



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-21-78
Meeting 21-18
June 9, 2021

AGENDA ITEM 8

AGENDA ITEM

Contract Amendment for the American Badger and Burrowing Owl Habitat Suitability Study

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION *den*

Authorize the General Manager to increase the contract amount by \$15,750 for a new base contract amount of \$230,000, with San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and sub-consultant Pathways for Wildlife, for additional biological analysis and publication services that will inform management actions for protecting American Badger and Burrowing Owl populations. Additional analysis costs will amount to \$6,750 and publication costs will amount to \$9,000.

SUMMARY

The American Badger and Burrowing Owl Habitat Suitability Study (Study) is generating valuable baseline ecological information to inform the management of both of these California Species of Special Concern (SSC) that are found in multiple locations on Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) lands. In 2018, the Board of Directors (Board) approved a contract for San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and sub-consultant Pathways for Wildlife (Consultant) to perform the Study for a base contract amount of \$214,250 and authorized a 10% contingency amount of \$21,425. Additional funds are now requested to support data analysis not previously scoped for improved Study results, and for publication of the Study results in peer-reviewed journals. This contract amendment would increase the contract amount by \$15,750.

DISCUSSION

In 2018, the Board approved a contract for the Consultant to perform the Study (R-18-136), which began in early 2019. This contract amendment will increase the contract amount by \$15,750 to support additional data analysis and extend the contract term to afford time for publication of Study results, as discussed in more detail below. In 2021, \$12,000 of the available contingency was authorized for the continuance of genetic sampling work that had been impacted due to COVID-19 and the 2020 wildfire events. Approximately \$9,500 in contingency funds remain that will likely be unspent to complete the original and new proposed scope of work.

Additional Data Analysis

Additional data analysis is recommended to perform a more thorough assessment of species distribution throughout the entire San Francisco Peninsula. The status of regional species distribution will provide District staff with stronger management recommendations. This analysis will include data collected on District Preserves under this contract and on other lands, from data acquired during the project as additional agencies became aware of and began to

participate in the Study through their own means, outside of the original contract. This particular data analysis task was not contemplated or included in the original scope of work; since then, new opportunities for collaboration with other external research projects have emerged that offer the ability to leverage resources to evaluate species distribution on a larger, regional scale.

The Consultant observed that surveys were more difficult in preserves in the southern area of the District because habitats suitable for American badger are smaller and more fragmented than habitats in northern District preserves. This led to a hypothesis that badgers occurring in the peninsula may be an isolated population with extremely limited connectivity to coastal or eastern habitats. Supplementing the existing Study data (within District Preserves) with secondary information (e.g. wildlife camera observations) from external studies will:

1. Provide presence/absence information not collected through the existing contract scope;
2. Help determine the accuracy of the isolated population hypothesis; and
3. Assist in ground-truthing the Study's original linkage analysis (which modeled connectivity on and across District lands to surrounding lands) with observations made after the Consultant's initial data compilation in 2019.

Manuscript Preparation for Publication

It is clear that Study results generated to date are substantial enough to be publishable in peer reviewed scientific journals to add to the scientific body of knowledge for American badger. This is especially important because little is known about American badger ecology and distribution on the San Francisco Peninsula. Published findings are a known reliable and accessible way to reach the broader scientific and resource management community with this valuable information. Published findings will also support more research, inform understanding of how peninsula badgers connect to neighboring populations, and can ultimately inform regional management initiatives. The District would be acknowledged as project creators, facilitators, and funders, and individual District staff will potentially be represented as co-authors. The contract amendment also includes a presentation of Study results at a public Board meeting as another opportunity to communicate this information to the broader public.

Publishing the Study results also supports objectives in the District's Resource Management Policies:

- Policy RC-2: Coordinate and cooperate with institutions, agencies, organizations, and individuals conducting resource management or research.
 - Explore partnerships and foster relationships with educational institutions, scientists, and other land management professionals to share information and resources and to develop cooperative information sharing between the District and other agencies.
 - Sponsor or participate in events and activities such as symposiums, workshops, and conferences that support scientific research and sound resource management practices.
- Policy RC-3: Undertake original research necessary for planning or management decisions. Carefully research existing information and explore opportunities for cooperative studies to collect additional information

While the Study, final report, and recommendations for the District will be complete by April 2022, the contract term will be extended to 2024 to allow for manuscript review and revision. It is estimated to take a minimum of four months and up to two years from manuscript submission

to publication. As an example, the recent April 2021 San Francisco garter snake publication in the journal *Biological Conservation* for which District staff was a co-author was based on research conducted on District Preserves from 2014 to 2017.

FISCAL IMPACT

The Fiscal Year 2021-22 proposed budget includes \$24,239 for the Badger/Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessment project #80054. There are sufficient funds in the projected project budget to cover the recommended action and expenditures.

Badger/Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessment 80054	Prior Year Actuals	FY21 Amended	FY22 Projected	FY23 Projected	Estimated Future Years	TOTAL
Total Budget:	\$140,620	\$71,000	\$24,239	\$0	\$0	\$235,859
Spent-to-Date (as of 05/14/2021):	(\$140,620)	(\$32,419)	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$173,039)
Encumbrances:	\$0	(\$29,581)	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$29,581)
San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory Contract Amendment:	\$0	\$0	(\$15,750)	\$0	\$0	(\$15,750)
Budget Remaining (Proposed):	\$0	\$9,000	\$8,489	\$0	\$0	\$17,489

The recommended action is not funded by Measure AA.

BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

November 2018 – original contract approved on consent by Board of Directors. ([R-18-136, meeting minutes](#)).

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

NEXT STEPS

Following Board approval, the General Manager will direct staff to amend the contract with San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory (Consultant). The Consultant will complete field surveys and genetic sample collection by August 2021. The Consultant will complete a final draft report for District staff review by April 2022. A manuscript will be prepared and submitted to begin the peer reviewed publication process beginning in July 2022.

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