

**PLACER COUNTY  
OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES**

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Honorable Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Thomas M. Miller, County Executive Officer  
by Rui Cunha, OES Program Manager

**DATE:** June 8, 2010

**SUBJECT:** Approve projects to be funded from two different sources: Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (HR 2389) (total of \$47,500) and the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 (\$96,000) and authorize 45 day public noticing of the County's intent to use these funds

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**ACTION REQUESTED**

Approve seven projects to be funded by previously approved federal funds, and authorize 45 day public noticing of the planned use of those funds for each project, as shown:

- \$47,500 from the Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (HR 2389), Title III discretionary funds for biomass project management and for a funding match for an Air Pollution Control District (APCD) grant; and
- \$96,000 from the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, Title III discretionary funds for five projects listed below to sustain fire mitigation program oversight, provide increased wildfire protection to communities most at risk, and to cover costs incurred from search and rescue operations on Federal lands.

**BACKGROUND**

Public Laws:

The Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act HR 2389 or Public Law (PL) 106-393, was enacted by Congress in October 2000 to offset the effects of decreased revenues in rural counties caused by declining timber harvests and the decrease of income generating activities on federal lands. It provided qualifying counties (of which Placer County was one) with predictable funding for rural schools and roads for federal fiscal years (FFY) 2001 through 2006 and it was extended by Congress to include FFY 2007. However, a restriction on current spending of PL 106-393 funds is that expenses can only be on any or all (of your Board's) previously approved methods or projects. The projects listed below under PL 106-393 meet current restrictions associated with this funding.

In October, 2008, Congress enacted the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 (PL 110-343) and fortunately, included in it was a reauthorization of the timber tax funded "Secure Rural Schools" program. However, when compared to PL 106-393, this law has a significantly lower level of funding and restricted funding uses. The projects listed below under PL 110-343 meet current restrictions associated with this funding.

Recommended use of funds:

PL 106-393: The two projects recommended for funding support concern management of the County's biomass utilization program over FY 2010-2011, and using funds as a "match" to an Air Pollution Control District (APCD) grant in order to attract further funding. It will use the Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (HR 2389), Title III discretionary funds as shown:

- Biomass Program Management - \$37,500
- APCD Grant Match - \$10,000
- \$47,500

PL 110-343: Staff recommends funding the following five education and assistance projects/activities that increase the protection of people and properties from wildfires. It will use Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, Title III discretionary funds as shown:

- Fire Mitigation Coordinator - \$40,000
- Defensible Space Inspections - \$24,000
- Firewise Public Information Materials - \$ 7,000
- Search & Rescue on Federal Lands - \$10,000
- Chipper Program Projects - \$15,000
- \$96,000

(A more comprehensive description of the activities and estimated costs to be supported by each Public Law is attached)

Upon authorization by your Board, staff will commence the required 45-day public noticing period, and return to your Board in late July with any input from the community to request final approval of expenditures.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no impact to the General Fund as a result of these actions. There is adequate fund balance in Placer County's Forest Reserve Title III fund to support these activities.

**Attachments**

Description of recommended projects to receive Title III discretionary funds support

## Activity Discussion

### Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act Reauthorization FY 2010-2011 Recommended Activities and Estimated Costs – Placer County June 8, 2010

#### PL 106-393:

#### PROJECT #1: BIOMASS PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

**Issue/Background:** Since 2006 the Board of Supervisors (BOS) has approved funding to provide a biomass Program Manager. The biomass program is working to determine the feasibility of and options for removing flammable wood materials from forests and the wildland urban interface in order to use the materials in energy production or in other environmentally positive ways.

In accordance with your Board's direction the program manager works directly with the Wildfire Protection and Biomass Policy Advisory group (comprised of Supervisors Holmes and Montgomery, Assistant County Executive Officer Heinzen, and other key County staff) on numerous biomass activities and issues.

Positive impacts on the environment and economy of all rural areas of Placer County is enhanced through the program's efforts in research, planning, and coordination with other biomass programs. It seeks to create economic value by converting the "slash" (or woody by-product of fuel reduction) to fuel, for use in energy production. In addition, fuel reduction efforts have the potential for making communities safer, forests healthier; and air quality improved (by reducing open burning). All activities undertaken in the program are guided by the Placer County five-year biomass strategic plan.

**Other Alternatives:** Program management would have to be delegated to another staff member as an additional duty with potentially detrimental effects on the program.

**Responsible Office:** Planning Department

**Cost Estimate:** \$40,000

**Benefit:** Efficient and responsive implementation of the Board directed Biomass Program.

#### PROJECT #2: APCD GRANT MATCH

**Issue/Background:** This project provides \$10,000 in matching funds for a \$22,000 Air Pollution Control District (APCD) grant that reaps the benefit of the synergy discussed above. The total \$32,000 project offers residents of eastern Placer County information, training, and assistance in clearing defensible space around homes. In addition, it will provide drop sites where residents can drop the biomass materials created in clearing defensible space for pick up, treatment, transport, and sale to biomass-supported energy producing facilities. All funds realized will be retained in the program in order to optimize grant benefits.

**Other Alternatives:** None - there is no other funding available for this program.

**Responsible Office:** Planning Department

**Cost Estimate:** \$10,000

**Benefit:** Provides improved fire protection by increasing defensible space around residences; while the residual by-products are used in an environmentally friendly manner, for the production of energy.

