City of San Carlos Fuel Management Project

Addendum A – Project Description
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Purpose
The purpose of the proposed project is to reduce hazardous fuel loads and vertical and horizontal fuel continuity within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) in City-owned parks located in the southwest portion of the City of San Carlos. The majority of the project area is classified by the City as a Hazardous Fire Area. The project will benefit up to 307 residential properties that directly abut the parks where proposed fuel management activities will take place, and will provide benefits to a significant number of residential structures, infrastructure, and natural resources in the surrounding area by minimizing the potential for wildfire ignition and spread. The project will also benefit responding fire agency personnel by providing defensible space areas and moderating fire behavior should a fire occur.

Location and Timing
The project consists of four (4) distinct parks in the City of San Carlos which can be accessed by Crestview Drive, Brittan Avenue, and Melendy Drive. Fuel reduction treatments will be used to create a mosaic of retained vegetation on up to 65.3 acres in Eaton Park, 55.3 acres in Big Canyon Park, 3.4 acres in Crestview Park, and 7.4 acres in Highlands Park (See Project Location Map). Some areas will not be treated due to the presence of cut banks, light fuel loads, steep slopes, riparian set-backs and/or access or equipment limitations. It is anticipated that this project will be conducted over a 2-year timespan, beginning during spring of 2019, and concluding prior to the end of the grant period in the fall of 2021.

Project Site Description and Environmental Setting
Terrain in the proposed project area is moderate to steep with slopes generally between 30 to 50 percent. Portions of the proposed project area are covered with annual grasses, extremely dense brush, and heavy concentrations of dead and down material resulting from sudden oak death and recent drought conditions. The predominant vegetation types in the project area are coast live oak woodland, chamise chaparral, and California sage brush scrub. Common shrub species include poison oak ( Toxicodendron diversilobum ), toyon ( Heteromeles arbutifolia ), California buckeye ( Aesculus californica ), coyote brush ( Baccharis pilularis ), chamise ( Adenostoma fasciculatum ), monkey flower ( Mimulus aurantiacus ), and black sage ( Salvia mellifera ) as well as various ceanothus ( Ceanothus spp. ), manzanita ( Arctostaphylos spp. ), and acacia ( Acacia sp. ) species. Common trees include coast live oak ( Quercus agrifolia ), California bay laurel ( Umbellularia californica ), Tasmanian bluegum ( Eucalyptus globulus ), Monterey pine ( Pinus radiata ), and ornamental pine ( Pinus sp. ) and cypress ( Cupressus sp. ). French broom ( Genista monspessulana ) is present in most locations, with significant cover found at Highlands Park. Elevation in the project area ranges from 220 to 700 feet above mean sea level. Slopes are variable, ranging from near flat (0 percent) to 100 percent, while proposed project activities will typically occur on slopes between 30 to 50 percent. The climate is Mediterranean, with warm dry summers and cool wet winters.

Activities
The project proposes to manage vegetation to reduce fuel loads and the horizontal and vertical continuity of surface and ladder fuels within project area through the use of hand crews, chippers, herbivory, herbicide, and masticators. Fuel management will include the treatment of grasses, forbs, brush, small live trees (<10 inches trunk diameter at breast height (DBH)), dead and dying brush and trees, and downed, dead material. The City of San Carlos will conduct outreach to educate adjacent homeowners, request right-of-entry for project area access, where necessary, and coordinate contracts to execute the proposed project. Following implementation of the proposed project, the fuel reduction sites will also require ongoing maintenance. It is anticipated that maintenance would be conducted by the City of San Carlos.

Hand crews will utilize hand tools such as chainsaws, pole saws, loppers, axes, and/or weed wrenches for pulling/grubbing weeds, thinning brush, felling small diameter live trees (<10 DBH), pruning, felling dead and dying trees, and bucking material into smaller, manageable lengths. Crews will hand carry and feed cut material to staged chippers. Hand crews will also utilize hand tools such as shovels, Pulaskis, or McLeods to scrape ground fuels. The project proponent anticipates very limited availability of hand crews within the proposed project timeframe. Large diameter (>10 inches DBH) or overstory trees may be removed only if determined to be dying, or hazardous, by a Registered Professional Forester or International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist. No limbs measuring 6
City of San Carlos Fuel Management Project  
Addendum A – Project Description  

inches or greater in diameter will be removed from large retained oak trees. Removal of invasive species, such as French broom, will be a high priority.

Chippers will be operated on existing roads, road shoulders, existing trails, and/or on stable slopes in the proposed project area.

Herbicide application will be done by a Licensed Applicator according to a Pest Control Advisor’s recommendations and in accordance with the City’s Integrated Pest Management (IPM) policy.

Goats or other herd animals may be used to reduce fine fuels such as annual grasses and new growth on brush and trees. Animals will be monitored and moved periodically through the project area. Animals will be contained in the project area with existing and temporary fencing, such as 3-foot high electric wire fencing supported by ½ inch ground stakes. Monitoring will ensure that grazing pressure does not result in overgrazed and denuded slopes. If the previous location of the animals is not known, or may have had known invasive species present, animals will be quarantined for a minimum of 24 hours prior to turnout.

