



AGENDA REPORT

TO: Jestin D. Johnson
City Administrator

FROM: Joe DeVries
Deputy City Administrator/
Chief Resilience Officer

SUBJECT: Accepting Funds for the Shepherd
Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation
Route Fire Prevention Project

DATE: September 3, 2024

City Administrator Approval


Jestin Johnson (Sep 11, 2024 19:46 PDT)

Date: Sep 11, 2024

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt A Resolution Authorizing The City Administrator To Apply For, Accept, And Appropriate One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000) From The California Department Of Forestry And Fire Protection (Cal Fire) Fire Prevention Program To Remove Dead, Dying, And Hazardous Trees Within The Shepherd Canyon To Grass Valley Evacuation Route Area; And Making Appropriate California Environmental Quality Act Findings

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through the coordination of the City of Oakland's (City) Wildfire Prevention Working Group, Oakland Public Works (OPW) partnered with the Office of the City Administrator and the Oakland Fire Department (OFD) to apply for State funding to mitigate tree hazards within the Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation Route (including Skyline Boulevard and arterial connector roadways) in Oakland via a grant proposal to the State Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). CAL FIRE awarded the City of Oakland \$1,000,000 in California Climate Investment funds to fulfill this project (see **Attachment A: Notice of Award**). Adoption of this resolution authorizes the City to accept the award and enter into an agreement with CAL FIRE to implement the project.

The project proposal involves selectively removing approximately 400 dead, dying, or hazardous trees within the Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation Route, including Skyline Boulevard between Shepherd Canyon Road and Grass Valley Road, and sections of Shepherd Canyon Road, Joaquin Miller Road, Redwood Road, Keller Avenue, Grass Valley Road, and Golf Links Road between Skyline Boulevard and State Highway 13 or Interstate 580 (see **Attachment B: Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Project Area Map**). These routes are primary traffic arteries for the Oakland Hills by which vehicles must travel during an evacuation and are susceptible to being blocked by fallen or burning trees and branches. Consecutive years of drought have exacerbated the decline of many of these trees while increasing potential fire risk, creating potential safety and traffic hazards that must be addressed to protect the functionality of the Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation Route during a catastrophic event.

Public Works and Transportation Committee
September 24, 2024

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Wildfires are a natural part of California's landscape and the potential risk of wildfires impacting communities in and adjacent to forested areas is at an all-time high. In the last few years, California has experienced the deadliest and most destructive wildfires in its history. The Oakland firestorm of 1991 was one of the largest urban wildfires in the Bay Area. The fire started on the border of Oakland and spread throughout the Oakland and Berkeley hills. Ultimately, twenty-five lives were lost, 150 people were injured, over fifteen hundred acres of land were burned, and over 3,000 homes were destroyed. The high winds, steep terrain, and heavy fuel load made fighting this historic blaze a major challenge. The economic loss from the fire was estimated at \$1.5 billion.

On November 19, 2019, the City Council adopted Resolution [No. 87940 C.M.S.](#) declaring Wildfire Prevention a top priority for the City of Oakland and the City Administrator established a Wildfire Prevention Working Group. This group consists of multiple City Departments working together to identify opportunities to reduce wildfire risk in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas of Oakland that are identified by the State of California to be in a Very High Fire Hazard Zone. These agencies include OFD, OPW, Department of Transportation (OakDOT), Bureau of Planning and Building (P&B), Oakland Police Department (OPD), and the City Administrator's Office.

In December 2021, the City Council passed Resolution [No. 88966 C.M.S.](#) to accept and appropriate a grant award of \$824,000 from CAL FIRE's Fuel Reduction Grant Program to remove dead, dying, and hazardous trees along Skyline Boulevard between Shepherd Canyon Road and Keller Avenue. This project was successfully completed before June 30, 2024, with the removal of 825 dead, dying, or hazardous trees. The Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation Route Project expands upon the work completed for this previous grant award to include a larger geographic area to complete necessary fuel reduction work.

