



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-25-113
Meeting 25-24
August 27, 2025

AGENDA ITEM 4

AGENDA ITEM

Grant Application with the California Wildlife Conservation Board for the Highway 17 Wildlife Undercrossing Project

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

(57) *den*

Adopt a resolution authorizing the General Manager to apply for up to \$13,000,000 in grant funding and negotiate a subsequent grant agreement, if awarded, from the California Wildlife Conservation Board for the Highway 17 Wildlife Undercrossing Project.

SUMMARY

The General Manager recommends that the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) Board of Directors (Board) adopt a resolution authorizing the General Manager to apply for up to \$13,000,000 in grant funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) and negotiate a grant agreement, if awarded. This grant would provide critical funding for construction of the Highway 17 Wildlife Undercrossing Project.

DISCUSSION

In alignment with the 2019 update to the Wildlife Conservation Board's (WCB) Strategic Plan, several grant funding sources are available to support projects that achieve one or more of the Strategic Plan's benefits. These benefits include protected or enhanced biodiversity; support of the State Wildlife Action Plan priority habitats; climate change resiliency and connectivity; conserved or enhanced working landscapes; conserved or enhanced water-related projects; and enhanced public access. The Grants Program has identified the Highway 17 Wildlife Undercrossing Project as a project meeting the criteria.

The Highway 17 Wildlife Undercrossing Project would improve wildlife passage at a known roadkill hot spot to safely connect 30,000 acres of protected open space habitat for local wildlife. Mountain lion, American badger and black-tailed deer are targeted mammal species that will benefit from this project. Highway 17 currently blocks wildlife from migrating between mountain ridges for food, mates, and shelter, thus acting as a barrier for genetic diversity among the populations. In fact, concerns regarding the low genetic diversity for mountain lions has led the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to list mountain lions as a candidate species under the California Endangered Species Act within the central coast evolutionary significant unit, which includes the Santa Cruz Mountains. The American badger is already considered uncommon and is listed as a California State Species of Special Concern.

In addition to mountain lions and badgers, many other wildlife are impacted in attempts to cross the highway, including hundreds of deer each year, as well as other native species such as coyote, bobcat, skunk, gray fox, opossum, and reptile and amphibian species. Providing a safe crossing for wildlife will not only significantly reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions that kill wildlife but also increase road safety for drivers along a heavily traveled highway.

The potential funding from this grant opportunity would support the construction of a year-round wildlife crossing under Highway 17. The crossing infrastructure will include 1.7 miles of directional fencing on each side of the highway, masonry sound walls above the undercrossing and running along both shoulders of the road, 23 wildlife escape ramps placed every 500 feet within the fencing area, and deterrents to keep animals from entering the highway at vehicle ingress/egress points where fencing cannot be installed.

This Highway 17 Wildlife Undercrossing Project meets the benefit criteria in the current WCB 2019 Strategic Plan and it aligns with Priority B1.2 in their draft 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, which states: *Each year, invest in at least three wildlife under-or over-crossing projects in locations deemed high priority by both transportation and fish and wildlife agencies.* The project also aligns with local and statewide goals, including the 2019 Santa Clara County Regional Conservation Investment Strategy, which identified the Highway 17 Undercrossing Project as a core area for mountain lion connectivity that can be greatly enhanced as a least-cost corridor compared to other barrier sites. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) also lists the Highway 17 Wildlife Undercrossing among its 12 priority connectivity projects for the state and one of the top two projects for CDFW Region 3-San Francisco Bay Delta Region.

WCB requires a resolution to apply for grant funding from the District's Board prior to reviewing the project and potentially awarding funds up to \$13,000,000. The resolution (Attachment 1) authorizes the General Manager or their designee to sign the application for WCB funds and to execute a grant agreement for the funding, if awarded.

FISCAL IMPACT

Upon review and approval by WCB, this funding opportunity would have a positive impact of up to \$13,000,000.

PRIOR BOARD OR COMMITTEE REVIEW

None

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

Submitting grant applications to secure funding is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The WCB requires that grantees comply with CEQA and certify that the CEQA analysis for any project encompasses all aspects of the work to be completed with grant funds.

NEXT STEPS

If approved by the Board, District staff will complete a WCB grant application for the Highway 17 Wildlife Undercrossing Project and the General Manager will submit the grant application to the WCB for consideration. Upon review and approval by WCB, District staff will work with WCB staff to develop a grant agreement for grant funding that the General Manager can execute.

Attachment

1. Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Approving the Application for a Wildlife Conservation Board Grant for the Highway 17 Undercrossing Project

Responsible Department Head:

Stefan Jaskulak, Chief Financial Officer, Administrative Services

Prepared by / Staff contact:

Carol Schimke, Grants Program Manager, Administrative Services

RESOLUTION NO. 25-____

RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT APPROVING THE APPLICATION FOR A WILDLIFE CONSERVATION BOARD GRANT FOR THE HIGHWAY 17 UNDERCROSSING PROJECT

WHEREAS, funds were made available to the Wildlife Conservation Board for the enhancement or restoration of fish and wildlife habitat and for the development of public access facilities for hunting, fishing or other wildlife-oriented recreational uses; and

WHEREAS, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District intends that the Highway 17 Undercrossing Project will complete construction of a year-round wildlife crossing under Highway 17.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District hereby:

1. Approves the filing of an application for funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board.
2. Certifies the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District will comply with all federal, state and local environmental, public health, and other appropriate laws and regulations applicable to the project and will obtain or will ensure that the other project partners obtain all appropriate permits applicable to the project.
3. Further commits to the terms and conditions specified in the grant agreement.
4. Authorizes the General Manager or designee as a representative of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District to conduct negotiations, execute, submit and sign all documents including but not limited to applications, agreements, amendments, payment requests, and other documents which may be necessary to administer grant funding for the proposed project, except as limited pursuant to Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District policies.

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PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District on August 27, 2025, at a regular meeting thereof, by the following roll call vote:

- AYES:**
NOES:
ABSTAIN:
ABSENT:

ATTEST:

APPROVED:

Zoe Kersteen-Tucker, Secretary
Board of Directors

Jed Cyr, President
Board of Directors

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Hilary Stevenson, General Counsel

I, the District Clerk of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of a resolution duly adopted by the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District by the above vote at a meeting thereof duly held and called on the above day.

Maria Soria, District Clerk