



Council Study Session

March 18th, 2024

Agenda Item	Ashland Forestland Climate Change Adaptation Project: Phase I Update	
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Item Type	Requested by Council <input type="checkbox"/> Update <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Request for Direction <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

SUMMARY

This update continues previous Council actions including the adoption of the 2023 City Forestlands Climate Change Addendum to the Ashland Forest Plan and recent contract with Lomakatsi Restoration Project to mark trees for helicopter removal. Staff will present current planning and data showing outcomes from tree marking, anticipated timelines, budget implications, three options for project implementation, community outreach, plans for trail and road closures, and a grant funding update from project partner Lomakatsi Restoration Project. Staff will also describe work to use by-product logs and chips for salmon habitat and local parks projects.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED

City Council Goal: Address Climate Change

City Council Goal: Reduce Wildfire and Smoke Risk

City Plans: Ashland Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan, Community Wildfire Protection Plan, 2016 Ashland Forest Plan and 2023 Forest Plan Climate Change Addendum.

Citizen Budget Goals: Wildfire Safety was the highest budget priority from resident in-person and online polling in spring 2023

BACKGROUND AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Recent drought and extreme heat have created what researchers call a [“decline spiral”](#) in Douglas-fir trees, a species that has proliferated on lower elevation City and APRC lands due to past logging and cessation of indigenous burning practices. In response to a significant uptick in dead and dying trees, the City commissioned a [drone-based survey](#) of impacted municipal forestlands. We found just over 20% of Douglas-fir were dead or visibly dying. Further data from local U.S. Forest Service researchers has since shown at least an additional 25% (range of 20% to 60%) of trees that appeared green during summer of 2023 were already infested with bark beetles and will likely die this coming spring. Climate change projections for coming years show that Douglas-fir will continue to die, making it imperative that the City respond quickly to prevent the build-up of fuels shown to cause significant ecological and private property damage during fires.





Council Study Session

Following guidance in the 2016 Ashland Forest Plan and 2023 Climate Change Addendum, staff and the Ashland Forestlands Management Advisory Committee proposed Phase One of a Climate Change Adaptation Project to quickly address increased fire danger from dead/dying trees and begin the critical work of helping our forests adapt to changing conditions. Public meetings and tours were offered to help inform the planning effort. In November, Council approved a contract with Lomakatsi Restoration Project to assist the City with marking dead, dying, and overcrowded forests for a future helicopter-based thinning project, part of Phase One implementation. A proposed contract with Timberline Logging Enterprises, LLC represents a significant investment in the safety of our community and the sustainability and [long-term survival of our local forests](#) that are a cornerstone of Ashland's local culture and economy.

The project addresses safety concerns along trails and roads where hundreds of dead trees need to be removed for public safety. Importantly, the project also reduces risk to critical infrastructure at the City's Water Treatment Plant and along the course of Ashland Creek where dead trees falling into the flood zone threaten the City's water supply pipelines, road crossings, culverts, and downstream to the plaza itself.

Forests across the west are under significant stress from climate change, resulting in permanent loss of forest cover in the southwest and the southern Sierra Nevada, and a shifting of climate zones resulting in ["zombie forests"](#) all the way into Northern California and likely Southern Oregon as well. Proactively addressing these issues is the most fiscal, ecological, and protective course of action for the community's interest and safety.

FISCAL IMPACTS

The current budget dedicated to wildfire and forest management is insufficient to pay for this unexpected cost. City Administration and Finance have identified additional funding to cover the added cost of this work. Project partner Lomakatsi Restoration Project recently pledged \$100,000 of federal funding and future in-kind labor to assist with prescribed burning, invasive species management, and replanting. Revenue from log sales as a by-product of this work will also offset a significant portion of the costs. The final mill pricing results (due March 15th) will be presented at the Council meeting with several courses of action with varying costs.

Given current market trends, projected costs, and the Timberline pricing proposal for this project, staff predicts a net need of between \$500,000 and \$715,000 this biennium to make this project "fly" between now and the end of the fiscal year.



Council Study Session

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What are potential outcomes if the City does not act now?

How do we measure success?

How are we mitigating potential impacts to wildlife during this project?

How does removing trees in our forest help protect homes in our community?

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

An Special Procurement contract will be presented to Council at the March 19th business meeting for decision. If approved, we expect work to start quickly after contract execution.

REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

[2023 Ashland Forest Plan Climate Change Addendum](#)

[November 2023 Lomakatsi Restoration Project Contract](#)

[Why our Forests Are Declining: *Trees on the Edge* OSU Extension Research Publication](#)