



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Office of Response, Recovery and Resilience & Parks, Open Space & Cultural Services Department

Subject: Accept and File Implementation Update for the Santa Cruz County Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction and Wildlife Protection Act

Meeting Date: January 28, 2025

Formal Title: Consider implementation update report for the Santa Cruz County Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction and Wildlife Protection Act, and take related actions

Recommended Actions

1. Accept and file the Santa Cruz County Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction and Wildlife Protection Act (WWWPA) implementation update report;
2. Accept notification of vacancy on the Citizens Oversight Advisory Board (COAB), with nominations for appointments to be received on or before February 25;
3. Approve transfer funds in the amount of \$160,000 from General Fund Contingencies to fund the County's unanticipated efforts to implement the WWWPA that will be repaid from WWWPA revenues once realized in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-26;
4. Direct the County Administrative Office to include the General Fund repayment for WWWPA implementation in FY 2025-26 departmental supplemental budgets to be presented during budget hearings; and
5. Direct staff to return on or before April 29, 2025, with an update on WWWPA implementation.

Executive Summary

The Santa Cruz County Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction and Wildlife Protection Act (WWWPA), referred herein as Measure Q, the Act, or the measure, was approved by over 60% of voters in the November 2024 election, and will provide approximately \$7 million annually through a special parcel tax to address key community needs such as: climate resilience; local water supply/conservation/habitat efforts; wildfire reduction and forest management; preserve working lands and local agriculture and enhance beaches and parks while protecting public access to nature across Santa Cruz County.

The County Parks Open Space and Cultural Services Department (Parks) and Office of Response, Recovery & Resilience (OR3) are tasked in the measure with all start up activities as well as the longer-term administrative management of the grant programs and staffing the Citizen Oversight Advisory Board (COAB). Initial start-up and implementation activities during calendar year 2025 will include establishment of the nine-member COAB, development of a Five-Year Vision Plan in collaboration with the

COAB and stakeholders, development of a start-up and ongoing staffing plan, development of the WWWPA budget, and development of the initial framework for grant administration including associated applications, review, approval, accounting, and reporting for the grant designated funds.

Discussion

This memo provides an update on start up activities necessary to implement the WWWPA. Following the passage of Measure Q, the Parks Department and OR3 have been coordinating with County Administrative Office (CAO) leadership and the Auditor Controller Treasurer-Tax Collector (ACTTC) on critical path items needed to achieve the timeline set forth in the Act. Measure Q defines the Parks Department and OR3 as WWWPA implementation partners and are tasked with administration of the COAB and grant program. The CAO, OR3 and Parks team is working with ACTTC on the overall fiscal structure for tax collection and distribution consistent with the requirements of the Act. Critical path items include creation of the COAB, development and approval of the Vision Plan, creation of the fiscal and administrative systems to collect and disperse funds collected by the ACTTC, and administration of the grant program. As a special tax, there will be specific reporting requirements managed by Parks, OR3 and the ACTTC to ensure funds are being used consistent with the WWWPA's intent and Vision Plan's guidance.

Citizen Oversight Advisory Board

The WWWPA directs that the Board of Supervisors establish a Citizens Oversight Advisory Board to ensure transparency, accountability, and alignment with the intent of the Act. The COAB will be comprised of nine members, five county selected members, with one selection by each Board Supervisor, and four city members, with one selected by each incorporated city. In order to move forward with implementation of Measure Q, the first step is for the Board and partner Cities to solicit applications and nominate qualified candidates, who will be appointed by the Board of Supervisors to the nine-member COAB. The WWWPA requires COAB members not hold any elected offices and have demonstrated expertise in the at least one of the following areas:

- 1) Water quality, water supply, or flood protection management.
- 2) Wildfire or forest management.
- 3) Wildlife, parks, or natural resources stewardship.
- 4) Working Lands or agricultural expertise.
- 5) Environmental justice, park equity, or public health.
- 6) Knowledge and expertise in evaluating financial transactions or program cost-effectiveness.

Santa Cruz County Code (SCCC) section 4.65.060 set forth the COAB member requirements, Board responsibilities, member terms, and how the costs of the operations of the COAB. Staff has followed existing County practices to provide the notice of vacancy for this new board and updated the County Boards and Commissions [website](#) and [application portal](#). The application for COAB applicants includes additional questions regarding required subject matter expertise consistent with the Act.