Per Oakland Municipal Code 12.32.020, the removal and maintenance of trees on public grounds and upon roads fall under the authority of the City Manager or their designee. OPW routinely removes dead, dying, or otherwise hazardous trees along roads and the public right-of-way. This project will help address the backlog of dead, dying, or hazardous trees along the specified evacuation routes as well as keep up with the ongoing tree die-off occurring in this area.

This project aligns with the Community Wildfire Protection Plan for Alameda County (2012), which specifically identifies addressing trees within striking distance of PG&E powerlines along evacuation routes in the project area as a priority treatment area.

The Oakland Vegetative Management Plan (2024) specifically identifies roadside treatment areas and medians within a larger geographic area that includes the Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation Route. It aims to reduce wildfire risk by reducing fuels throughout a large area in the Oakland Hills.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation Route project area is a cumulative 17 miles of roadways, including the section of Skyline Boulevard between Shepherd Canyon Road and Grass Valley Road, and the sections of Shepherd Canyon Road, Joaquin Miller Road, Redwood Road, Keller Avenue, Grass Valley Road, and Golf Links Road between Skyline Boulevard and State Highway 13 or Interstate 580 (see **Attachment B: Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Project Area Map**).

There are thousands of mature trees in close proximity to the evacuation roadways in the project area. The dead, dying, or hazardous trees in this area have a higher chance of falling across roadways and blocking access, which could have disastrous consequences for evacuation and emergency service access during a wildfire event. These trees are mostly Monterey pine (*Pinus radiata*), eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus* spp.), black acacia (*Acacia melanoxylon*), coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), and other species. Many of the Monterey pines have reached the end of their lifespan or are succumbing to ongoing drought conditions. On average, twenty to thirty mature Monterey pines have been dying in the project area each year and this trend is accelerating in the face of ongoing drought conditions. It is common for these trees to lose limbs or uproot without warning and their removal has been an ongoing, incremental task for several years. In a major high-wind event, it is also common for numerous large trees to fall and block roadways, requiring several hours to clear the debris. High wind events in this area are often linked to low humidity and red flag warnings, which set conditions for potential fire hazards. The CAL FIRE Fire Hazard Severity Zone map rates the Oakland Hills area, which includes these evacuation routes, as a “Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone.”

OPW has removed over 800 dead, dying, or hazardous trees along the evacuation routes in the project area in the last five years. Many of these trees had been dead for years and were at a high risk of falling over or splitting. To continue addressing the backlog of dead, dying, and hazardous trees, and to address the ongoing additions of new trees that die each year, it will be necessary to continue seeking grant funding to do this work. The City does not otherwise have adequate resources to remove this volume of trees. OPW’s Tree Services Division is still suffering from the impacts of department downsizing after the 2008 global financial crisis.

Six OFD stations in this region use these roadways to travel across the Oakland Hills and reach fires. If any roadway were blocked by a tree, tree branch, or fire during a fire emergency, this would hinder both residents from evacuating and OFD from moving their resources into the scene of the fire. If OFD cannot access the fire, there is a greater chance that fire containment strategies will fail. These roadways are the main evacuation routes across the Oakland Hills for approximately 60,000 residents. See **Attachment C: Public and Private Assets within Proximity to the Project Area** for a list of additional public and private assets in the project area that could be affected by a catastrophic fire event.

Accepting the contract and grant award funds from CAL FIRE will allow the City to take the necessary steps to reduce the fuel loads in the project area. Without these funds, the City will not be able to complete this work.

Hazardous tree removal work will be managed by OPW and performed by tree removal contractors. This work is separate from the Vegetation Management Plan as the project area

falls under OPW’s routine area of responsibility per OMC 12.32.010 – 12.32.020. The anticipated project deadline is March 15, 2030.

Expected outcomes for this project include:

- A substantial reduction in the number of dead and hazardous trees within striking distance of the public right of way within the project area.
- A substantial reduction in the chances of a wildfire crossing the evacuation route roadways by removing dead, hazardous trees in the undeveloped right of way.
- A substantial reduction in the ability for tree branches over evacuating route roadways to carry fire.
- A substantial reduction in the fuel load along the evacuation routes, reducing fire intensity in the event of a wildfire evacuation.
- Woody biomass created by operations will be disposed of in ways to minimize greenhouse gas emissions. Logs will go to a green waste facility or be used as traffic barriers on nearby roads. Branches and brush will be chipped. No woody biomass will be burned or landfilled.

