



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

R-13-105  
Meeting 13-32  
November 20, 2013

## **AGENDA ITEM 3**

### **AGENDA ITEM**

Authorization to enter into a Technical Assistance Agreement (Agreement) with the US Geological Survey (USGS), to perform professional services as a Biological Consultant for the District conducting population monitoring and analysis of the San Francisco garter snake (SFGS) at the Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve.

### **GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION**

Authorize the General Manager to enter into a two year agreement, with an option to extend the agreement for a term not to exceed four total years, with the US Geological Survey, located in Dixon, CA, for a not-to-exceed total amount of \$203,703.56. This is for monitoring and analysis of the San Francisco garter snake (SFGS) population, at specific locations within the Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve (Preserve).

### **SUMMARY**

A Request for Proposals was issued on July 11, 2013. Five well qualified firms submitted proposals on July 31, 2013. The top three highest ranking and most cost effective firms were interviewed by a panel consisting of District staff members. After interviews were completed, the consultant that exhibited the highest professional rigor in its response to the RFP was the US Geological Survey (USGS). Therefore, staff recommends entering into an agreement with the USGS to conduct a baseline SFGS population survey (Project) for a total not-to-exceed amount of \$203,703.56.

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Background**

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) acquired a 1,047 acre addition to Russian Ridge in 2008 that had documented occurrences of SFGS as early as 1986. However, no additional sightings had been recorded prior to District acquisition and current status of the species at the site was unknown. Consultant surveys in 2010 and 2012 confirmed the continued presence of SFGS at multiple locations throughout the site and documented evidence of successful reproduction (through the presence of young snakes). What remains unknown is the relative abundance of the species at the site. The District is required to conduct a baseline population estimate in order to comply with permitting requirements of wildlife regulatory agencies who may issue permits to the District to implement important species recovery efforts

at the site. These efforts include such activities as grazing, routine Preserve maintenance, wetland enhancement projects, and building demolition. All of the activities for which the District is seeking approval from federal and state wildlife agencies have been identified in the proposed Use and Management Plan for Mindego Ranch which is currently under CEQA review and is currently scheduled to be brought to the Board for final approval in December of 2013.

Survey efforts are anticipated to begin April 1 of each year, however, based on District monitoring of SFGS activity at the project site, surveys may need to begin earlier or later each year because early spring SFGS population activity is anticipated to fluctuate during the study period, possibly beginning as early as March.

### **Consultant Selection**

The Request for Proposals and Qualifications was issued on July 11, 2013 and was sent to (15) persons at 11 different firms or agencies. The list of consultants notified was generated with input from both the US Fish and Wildlife and California Department of Fish and Wildlife, as only those persons/firms who currently hold a permit to work with this special status species were solicited. The SFGS is extremely rare and limited only to the San Francisco peninsula, so there are very few persons/firms qualified to work with this species. By soliciting only those currently permitted, the District had some assurance that the selected consultant could commence work on the earliest possible start date in spring 2014.

A pre-bid meeting was held at the Project site on July 22, 2013 and was attended by four (4) consultants. Sealed proposals were due on July 31, 2013, and five proposals were received and reviewed.

Upon review of the proposals and the consultants' qualifications and references, three firms were selected for interviews. Based on their initial response to the RFP and clarifying responses provided during the subsequent interview, staff recommends entering into an agreement with the USGS to conduct this work.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The FY2013-14 budget contains funds to begin this work in March of 2014. Surveys are expected to continue into April and beyond (based on observed SFGS activity) in FY2014-15 and will be included in that fiscal year's budget for the Natural Resources Department. An estimated \$50,000 each fiscal year will be required for up to four years for a not to exceed total amount of \$203,703.56 to conduct the on the ground sampling, compiling of annual data, reporting, and publication of results.

The total amount was negotiated from within the range of costs and associated services that the USGS could provide to the District. The total budget amount assumes that the USGS would complete all of the annual monitoring and analysis over the next four years (assuming the contract was extended for the additional two years), however, costs associated with this project are anticipated to decrease annually as the USGS trains District staff who will in turn will take on portions of the yearly monitoring and analysis duties. Any unexpended funds each year are anticipated to be used as a contingency for any unanticipated costs.

The FY2013-14 Natural Resources Department Action Plan Budget included \$47,000 for survey efforts. However only a portion of these costs are anticipated to be expended this fiscal year, as

the majority of SFGS work is anticipated to begin after April 1, 2014 (the beginning of the District's next fiscal year). Funds budgeted in FY 2013-14 allow the District flexibility in start dates based on SFGS activity and allows for training and purchase of equipment to occur in March prior to beginning the main survey efforts in April, which will be included in the FY2014-15 budget.

### **BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW**

No Board Committee review is required for the Project.

### **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Public notice of this Agenda Item was provided per the Brown Act. No additional notice is required. However, notification, including this report, will also be sent to adjacent and nearby property owners.

### **CEQA COMPLIANCE**

This project consists of a biological research conducted on District lands. The research study will be conducted by qualified biological professionals under a study design approved by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game.

Initiating the research does not constitute a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as it will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment [CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(2)]. Any proposed future actions will be subject to environmental review to be completed at a later date, prior to any physical implementation.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Upon approval by the Board of Directors, the General Manager will be authorized to enter into an agreement with the US Geologic Survey to perform baseline population studies for SFGS at the District's Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve. The District anticipates that a total of up to 4 years will be required to complete the study with a high degree of statistical success. After two years of survey, the District may be able to complete some or all of the survey tasks on its own. If the final 2 years of survey efforts cannot be completed by the District on its own, the District may choose to extend the contract with USGS for up to another 2 years (based on successful performance) to complete all or some of the remaining tasks. Results of the study will better describe SFGS demographics at the site including a population estimate, a determination if the population is increasing or decreasing over the course of the study and estimated growth or contraction rates. Baseline data may also be used to help the District determine if District activities or projects are having positive or negative impacts to SFGS at the site. Year one field work is anticipated to begin in March or April of 2014, based on staff observations of SFGS activity at the site. District staff will attend a biological monitoring training offered by the USGS for the project and will work alongside onsite USGS staff to conduct the surveys. This level of participation by District staff will allow them to gain important experience working hands on with species in order to eventually become permitted by state and federal wildlife agencies to conduct this type of research effort in house in future study years.

The USGS will release up to two peer-reviewed publications reporting on the results of research findings and will also present the findings at two appropriate international conferences, such as the Joint Meeting of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists and annual meeting of The Wildlife Society. USGS will also provide annual reports and one final report to the District on the annual abundance and distribution of San Francisco garter snakes at the project site, with recommendations and a decision support tool for ongoing and future habitat management.

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