



**M E M O R A N D U M**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING DIVISION**  
County of Placer

TO: Board of Supervisors DATE: April 13, 2021  
FROM: Ken Grehm, Director of Public Works  
By: Brett Storey, Principal Management Analyst  
SUBJECT: Middle Fork Project / Fuel Reduction Management Program Phase I Funding  
Recommendations for 2021

---

**ACTION REQUESTED**

Approve \$148,500 in funding for the Fuel Reduction Management Program for the Middle Fork Project and authorize the Director of Public Works, or designee, to sign funding agreements with the City of Auburn, on behalf of its Department of Public Safety, and the Iowa Hill Community Club on behalf of Foresthill/Iowa Hill Fire Safe Council. Funding is provided pursuant to the Middle Fork Project Memorandum of Agreement.

**BACKGROUND**

At the June 3, 2014 Board of Supervisors meeting, your Board approved the Fuel Reduction Management (FRM) Program. The FRM Program provides funds annually for the duration of the federal license for the Middle Fork Project (MFP) to organizations that propose projects or have programs that 1) have a direct nexus to the MFP area, and 2) show the potential to reduce fire danger through some form of fuel management projects. The MFP area is a critical forested watershed and its protection is of paramount importance to Placer County. The MFP is a multi-purpose water supply and hydro-electric generation project designed to conserve and control waters of the Middle Fork American River, the Rubicon River, and several associated tributary streams.

The FRM Program includes a semi-annual application period (January for Phase I and June for Phase II) that provides participating organizations the opportunity to coordinate FRM funding with other grant funding timelines. Funding for these requests is available pursuant to the MFP Memorandum of Agreement with Placer County Water Agency which administers MFP budgeted funding, at no net County cost. Funding for this year's grant is contained within Fuel Reduction Projects/Middle Fork Trust Fund. This fund is replenished annually to be distributed for this Program.

For the January 2021 Phase I of the Program, staff received three grant requests and recommends funding all projects as they met all the FRM criteria and directly support fuel reduction in the MFP area:

- 1) City of Auburn Department of Public Safety: \$49,500 for MFP portion of American River Canyon Shaded Fuel Break – Maintenance
- 2) Iowa Hill Community Club: \$49,500 for MFP portion of Michigan Bluff Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project - Phase 3
- 3) Iowa Hill Community Club: \$49,500 for MFP portion of Michigan Bluff Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project - Phase 4

The details of the projects are included in the attachment titled Fuel Reduction Management Program Recommendations for 2021 Phase I.

Staff has developed a standardized FRM Grant Agreement. Copies of the proposed agreements are on file with the Clerk of the Board.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

Staff's recommendation provides partial grant funding to previously approved California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) projects. Each grantee performed that CEQA determination. This action does not constitute a "Project" under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to CEQA Guidelines sections 15378(a) and (b)(5) because it is an administrative action that does not result in any direct or physical change in the environment.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

Funding for MFP FRM program projects is budgeted in the FY 2020-21 Community and Agency Support appropriation, with reimbursements from the Fuel Reduction Projects/Middle Fork Trust Fund, pursuant to the Middle Fork Project Memorandum of Agreement with Placer County Water Agency which administers MFP budgeted funding. The total grant funding for projects in 2021 Phase I is \$148,500.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Fuel Reduction Management Program Recommendations for 2021 Phase I

On File with Clerk of the Board: Grant Agreement with City of Auburn Department of Public Safety:  
American River Canyon Shaded Fuel Break – Maintenance

Grant Agreement Iowa Hill Community Club: Michigan Bluff  
Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project - Phase 3

Grant Agreement Iowa Hill Community Club: Michigan Bluff  
Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project - Phase 4

### ***Fuel Reduction Management Program Recommendations for 2021 (Phase I)***

***Background:*** The Placer County Board of Supervisors (BOS) adopted the Fuel Reduction Management (FRM) Program in 2014 to implement a program that funds projects that perform fuel management activities that support a reduction in potential fire in the Middle Fork Project (MFP) nexus area. The funding available is pursuant to the Middle Fork Project Memorandum of Agreement with Placer County Water Agency (PCWA) and based upon a nexus to the MFP area.

***Process:*** The BOS-adopted FRM Program allows for the application period to be twice annually; once in January and once in June. Three applications were received by two organizations and were reviewed by a joint Placer County/PCWA staff panel and the following recommendations for projects have been proposed.

***Individual Projects Recommendations:*** The following projects were reviewed by staff to meet all FRM Program qualifications and are recommended for funding in the FRM Program. Staff is recommending a total of \$148,500 in funding to the Placer County Board of Supervisors.

