



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: General Services Department

Subject: Contract with CAL FIRE for Fiscal Years 2025-26 and 2026-27

Meeting Date: June 24, 2025

Formal Title: Approve agreement with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) in the amount of \$16,718,861 for fire protection services in County Service Areas 48 and 4 for Fiscal Years 2025-26 and 2026-27, and take related actions

Recommended Actions

1. Adopt the attached resolution approving and authorizing execution of agreement 1CA07236 with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE);
2. Approve agreement with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) in the amount of \$16,718,861 for fire protection services in County Service Areas 48 and 4, including \$8,155,542 for Fiscal Year 2025-26 and \$8,563,319 for Fiscal Year 2026-27; and
3. Authorize the Director of the General Services Department and the Santa Cruz County Fire Department Chief to execute the agreement on behalf of the County.

Executive Summary

The proposed two-year agreement for July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2027 provides for CAL FIRE to staff and operate fire protection services for both County Service Area (CSA) 4 - Pajaro Dunes and CSA 48 - County Fire, and covers the basic functions of a full-service fire department.

Discussion

The current agreement with CAL FIRE, approved by the Board on June 25, 2024, began July 1, 2024 and expires on June 30, 2025. A two-year agreement, from July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2027 is being proposed to continue the current fire protection services.

This agreement provides for CALFIRE to oversee and manage the Santa Cruz County Fire Department (CSA 48) and the Pajaro Dunes Fire Protection District (CSA 4) year-round. For CSA 4, it covers the provision of a full-time staffed fire station 365 days per year throughout the duration of the agreement, paid for by CSA 4 property owners. For CSA 48, it includes the following:

- 1) Administration of County Fire - CALFIRE appointed as County Fire Chief
- 2) Provides Year-Round Emergency response from CALFIRE (by providing up to five months per year during non-fire season) that includes:
 - a. Fire Protection

- b. Basic Life Support Medical Services
 - c. Rescue Response Services
- 3) Dispatch Services (Year-Round)
- 4) Fire Code Inspection, Prevention and Enforcement Services (Year-Round)
- 5) Land Use/ Pre-Fire Planning Services (Year-Round)
- 6) Oversight of County Fire's volunteer firefighter system (Year-Round)

Under this cooperative agreement with the State, the County benefits from State-funded emergency response for CSA 48 during the declared fire season, and contracts with CALFIRE to continue that emergency response for CSA 48 for the non-fire season (up to five months per year). During the non-fire season, the County funds the fire fighters on each apparatus providing services, and the State and County share the cost of the Engineer/Drivers of the apparatus.

Currently, under the Amador Agreement, five engines are staffed during CAL FIRE's base season (3 months). In this arrangement, the County funds the firefighter positions, while CAL FIRE provides the engine operators. During the peak fire season (9 months), CAL FIRE and Santa Cruz County Fire volunteers, organized into five companies, respond to County Fire incidents.

There are no significant changes between the current FY 2024-25 agreement and the new FY 2025-26 and FY 2026-27 agreement with CAL FIRE. The only notable addition is the inclusion of a Public Information Officer (PIO) position. The PIO will support fire prevention messaging, public engagement, and assist with efforts related to the potential transition of the Santa Cruz County Fire Department to an independent fire district.

Staffing levels will remain consistent with the past two years. An Assistant Chief assigned to the Santa Cruz County Fire Department continues to report directly to the San Mateo–Santa Cruz Unit Chief.

Historically, these agreements were structured as multi-year contracts to reduce administrative burden and provide continuity in operational planning. In recent years, however, the County operated under single-year agreements due to CAL FIRE's transition to a 66-hour shift schedule and the uncertainty around how that change would affect longer-term agreements. It has been determined that no contract changes will be needed for personnel based on the shift pattern during FY 2025-26 and FY 2026-27, making a multi-year agreement feasible and appropriate at this time.

Financial Impact

The agreement for Fiscal Years 2025-26 and 2026-27 is in the amount of \$16,718,861, including \$8,155,542 for Fiscal Year 2025-26 (a \$325,803 or 3.8% decrease over the previous agreement), which is budgeted in the proposed Fiscal Year 2025-26 budget, and \$8,563,319 for Fiscal Year 2026-27 (a \$407,777 or 5% increase over FY 2025-26). The agreement is fully funded by the special benefit assessments completed for County Service Areas 4 and 48. There is no anticipated impact to the General Fund.

Strategic Initiatives

Operational Plan - Comprehensive Health & Safety

Submitted By:

Michael Beaton, General Services Director

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Executive Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.