Masticators may be used where they can operate on existing roads, trails, or slopes with gradients measuring <30%, avoiding riparian areas. The objective will be to disrupt the horizontal and vertical continuity of surface and ladder fuels. A spotter will be used to inspect the ground in advance of the masticator. Brush will be treated in a mosaic pattern, leaving trees and larger brush specimens interspersed throughout the treated fuel break area for maintenance of aesthetics and visual screens.

All project staging areas will be located in turnouts, parking areas, or existing clearings within or adjacent to the project area.

Avoidance and Minimization Measures

Consistent with the recommendations included in the Cultural Resources Inventory Report (Addendum B) and the Biological Resources Constraints Assessment (Addendum C) prepared for the project, the following measures will be implemented during the project:

Cultural Resources:

- No archaeological resources were identified within the project site or immediate vicinity; however, some may be encountered during project implementation.
- All crews should be alerted to the potential to encounter archaeological material. In the event that cultural resources (sites, features, or artifacts) are exposed during work activities for the proposed project, all ground disturbing work occurring within 100 feet of the find shall immediately stop until a qualified specialist, meeting the Secretary of the Interior’s Professional Qualification Standards, can evaluate the significance of the find and determine whether additional study is warranted. Prehistoric archaeological deposits may be indicated by the presence of discolored or dark soil, fire-affected material, concentrations of fragmented or whole freshwater bivalve shell, burned or complete bone, non-local lithic materials, or the characteristic observed to be atypical of the surrounding area. Common prehistoric artifacts may include modified or battered lithic materials; lithic or bone tools that appeared to have been used for chopping, drilling, or grinding; projectile points; fired clay ceramics or non-functional items; and other items. Historic-age deposits are often indicated by the presence of glass bottles and shards, ceramic material, building or domestic refuse, ferrous metal, or old features such as concrete foundations or privies. Depending upon the significance of the find under CEQA (14 CCR 15064.5(f); PRC Section 21082), the archaeologist may simply record the find and allow work to continue. If the discovery proves significant under CEQA, additional work, such as preparation of an archaeological treatment plan, testing, or data recovery may be warranted.
- In accordance with Section 7050.5 of the California Health and Safety Code, if human remains are found, the county coroner shall be immediately notified of the discovery. No further excavation or disturbance of the site or any nearby area reasonably suspected to overlie adjacent remains shall occur until the county coroner has determined, within 2 working days of notification of the discovery, the appropriate treatment and disposition of the human remains. If the county coroner determines that the remains are, or are believed to be, Native American, he or she shall notify the NAHC in Sacramento within 24 hours. In
City of San Carlos Fuel Management Project
Addendum A – Project Description

accordance with California Public Resources Code, Section 5097.98, the NAHC must immediately notify those persons it believes to be the most likely descendant from the deceased Native American. The most likely descendant shall complete his/her inspection within 48 hours of being granted access to the site. The designated Native American representative would then determine, in consultation with the property owner, the disposition of the human remains.

Biological Resources:

- To protect special-status plant species, a survey will be conducted prior to ground-disturbing activities with heavy equipment and prior to vegetation management adjacent to identified western leatherwood trees by a qualified botanist at the appropriate period when these species are evident and identifiable to identify the locations of special-status plant species within the treatment areas. If species are found within the selected treatment areas during surveys, the individuals or populations will be flagged with high-visibility flagging and completely avoided. If avoidance is not feasible, an appropriate mitigation plan will be developed and implemented. The mitigation plan will include translocation and propagation methods, monitoring requirements, and success criteria based on the identified species.

- San Francisco Dusky-footed Woodrat
  - Woodrat nests will not intentionally be destroyed. Where feasible, an exclusion buffer of at least 10 feet from nests shall be established to avoid moving or bumping the nests or the logs or branches on which the nests rest. Screening for houses will be left in place provided the integrity of the fuel break is not compromised.
  - If establishing a buffer and avoiding the nests is not feasible, the nests shall be dismantled and the nesting material moved to a new location outside the project’s impact areas so that it can be used by woodrats to construct new nests. Prior to nest deconstruction, each active nest shall be disturbed by a qualified wildlife biologist to the degree that all woodrats leave the nest and seek cover out of the impact area. Whether the nest is on the ground or in a tree, the nest shall be slightly disturbed (nudged) to cause the woodrats to flee. For tree nests, a tarp shall be placed below the nest and the nest dismantled using hand tools (either from the ground or from a lift). The nest material shall then be piled at the base of a nearby tree or large shrub outside of the impact area.

- White Tailed Kite, and Nesting and Migratory Birds
  - If possible, fuel management using goat and mastication work shall be conducted outside of the nesting bird season (February 1 through August 30, depending on species) to avoid impacts to nesting birds.
  - If construction will occur within the nesting season, a pre-construction nesting bird survey of all potential nest habitat within the fuel management areas, including a 100-foot buffer for passerine species and a 250-foot buffer for raptors, shall be completed by a qualified biologist no earlier than 10 days prior to beginning fuel management during the nesting season to determine if any native birds are nesting on or near the site. If there is a lapse between the survey time and initiation of work activities of 10 days or greater, the nesting bird survey should be repeated.
  - If active nests are encountered at any time during fuel management activities, work in that area will stop and a qualified biologist will determine a suitable avoidance buffer from the nest based on work activity and species. The nest(s) and associated avoidance buffers will be flagged by the biologist based on species, location and planned fuel management activity. These nests should be avoided until the chicks have fledged and the nests are no longer active, as determined by the biologist.