enhancement, and resiliency of grassland habitats, which would in the long term benefit native grassland species, including but not limited to Crotch's bumble bee, western burrowing owl, and western spadefoot toad. Wildfire and climate resiliency of oak woodlands would be enhanced through selective thinning and prescribed burning understory fuels. In addition, any tree identified to be infested with goldspotted oak borer will be removed and properly disposed of to reduce transmission throughout the Park.

- B. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (b), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project may have incidental public benefits, such as public access and recreation.

The Project may have incidental public safety benefits to neighboring residences and utility, transportation, and water supply infrastructure by reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire. By restoring a more natural fire regime in grasslands and oak woodlands through prescribed burning and hazardous fuel removal, the Project will

reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire to neighboring property/infrastructure. Additionally, the Project will protect public access and recreation at the Park by reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire to Park resources and infrastructure.

- C. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (c), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project will result in long-term net benefits to climate resiliency, biodiversity, and sensitive species recovery, and includes procedures and ongoing management for the protection of the environment.

Long-term Net Benefits to Climate Resiliency: The Project will result in long-term net benefits to climate resiliency by reducing the risk and severity of catastrophic wildfire through the strategic alteration of fuel loads in chaparral communities and the reintroduction of low intensity fire to grassland and oak woodland communities. These treatments will reduce the risk of more frequent, high intensity and large-scale fire events, and the associated release of greenhouse gases and post-fire invasive vegetation type conversion. Furthermore, prescribed burning in grasslands will be timed to target the reduction of non-native plant species, and promote the growth of diverse native species with greater carbon sequestration potential. Enhancement of oak woodlands through understory treatment and removal of pest infected trees will improve the health of the woodland habitat in the face of increasing climate stressors including long and more intense droughts, and intensifying scale and range of plant pathogens.

Long-term Net Benefits to Biodiversity: The Project will result in long-term net benefits to biodiversity by reducing the potential for catastrophic wildfire through the strategic alteration of fuel loads in chaparral communities and the reintroduction of low-intensity fire to grassland and oak woodland communities. Prescribed burning in grasslands will reduce the abundance of non-native invasive species and promote the growth of diverse native plant species such as narrowleaf milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*), showy penstemon (*Penstemon spectabilis*), deer weed (*Acmispon glaber*), winecup clarkia (*Clarkia purpurea*), Parish's bluecurls (*Trichostema parishii*), Coulter's snapdragon (*Antirrhinum coulterianum*), and various Phacelia and Calochortus species. This may in turn increase the diversity of native pollinators such as California carpenter bee (*Xylocopa californica*), monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), and various other bee species, including bumble bees (*Bombus* sp.), digger bees (*Anthophorini*), and sweat bees (*Halictidae*) species. Creating a more fire resilient growth pattern in existing dense, enclosed chaparral communities will allow for the growth of chaparral species that prefer a more disturbed or otherwise open canopy.

Long-term Net Benefits to Sensitive Species Recovery: The Project would benefit Crotch's bumble bee, western spadefoot toad, and other fire-adaptive sensitive species by enhancing the Parks overall habitat suitability through mimicking historical fire regimes. This will be accomplished through the Project's prescribed burning activities, which will burn small plots over several years, creating diverse seral stages of grassland vegetation throughout the landscape. Strategically timed prescribed burning will also help to limit invasive species and promote native biodiversity. This

Project has been discussed with Xerxes Society to evaluate the Project's net benefit to Crotch's bumble bee.

The Project site is also located adjacent to a primary migratory corridor for western burrowing owl. There is a heavy fossorial mammal population throughout the Park, which is critical for creating suitable natural burrows for burrowing owls to inhabit. Grassland restoration via prescribed burning of thatch and an associated reduction in overall vegetation height and density will provide ideal burrowing owl habitat.

Both Yucaipa onion and Parry's spineflower occur within the Project area as well. Yucaipa onion is dependent upon clay-soil openings in chaparral. Therefore, creating openings within the chaparral will improve potential habitat for this species. Prescribed burning of grasslands and manual infrastructure treatment will also benefit Parry's spineflower, by reducing shrub canopy density to create a more open habitat structure.

Procedures for the Protection of the Environment: Avoidance, minimization, and conservation measures will be implemented during the Project to avoid and minimize impacts on sensitive resources, and to protect the environment to the greatest extent feasible. Established best management practices and California Board of Forestry's Forest Practice Rules and operational standards will be implemented as part of the Project and include protection from vegetation disturbance in the Watercourse and Lake Protection Zones as appropriate. Protection measures will also include erosion and dust control measures, and inspections for wildlife and equipment leaks prior to implementation of the Project. Avoidance and minimization measures related to the habitat protection will be enforced and will include procedures to address native vegetation communities and plants, special-status plants, invasive plants, protection of nesting birds, and protection of wildlife species. Furthermore, equipment will be kept on existing roads and trails to the extent possible; a qualified biologist will train all crew members and contractors about decontamination of equipment prior to entering the Park, specifically with regard to mud and seed dispersal; work stoppages will occur when predicted precipitation events and conditions in which saturated soil may increase erosion and impacts to habitat occur; all staging areas and fueling or maintenance of vehicles and equipment will occur outside of sensitive habitat areas.

Ongoing Management for the Protection of the Environment:

The Project is designed to be implemented through 2040 and will include ongoing management through an adaptive management approach. CAL FIRE and State Parks plan to conduct maintenance of all proposed treatments. Treatment areas requiring maintenance re-entries will be identified on an annual basis. To ensure Project goals and objectives are being met, as climate and other environmental conditions change in the future, an adaptive management approach will be taken. A Project monitoring strategy will be developed to inform any necessary changes to treatment types, location, and prescriptions. The monitoring program will include pre-treatment survey transects conducted on all sites identified for treatment within a given year. In the long term, the Park is expected to remain under State Parks management and will be managed and maintained in line with State Parks' maintenance protocols.

- D. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (d), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project does not include any construction activities, except those solely related to habitat restoration.

The Project will not include any construction activities. All Project activities, including the use of any heavy machinery to prepare for prescribed fire events and/or forest thinning, are solely for the purpose of habitat restoration.

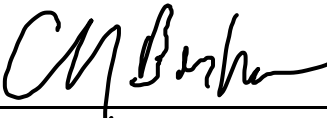
Scope and Reservation of Concurrence

This Concurrence is based on the proposed Project as described by the Lead Agency Determination and the Request. If there are any subsequent changes to the Project that affect or otherwise change the Lead Agency Determination, the Lead Agency, or any other public agency that proposes to carry out or approve the Project, shall submit a new lead agency determination and request for concurrence from CDFW pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56. If any other public agency proposes to carry out or approve the Project subsequent to the effective date of this Concurrence, this Concurrence shall remain in effect and no separate concurrence from CDFW shall be required so long as the other public agency is carrying out or approving the Project as described by the Lead Agency Determination and the Request.

Other Legal Obligations

The Project shall remain subject to all other applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and this Concurrence shall not weaken or violate any applicable environmental or public health standards. (Pub. Resources Code, § 21080.56, subd. (f).)

CDFW Director's Certification

By: _____

Charlton H. Bonham, Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Date: 12/29/2025