



Staff Report

File #: 22-0871

REQUEST FOR CITY COUNCIL ACTION

DATE: 11/16/2022

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

FROM: Fire Department

SUBJECT:

Expansion of the Wildland Protection Agreement between the City of Corona and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This staff report asks City Council to approve expanding the Wildland Protection Agreement between the City of Corona and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). The expansion increases the acreage covered by the agreement from 721 to 1,879. The additional 1,158 acres add a portion of Eagle Valley, which falls within the City of Corona's Direct Protection Area, commonly referred to as the Local Responsibility Area. The costs for additional firefighting resources (air and land) in the Local Responsibility Area fall on the authority having jurisdiction, in this case, the City of Corona. The Wildland Protection Agreement provides specialized resource requests at a predetermined amount, ensuring that there will be no additional or exorbitant costs absorbed by the City beyond the terms of the agreement during CAL FIRE assisted emergency response efforts.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the City Council:

- a. Approve the expanded Wildland Protection Agreement for Automatic and Mutual Aid in Fire Emergency Services between the City of Corona and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.
- b. Authorize the City Manager, or his/her designee, to execute the Wildland Protection Agreement for Automatic and Mutual Aid in Fire Emergency Services between the City of Corona and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection annually until such time either party cancels the agreement in its entirety.

BACKGROUND & HISTORY:

Several terms are applicable when identifying the responsible jurisdiction to provide firefighting resources. Direct Protection Area (DPA) is where a particular fire protection organization is primarily responsible for attacking an uncontrolled fire and directing the suppression action. Federal Responsibility Areas (FRA) are areas for which Federal Agencies are responsible for wildland fire protection under various federal laws. State Responsibility Area (SRA) is a legal term defining the area where the State has financial responsibility for wildland fire protection. Local Responsibility Areas (LRA) are lands on which neither the State nor the federal government has any legal responsibility for providing fire protection.

On October 20, 2021, the City Council approved a Wildland Protection Agreement between CAL FIRE and the City of Corona for 721 acres of LRA in the Prado Basin. The original agreement is being amended to add a second geographic area that is prone to wildland fires. The added Wildland Protection Agreement's area of focus is east of the 15-freeway known as Eagle Valley. Corona Fire has responded to 54 fires in the Eagle Valley LRA since July 2019. Though CAL FIRE often absorbs much of the costs due to the proximity to SRAs, the final incident costs can be significant. For example, the 2020 Airport Fire in the Prado Basin cost nearly \$4 million. Full containment of this wildland fire did not occur for 14 days, and the fire impacted businesses and flight operations at the City's airport. The recommended Wildland Protection Agreement eliminates specialty resource (aircraft, fire crews, and dozers) ordering delays and significantly reduces potential costs to the City of Corona.

Multiple municipalities in Southern California have Wildland Protection Agreements with CAL FIRE. Some examples of those cities include Anaheim, Beaumont, Calimesa, Chino, Colton, Jurupa Valley, Lake Elsinore, Loma Linda, Menifee, Murrieta, Rancho Cucamonga, Redlands, and Wildomar.

ANALYSIS:

This Wildland Protection Agreement is intended to establish a wildland fire response plan for areas within the City in coordination with CAL FIRE. Wildland fires are considered a significant natural disaster risk faced by the City. The City is in a wind-prone area, and it is not uncommon for fires to grow beyond the local capability of the resources assigned to protect the City. When a wildland fire extends beyond the ability and capacity of local resources, assistance requested from CAL FIRE provides help and resources. The Wildland Protection Agreement includes specialized wildland firefighting resources such as fixed and rotary-wing aircraft, dozers, and hand crews. Without a Wildland Protection Agreement, these resources may be charged at an hourly rate of assistance by hire when fighting a fire in the LRA. As a point of reference, a specialty resource request for a high wildland threat dispatch may be approximately \$50,000 for the first hour of the incident. All these expenses would be covered under the Wildland Protection Agreement and are designed to increase and improve interagency coordination and save the City on the cost to combat wildland fires.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The recommended action increases the City's Wildland Protection Agreement with CAL FIRE by \$39,941 annually. The current annual cost of the Wildland Protection Agreement is \$27,095. Beginning in Fiscal Year 2024, the Wildland Protection Agreement will be increased to \$67,036 annually. Recurring annual costs will be requested during the City's budget process.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

This action is exempt according to Section 15061(b)(3) of the Guidelines for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which states that a project is exempt from CEQA if the activity is covered by the commonsense exemption that CEQA applies only to projects that have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. Where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA. This action merely approves an agreement, and there is no possibility that adopting this resolution will have a significant effect on the environment. Therefore, no environmental analysis is required, and staff will file a Notice of Exemption with the County of Riverside.

PREPARED BY: JUSTIN MCGOUGH, DEPUTY FIRE CHIEF

REVIEWED BY: BRIAN YOUNG, FIRE CHIEF

Attachments:

1. Exhibit 1 - LRA WPA Reimbursement Agreement
2. Exhibit 2 - Eagle Valley WPA Expansion Map