Staff is requesting that Supervisors solicit and review applications for the five County-nominated positions so that the Board of Supervisors can receive those nominations and approve appointments at the February 25, 2025 Board meeting. Simultaneously, staff is working with the City Managers and Clerks so that they can complete their own

selection processes consistent with COAB member requirements and including City Council action to allow for Board consideration of city appointments at the February 25th meeting. If needed, the formal appointment action can be delayed to the March 11, 2025 Board meeting. Staff is planning for the first meeting of the COAB to happen the week of March 17, 2025.

Initial actions by the COAB will include approving by-laws, selecting a Land Stewardship Implementation Partner as outlined in SCCC (4.65.060(3h)), and engaging in the development of the Five-Year Vision Plan lead by Parks and OR3. The goal is for the COAB to approve the Five-Year Vision Plan by July 1, 2025, per the Act. However, if the COAB and County staff determine additional time is required, staff will request that the Board of Supervisors approve the Vision Plan at a later date.

The WWWPA also requires that the COAB receive annual reports from the County, each city, Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County (RCD) and the selected Land Stewardship Implementation Partner on projects funded by Measure Q; however, that reporting requirement will not be in place until late 2026. The COAB will also provide an annual report to the Board on the outcomes of projects and programs funded by Measure Q.

Five-Year Vision Plan

To meet the July 1, 2025, date set forth in Measure Q for the Five-Year Vision Plan adoption, the Parks Department and OR3 have released a Request for Proposal (RFP) for potential consultant support to assist in the development of the Vision Plan. The WWWPA requires that the Vision Plan identify the types of activities and geographies that will be prioritized for investment over the first five years of the act. The intent of the Vision Plan is to guide investments by the incorporated cities, County, RCD, Land Stewardship Implementation Partner, and grantees to ensure that they are best meeting the needs of the community. The Vision Plan will be updated every five years and is intended to be based on existing strategic plans in the water management, wildfire risk reduction, wildlife protection, natural resource conservation, and the access to nature principles. Parks and OR3 will lead the creation of the Five-Year Vision Plan with consultant support with extensive input from stakeholders, partner agencies and the public.

Initial Start-Up & Implementation

The one-time start-up expenses, including COAB formation, outreach, consultant services, personnel costs, various technology, and legal support, are estimated at approximately \$160,000. These costs have not been budgeted in the Parks and OR3 budgets in FY 2024-25, and Measure Q revenues will not be received and budgeted until FY 2025-26. To fund these costs, staff recommends that the Board authorize a General Fund Contingency loan with repayment by Measure Q to the General Fund in FY 2025-26. This repayment will be incorporated in the Measure Q budget to be presented to the Board during budget hearings.

Implementation Timeline

With the WWWPA identifying July 1, 2025, for adoption of the Five-Year Vision Plan, Parks and OR3 will be moving expeditiously to meet that deadline. Accordingly, the following high-level schedule has been developed. At the discretion of the Board, or at

the recommendation of implementation partners (Parks and OR3), this deadline could be shifted by Board action to accommodate Vision Plan process and development, if warranted.

- **January 2025:**
 - Board of Supervisors:
 - Accept and file the implementation plan report and approve budget allocation from General Fund Contingency on January 28, 2025.
 - Nomination Process: Open COAB nominations.
 - Identify candidates for COAB.
 - Parks & OR3 (Implementation Partners):
 - Outreach Launch: Initiate a public-facing communication strategy, including a dedicated WWWPA/Measure Q website and community engagement efforts with key stakeholders and partner agencies.
 - Solicit consultant support for Vision Plan development.
 - Measure Q Website development
 - COAB application development

- **February–March 2025:**
 - Board of Supervisors:
 - Complete COAB nominations and appointments approved by Board on or before March 11, 2025.
 - Parks & OR3:
 - Secure consultant support for Vision Plan development.
 - Begin preparatory work on the Vision Plan, leveraging existing plans and strategies.
 - Conduct outreach and engagement on Vision Plan development with community, stakeholders and agency partners.
 - Prepare preliminary FY 2025-26 departmental supplemental budgets accounting for administrative funds to implement the COAB and Measure Q grant program.

