



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

PROCUREMENT AGENDA ITEM

R-26-82
Meeting 26-16
June 10, 2026

AGENDA ITEM 5

AGENDA ITEM

Contract Amendment with Creekside Center for Earth Observation for the Study of Biochar Effects to Grassland Ecosystems

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

Authorize the General Manager to amend a contract with Creekside Center for Earth Observation in the amount of \$39,989, with an additional 10% (\$6,575) in contingency funds, to revise the study plan for a new study site and conduct preliminary site surveys and soil testing, bringing the contract to a new total amount of \$72,330.

DISCUSSION

On December 1, 2023, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) entered into an agreement with Creekside Center for Earth Observation (Creekside) under the General Manager's authority for a not-to-exceed amount of \$19,982, later amended to a not-to-exceed amount of \$25,766, to conduct a biochar study for informing carbon resilient land management practices. The purpose of the study is to investigate the effects of amending grassland soils with biochar – a relatively inert, carbon-rich substance similar to charcoal – as a potential mechanism for increasing carbon sequestration in grassland ecosystems.

Resource Management Policy XVI – *Climate Change* directs the District to “Increase carbon sequestration in vegetation and soils,” including to “evaluate, study, and implement additional land management strategies” for this specific goal and purpose. Biochar has demonstrated benefits as a soil amendment in agriculture and has been well-studied in that context. However, studies in wildland or restoration contexts are rare and the effects on California grassland native vegetation and soil types are not well understood. Therefore, the District is developing a study to examine the effects at a previously disturbed site to determine if biochar can be safely applied in native natural areas. The study will measure the response of native vegetation, soil chemistry, and soil structure to the application of biochar. Results of the study will inform whether the District should consider applying biochar in the future to grasslands, or whether it should only be considered for highly disturbed areas such as disk-line restorations.

In Phase I of this project, Creekside developed a study design, including a five-year monitoring plan, for a site at Rancho San Antonio County Park (site is currently managed under a time-limited agreement by the District). This study site was selected due to its heavily disturbed and flat condition, with low risk if the biochar application resulted in negative effects. The site was

approved by Santa Clara County Parks (County) prior to commencing the study design in 2023. At the time, it was anticipated that the District and the County would seamlessly enter into a new, multi-year management agreement for managing Rancho San Antonio County Park. Currently, the District is under a short-term 1-year agreement, which was extended for one additional year ending on June 30, 2027. Although negotiations are underway, it is unclear as of the writing of this report whether an extension or new, similar management agreement will be possible. Given the uncertainty regarding the long-term management of the site, it is prudent to switch the study location to accommodate its five-year monitoring period, which is necessary to understand the long-term effects of a biochar application.

In fall 2025, a new study site was identified adjacent to the Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve “Circle Lot” (Attachment 1). In addition to the benefit of District ownership, the Skyline Ridge location includes soils and vegetation more representative of other District grasslands, which will make the results of the study more broadly informative to future biochar projects. The differences between the Skyline Ridge and Rancho San Antonio site, such as slope and soil conditions, necessitate adjustments to the study design, soil testing and vegetation surveys. Thus, an amendment to the contract is needed to revise the details of the study.

The proposed contract amendment for \$39,989 plus \$6,575 in contingency will allow the consultant to revise the study design and apply the design to the new site. This is a larger cost than the original study design because new soil testing and vegetation surveys are more extensive at the new site given the greater variety of soil types and vegetation present.

BUDGET / FISCAL IMPACT

The current fiscal year budget contains:

- sufficient funds.
- insufficient funds; the next quarterly budget update will include a reallocation of unspent funds from other budgets to cover for this expenditure.
- insufficient funds; approval of this item requires a fiscal year budget augmentation.
- future fiscal year budgets will include additional funds to complete the contracted work.

Measure AA

- No, this contract is not part of a Measure AA project.
- Yes, this contract is part of a Measure AA project.

PROCUREMENT PROCESS AND SELECTION

A Request for Proposals and Qualifications was posted on September 1, 2023, and emailed to a list of trusted vendors. Two firms attended the mandatory pre-proposal meeting, Creekside and AECOM. Following the pre-proposal meeting, these two firms elected to submit a joint proposal with Creekside as the primary consultant and AECOM as a subconsultant. This was the only proposal received. The firm was determined to be qualified to perform the scope of work at a fair and reasonable price. The contract was awarded with scope and funds for Phase I of the project (study design) leaving the specific tasks and budget for Phase II (implementation) to be refined based on the completed study design.

Consultant	Location	Proposed Fee
Creekside Center for Earth Observation	Los Gatos, CA	\$19,982

PRIOR BOARD ACTION SUPPORTING THE PROJECT

None

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided to the Natural Resource Management and Skyline Preserve interested parties lists as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

The Environmental Impact Report (EIR, State Clearing House Number 2013092033) prepared for the Integrated Pest Management Program, which the Board approved on December 10, 2014 ([R-14-148](#), [Minutes](#)), analyzed vegetation management activities consistent with those in the recommended contract. The project and contract documents will incorporate the associated mitigation measures and BMPs from the environmental review.

The Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (ISMND, State Clearing House Number 2021080129) prepared for the Open Space Maintenance and Restoration Program, which the Board approved on September 22, 2021 ([R-21-126](#), [Minutes](#)), analyzed the restoration activities consistent with those in the recommended contract. The project and contract documents will incorporate the associated mitigation measures and BMPs from the environmental review.

NEXT STEPS

Pending Board approval, the General Manager will amend the contract with Creekside Center for Earth Observation. Site surveys to inform the changes to the study design would begin with soil sampling in late summer or fall of 2026 (Q1 Fiscal Year 2027).

Attachment:

1. Study Location at Skyline Ridge OSP

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