***Individual Projects declined:*** There were no applications declined during this phase of 2021.

## **Project Recommendation #1**

Title: American River Canyon Shaded Fuel Break – Maintenance

Applicant: City of Auburn Department of Public Safety

County Plan project references: 1) Western Slope Placer County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), 2) DMA 2000 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (FEMA approved), and 3) the Greater Auburn Area Fire Safe Council (GAAFSC) Strategic Plan.

Total Project Cost: \$125,000

Application agency contribution: \$75,500

Request of funds: \$49,500

**Recommendation of funds: \$49,500 (maximum amount allowed 40% of total project or \$49,500)**

Summary of Project: The objective of the American River Canyon Shaded Fuel Break proposed project is to provide a means of protection to the Auburn community from the disaster of wildfire, preserve our natural and cultural resources, enhance our watershed, support wildlife habitat, and maintain recreational opportunities to the pristine American River and Auburn State Recreation Area.

The project area will encompass approximately 45 acres where maintenance will be applied. Fuel arrangement and continuity are comprised of ground fuels; annual grasses and forbes, intertwined with the brush and some developing ladder fuels in the project area. Vegetation maintenance will primarily be by livestock; goats for natural, ecologically sensitive control of the regrowth of weeds and brush, an efficient, cost-effective reduction of fuel for fire danger management. In the case that livestock is not suitable for the maintenance in these project areas vegetation will be removed by hand, using hand saws, pole saws, and chainsaws. Cut materials will be hauled, stacked in piles, and chipped with a mechanical chipper. Chipped materials will be scattered within the project area and left on site for natural decomposition and soil stability enhancement. Although the prescription allows for pile burning this project has been planned with the livestock and chipping components (if needed) to 1) avoid smoke issues, 2) create a more complete project by cutting and chipping or grazing, and 3) avoid additional crew time for pile burning. Burning may be used in some cases to eliminate invasive plant species instead of chipping where the broadcast of material may expand such species.

This project is crucial to reduce destruction from wildfire and is critical to the watershed. These areas are in drainages known as “chutes” or “chimneys” - very steep V shaped canyons with massive fuel loads of natural vegetation when during a wildfire will burn with fierce intensity and cause major destruction to any structures as well as the land itself. Fire professionals are extremely concerned when any wildfire occurs in drainages because fuels burn extremely rapidly, there is limited success in fire suppression efforts because of terrain, and such areas are an extreme safety concern for firefighting personnel and surrounding development due to intense fire behavior. The 2012 Robbers Fire, the 2013 American Fire, the 2015 King Fire in the upper American River Watershed System, and the recent Trailhead Fire all encountered intense fire behavior in such drainages.

The project area encompasses private lands and is part of the overall American River Canyon Shaded Fuel Break. In 2019-2021 the adjacent public lands where and is treated through a CAL FIRE grant administered by the Placer County Resource Conservation District. This 1.9-million-dollar grant will apply approximately \$75,500.00 to the adjacent public lands for crew work on Bureau of Reclamation lands. These requested funds will cover ground maintenance work with a nexus to the public lands. In addition, it is estimated that the City of Auburn Fire Department will match “in-kind” through staff coordination and project implementation time approximately \$2,000.00.

## **Project Recommendation #2**

Title: Michigan Bluff Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project - Phase 3

Applicant: Foresthill/Iowa Hill Firesafe Council

County Plan project references: 1) Western Slope Placer County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), 2) DMA 2000 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (FEMA approved), 3) Cal Fire Unit Fore Plan, and 4) the Foresthill/Iowa Hill Risk Assessment Mitigation Systems Plan.

Total Project Cost: \$124,100

Application agency contribution: \$74,600

Request of funds: \$49,500

**Recommendation of funds: \$49,500 (maximum amount allowed 40% of total project or \$49,500)**

Summary of Project: Historically, there have been several wildfires in the area, ranging from 500 acres to several thousand. The most recent fire to threaten Michigan

Bluff was the American Fire that started in the canyon near the historic area of Deadwood on August 10, 2013 and burned 27,440 acres.