**PL 110-343:**

**PROJECT #1: FIRE MITIGATION COORDINATOR**

**Issue/Background:** This project funds the Placer County Fire Mitigation Coordinator, a part time contract position, for 615 hours in 2010/2011. The Fire Mitigation Coordinator represents the County with citizen groups, fire safe councils, and fire departments/districts involved in planning wildfire protection. The Fire Mitigation Coordinator assists with public education; fire mitigation; project planning and implementation, and coordination between the various professional and community organizations necessary to implement fuel reduction efforts. The coordinator seeks to build a community-based fire mitigation vision with consistent goals and implementation through the sharing of professionally derived fire mitigation standards, conducting inclusive planning efforts, and by the sharing of best practices between communities.

**Other Alternatives:** Each fire mitigation entity (departments, districts, fire safe councils, etc.) operates on its own without the benefit of a dedicated manager to coordinate all programs between entities in order to optimize programming and funding.

**Responsible Office:** Office of Emergency Services

**Cost Estimate:** \$40,000

**Benefit:** Better informed, safer, more resilient communities. Coordinated fire mitigation activities, implemented expeditiously, efficiently, and in accordance with planned and agreed on priorities.

**PROJECT #2: ANNUAL DEFENSIBLE SPACE INSPECTIONS PROGRAM**

**Issue/Background:** Ensuring adequate defensible space around homes and structures is the single most important action for increasing fire survivability; according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). Conversely, defensible space helps to protect wild lands and forests from the effects of a structure fire. Lastly, it provides firefighters with a (relatively) safe place from which to work; while defending a home or structure.

Many homeowners, especially those new to the unincorporated County and those formerly from urban areas, are not aware of defensible space requirements. Public Resources Code, Section 4291-4299 (PRC 4291) establishes a minimum defensible space requirement of 100' in fire prone areas. Inspections aimed at informing property owners of defensible space inspection requirements and their specific application to their properties have proven to help ensure that homeowners create and maintain required defensible space. In the most severe cases PRC 4291 inspections can be used to enforce appropriate clearance.

Whereas, CAL FIRE is mandated to perform PRC 4291 inspections within the State Responsibility Area (SRA), this funding allows Placer County to augment the CAL FIRE inspection program by covering areas outside the SRA and/or increasing the number of inspections in particularly high risk areas within the SRA.

**Other Alternatives:** Rely solely on CAL FIRE inspections; increase public education handouts; rely on property owner self-inspections.

**Responsible Office:** CAL FIRE/Placer County OES

**Cost Estimate:** Total cost estimate - \$24,000. This project commitment is expected to allow for 1200 initial and re-inspections. Included in this estimate is funding for handout literature; the most important of which is the Homeowner's Checklist (downloadable at <http://www.fire.ca.gov/index.php>). Color copies of this document cost from \$1.50 to \$2.00 each depending on the number of copies.

**Benefit:** Increased life safety and reduced property loss. Improved public education.

### **PROJECT #3: SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS ON FEDERAL LANDS**

**Issue/Background:** This action makes funds available to support (mostly volunteer) Search and Rescue (SAR) operations on Federal land. The Placer County Sheriff's Office uses the funds for costs associated with SAR operations, e.g., fuel for vehicles; rescue equipment and supplies; maps; food for both personnel and rescue animals, etc.

**Other Alternatives:** Continue to conduct search and rescue with limited and uncertain resources.

**Responsible Office:** Placer County Sheriff's Office

**Cost Estimate:** \$10,000

**Benefit:** This project helps defray operational costs incurred by the Sheriff's Office SAR operations, and enable it to continue to maintain one of the most successful Search and Rescue Operations in the State.

### **PROJECT #4: FIREWISE EDUCATION MATERIALS**

**Issue/Background:** This project provides a limited amount of public information/education materials to Firesafe Councils, the Dry Creek Fire Protection Advisory Committee, and the Placer Firesafe Alliance; leveraging their community leadership and connections to disseminate important information about making and keeping properties fire safe.

**Other Alternatives:** Rely solely on the limited public education material dissemination accomplished in the PRC 4291 inspection program.

**Responsible Office:** Placer County Office of Emergency Services

**Cost Estimate:** \$7,000

**Benefit:** This project contributes to the continued fire safe education throughout Placer County.

### **PROJECT #5: PLACER COUNTY CHIPPER PROGRAM**

**Issue/Background:** The Chipper Program provides chipper services to residents of Placer County at no or low cost. The program is operated by the Placer County Resources Conservation District using inmate labor provided and supervised by CAL FIRE. Currently the program is fully grant funded, but it is transitioning to a fee-for-service. This transition will not change the focus of the program which is on residential chipping.

While the focus is on residential applications; some high priority projects defined in the Western Slope Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) require chipper support. This project provides funding for these projects if the project is determined (1) to be of such significant benefit to the safety of a community, and (2) the funding source for the project does not cover chipper services. An example of a project that meets this category is the Interstate 80 Fuel Reduction Project which reduces fuel loads along the highway which, in turn, significantly reduces the potential spread of fires from ignitions along this route.

**Other Alternatives:** Burning of chipped slash which, as stated earlier, degrades air quality.

**Responsible Office:** Placer County Office of Emergency Services

**Cost Estimate:** \$15,000

**Benefit:** This project augments other source fuel reduction funding; and in high priority areas makes chipper services available, reduces burning, and improves community safety.