 - COAB:
 - Hold the first COAB meeting.
 - Approve COAB By-laws.
 - Solicit Land Stewardship Implementation Partner applications.

- **April 2025:**
 - Parks & OR3:
 - Work on Vision Plan structure, coordination with consultant, stakeholders, conduct outreach and engagement on Vision Plan development.
 - Develop internal and external fiscal mechanisms for Measure Q revenue disbursement with cities, the Resource Conservation District, and other Land Stewardship Implementation Partner.
 - Finalize FY 2025-26 departmental supplemental budgets

- accounting for administrative staffing of COAB and Grant program.
- COAB:
 - Select Land Stewardship Implementation Partner.
 - Hold hearing(s) on Vision Plan development.
 - Provide feedback to Parks, OR3 and consultant on Vision Plan development.
- **May–June 2025:**
 - Board of Supervisors:
 - Receive implementation update Board memo from Parks and OR3.
 - Review FY 2025-26 County budget with Measure Q revenue allocations for internal County departments (ACTTC, Parks and OR3) to support on-going operational costs and preview county specific initiatives aligned with Measure Q County allocation.
 - Parks & OR3:
 - Conduct outreach and engagement on Vision Plan development.
 - Draft the Five-Year Vision Plan with input from COAB and community stakeholders.
 - Present the finalized Five-Year Vision Plan for COAB approval.
 - COAB:
 - Review Draft Five-Year Vision Plan and provide feedback towards final draft.
 - Approve Five-Year Vision Plan for WWWPA/Measure Q.
- **Fiscal Year 2025-2026:**
 - Parks & OR3:
 - Develop grant application criteria, form, database system.
 - Launch grant program.
 - Receive and review grant applications.
 - Provide recommended allocations for grants.
 - Prepare and present update to COAB on first year grant allocations.
 - COAB:
 - Conduct hearings and receive public input on grant allocations related to Measure Q.
 - Board of Supervisors:
 - Receive Board report from the COAB on the initial grant allocations from Measure Q.

Financial Impact

To meet the July 1, 2025, timeline set forth in the WWWPA/County Code for Five-Year Vision Plan adoption, and given existing workloads, the Parks and OR3 implementation team recommends securing an external consultant and extra help staff resources to support the timeline and milestones outlined above. This will ensure that adequate time and energy is available for creation of the Five-Year Vision Plan.

Parks and OR3 also recommend that the General Fund provide an advance from a reduction of the 2024-25 General Fund Contingencies budget (GL 131375-98700) to be repaid to the General Fund from the 2025-26 Measure Q Special Revenue Fund once realized. The current fiscal year budget does not account for start-up costs associated with Measure Q.

The one-time start-up expenses, including outreach, consultant services, extra help personnel costs, various technology, and legal support, are estimated at \$160,000. Existing County staff working on the implementation of Measure Q will be tracking their time and those costs will be included for reimbursement. Existing County staffing costs are being tracked, and an estimate will be provided with the next update. We are anticipating a consultant contract not to exceed \$50,000. These costs will benefit all Measure Q partners named as fiscal recipients. Start-up costs, including the labor cost of current County staff, will be deducted from initial total projected revenues prior to disbursement to all partners. Parks and OR3, in collaboration with the CAO, will return during budget hearings to formalize these actions pertaining to the FY 2025-26 budget.

Staff requests approval to transfer funds from General Fund/Appropriations for Contingencies (131375/98700) to Planning Parks/Regular Pay-Extra Help (GL 494000/51010) in the amount of \$50,000, and to Planning/Services & Supplies (GL 494000/62135) in the amount of \$110,000, as documented in the attached AUD74 form. The labor cost of existing County staff is already included in FY 2024-25 budgets for Parks, OR3 and CAO. If additional funds are needed, staff will return to the Board for further direction.

Strategic Initiatives

Equity Framework - County Facilities & Infrastructure, Plans, Policies & Budgets
Operational Plan - Comprehensive Health & Safety, Sustainable Environment
Climate Action - Water, Natural & Working Lands, Wildfire Prevention

Submitted By:

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Recommended By:

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Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

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