Statistics show that fire events in the local area have started from abandoned campfires, lightning strikes, vehicle fires, and downed powerlines. These statistics are a prime example of what could be anticipated in a local fire event in the Michigan Bluff area. These fires were all within, or adjacent to, the Middle Fork of the American River near the communities of Michigan Bluff, Baker Ranch, and Foresthill. This area is classified as a "Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone" by Cal Fire and is listed in the Federal Register as "Communities at Risk". Fire danger is an ever-existing threat to the area, particularly since the great outdoors and recreation have become so popular. Many hikers, fisherman, and outdoor enthusiasts use this area, posing a real potential for an inadvertent wildfire. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have realized this fire danger and are currently working on hazard fuel reduction projects on their lands. Placer County Community Wildfire Protection Plan states its goal is to reduce the risk of wildfire near communities on the west slope of the Sierra Nevada in Placer County by identifying and prioritizing projects that will reduce hazardous fuels in and adjacent to communities. It is the hopes of these communities and the Foresthill/Iowa Hill Firesafe Council (FH/IHFSC) that working with Cal Fire, BLM, USFS, Placer County Resource Conservation District (RCD), and the Placer County Firesafe Alliance (PCFSA) can tie these existing projects together, creating a sustainable continuous Hazard Fuels Reduction area to help protect the Natural, Historic, and Private assets of these communities. Once this is complete, the ability to restore and maintain ecosystems with the reintroduction of low intensity fire in this area could be accomplished, as well as protecting the invaluable watershed. Recently, the FH/IHFSC, with cooperation from the Iowa Hill Community Club, received \$200,000 to implement the Michigan Bluff Hazardous Fuels Reduction project which will construct 100 acres of Shaded Fuel Break below the community of Michigan Bluff.

The proposal is to complete the first of two additional 25-acre areas of the Michigan Bluff Hazardous Fuels Reduction project with this grant. This project is on private lands adjacent to Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) lands, U.S. Forest Service Tahoe National Forest (USFS) lands and the PCWA Middle Fork Project area. The owners of these properties have strived to be fire-wise and have continually brushed their property as much as possible. This has been accomplished through private dollars, and grants from NRCS, USFS, California Firesafe Council Clearinghouse from BLM and Middle Fork Project dollars acquired through the Foresthill/Iowa Hill FSC These combined dollars amount to \$699,000 we will use 74,600 as a match for this \$124,100 project.

### **Project Recommendation #3**

Title: Michigan Bluff Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project - Phase 4

Applicant: Foresthill/Iowa Hill Firesafe Council

County Plan project references: 1) Western Slope Placer County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), 2) DMA 2000 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (FEMA approved), 3) Cal Fire Unit Fore Plan, and 4) the Foresthill/Iowa Hill Risk Assessment Mitigation Systems Plan.

Total Project Cost: \$124,000

Application agency contribution: \$74,500

Request of funds: \$49,500

**Recommendation of funds: \$49,500 (maximum amount allowed 40% of total project or \$49,500)**

Summary of Project: Historically, there have been several wildfires in the area, ranging from 500 acres to several thousand. The most recent fire to threaten Michigan Bluff was the American Fire that started in the canyon near the historic area of Deadwood on August 10, 2013 and burned 27,440 acres.

Statistics show that fire events in the local area have started from abandoned campfires, lightning strikes, vehicle fires, and downed powerlines. These statistics are a prime example of what could be anticipated in a local fire event in the Michigan Bluff area. These fires were all within, or adjacent to, the Middle Fork of the American River near the communities of Michigan Bluff, Baker Ranch, and Foresthill. This area is classified as a "Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone" by Cal Fire and is listed in the Federal Register as "Communities at Risk". Fire danger is an ever-existing threat to the area, particularly since the great outdoors and recreation have become so popular. Many hikers, fisherman, and outdoor enthusiasts use this area, posing a real potential for an inadvertent wildfire. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have realized this fire danger and are currently working on hazard fuel reduction projects on their lands. Placer County Community Wildfire Protection Plan states its goal is to reduce the risk of wildfire near communities on the west slope of the Sierra Nevada in Placer County by identifying and prioritizing projects that will reduce hazardous fuels in and adjacent to communities. It is the hopes of these communities and the Foresthill/Iowa Hill Firesafe Council (FH/IHFSC) that working with Cal Fire, BLM, USFS, Placer County Resource Conservation District (RCD), and the Placer County Firesafe Alliance (PCFSA) can tie these existing projects together, creating a sustainable continuous Hazard Fuels Reduction area to help protect the Natural, Historic, and Private assets of these communities. Once this is complete, the ability to restore and maintain ecosystems with the reintroduction of low intensity fire in this area could be accomplished, as well as protecting the invaluable watershed. Recently, the FH/IHFSC, with cooperation from the

Iowa Hill Community Club, received \$200,000 to implement the Michigan Bluff Hazardous Fuels Reduction project which will construct 100 acres of Shaded Fuel Break below the community of Michigan Bluff.

The proposal is to complete the second of two additional 25-acre areas of the Michigan Bluff Hazardous Fuels Reduction project with this grant. This project is on private lands adjacent to Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) lands, U.S. Forest Service Tahoe National Forest (USFS) lands and the PCWA Middle Fork Project area. The owners of these properties have strived to be fire-wise and have continually brushed their property as much as possible. This has been accomplished through private dollars, and grants from NRCS, USFS, California Firesafe Council Clearinghouse from BLM and Middle Fork Project dollars acquired through the Foresthill/Iowa Hill FSC. These combined dollars amount to \$699,000 we will use 74,600 as a match for this \$124,100 project.