



City of Austin

Recommendation for Action

File #: 25-0001, Agenda Item #: 4.

1/30/2025

Posting Language

Authorize negotiation and execution of an agreement with the U. S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station to conduct a study of wildland fire fuels, which can include vegetation, dead, and downed material that contribute to fires, on certain properties managed by the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve for a term of three years, in an amount not to exceed \$198,467. Funding: Available in the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan Fund and the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Operating Budget of Austin Water. Funding for the remaining term is subject to available funding in future budgets.

Lead Department

Austin Water.

Fiscal Note

Funding is available in the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan Fund and the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Operating Budget of Austin Water. Funding for the remaining term is subject to available funding in future budgets.

For More Information:

Inquiries should be directed to Heather Cooke, Austin Water Chief Administrative Officer, at heather.cooke@austintexas.gov <<mailto:heather.cooke@austintexas.gov>> or 512-972-0083.

Council Committee, Boards and Commission Action:

January 15, 2025 - Recommended by the Water and Wastewater Commission on a vote of 10-0 with one vacancy.

Additional Backup Information:

The purpose of this agreement is to engage in a re-assessment of wildland fire fuels on land managed by Austin Water under the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve. The assessment, to be conducted by experts with the Fire and Environmental Research Applications Team of the Pacific Northwest Research Station of the Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture (USFS FERA), will enhance and improve upon the information collected during the 2007 "Baylor Study", a fuels assessment of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve conducted by Dr. Joseph White and Baylor University's Geospatial Lab.

Significant change has occurred in this landscape since the Baylor Study was completed, including three severe droughts and two major winter storms. Updated information is needed to accurately capture the condition of wildland fire fuels and inform possible management strategies. Data collection in the field is expected to begin as early as February 2025 and is expected to conclude by July 2025. Data processing will occur over summer 2025, with preliminary data available as early as July 2025. Processed deliverables are expected Winter 2025/2026. Subsequent data collection and analysis may occur through 2028.

Deliverables will include:

- **Data set of remeasurements of Baylor University study plots** . USFS FERA will remeasure a subset of the 31 Baylor University study plots and provide a database listing fuel parameters that can be directly

compared with the 2007 fuels assessment. This will also include data on new fuel strata measured as part of this assessment. This information can be used to inform management goals and hazard assessment.

- **Seminar and meetings for City of Austin staff** . USFS FERA staff will review findings, answer questions, and provide consultation regarding appropriate fuel hazard mitigation strategies.
- **Peer-reviewed publication** . USFS FERA will complete a draft publication evaluating how climate-mediated impacts (i.e., drought and ice storm damages) in closed-canopy juniper-oak woodlands are affecting fuel hazard.

Information collected as part of this project will be shared with other City departments, including the Austin Fire Department and the Parks and Recreation Department. Data will also inform ongoing efforts, including updates to the Austin/Travis County Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

The USFS FERA team works nationally to inform management of natural resources through research and development in fuels and combustion science, fire and landscape ecology, and integration of the physical and ecological sciences: <https://research.fs.usda.gov/pnw/centers/fera>.