This resolution meets the citywide goal of holistic community safety in that it is designed to protect evacuation routes and reduce the potential spread of wildfires in the most fire prone area of the city. It also meets the goal of responsive and trustworthy government as the community has asked the City to address these concerns and has shown a willingness to partner with the City on these efforts.

FISCAL IMPACT

The total one-time cost to implement this project will be \$1,091,000, of which \$1,000,000 is funded through a grant from CAL FIRE and \$91,000 is match funding for 632 hours of staff time for two Arboricultural Inspectors in OPW Tree Services throughout the grant period for implementation of this grant, including identifying trees for removal and coordinating work with contractors. This work is incorporated into the staff’s existing duties and budgeted costs.

Table 1: Project Funding Sources

FUNDING SOURCE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT
CAL FIRE	Grant Award	\$1,000,000
Tree Services – Existing Staffing	Match Funding	\$91,000
TOTAL PROJECT		\$1,091,000

There is no impact on the General Purpose Fund, and no additional funding is requested.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

The following organizations were involved in the creation of the project scope and/or provided letters of support for the project:

- Oakland Fire Safe Council
- North Hills Community Association

The Office of the Mayor of Oakland and the Office of the Council President, District 2, also provided letters of support for this project.

Additionally, this project supports the goals and objectives of the Oakland Vegetative Management Plan as well as Alameda County's 2012 Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) which specifically identifies addressing trees within striking distance of PG&E powerlines along the Skyline Boulevard corridor in Oakland as a priority treatment area.

COORDINATION

The Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation Route project, from inception to award, is a direct result of the City's interagency Wildfire Prevention Working Group. This working group was an outcome of Resolution No. 87940 C.M.S., adopted by City Council on November 19, 2019, declaring wildfire prevention a top priority for the City of Oakland. Through this working group and a relationship with the regional CAL FIRE Unit, City staff identified the Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation Route project for a funding request to CAL FIRE. The scope of work was developed through the Wildfire Prevention Working Group in coordination with the Oakland Fire Safe Council.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: Accepting these funds would add \$1,000,000 to OPW's budget to complete necessary work to reduce fire and evacuation-related risks in the project area. The project area includes the evacuation routes for approximately 60,000 Oakland residents. This project will reduce potential life and property losses should there be a catastrophic fire event in or near the project area by minimizing fuel loads that can both spread fire and block roads for local evacuation purposes and emergency vehicle access.

Environmental: Protecting the Skyline Boulevard Evacuation Corridor will allow Fire and emergency crew access to WUI areas and reduce the potential of any fires from becoming catastrophic wildfire events in the Oakland Hills, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions released from burning forests and structures. Preventing structures from burning will also reduce greenhouse gas emissions that would be released when rebuilding these structures, including the harvesting and fabrication of the construction materials and their transport.

The woody biomass from the trees removed for this project will be disposed of in ways that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as disposal at a green waste facility, using the logs as permanent barriers in parks or along roadsides throughout the City, and chipping branches for use as mulch to help inhibit the growth of seasonal grasses that will become potential fire fuels.

Race & Equity: CAL FIRE's Wildfire Prevention Grant funds are designated for areas with high wildfire risk. The geographic region in Oakland with the highest wildfire risk is the Oakland Hills, which is not a low-income or disadvantaged community. However, this project has the potential to indirectly prevent additional burdens on Oakland's low-income or disadvantaged communities in the flatlands if a fire were to occur in the Oakland Hills. Significant resources from the City and other emergency personnel would be needed in the project area if a catastrophic wildfire were to occur, thereby reducing the availability of these resources to other parts of Oakland.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA)

CEQA Guidelines Section 15269(b) exempts further CEQA review for "emergency repairs to publicly or privately-owned service facilities necessary to maintain service essential to the public health, safety, and welfare. Emergency repairs include those that require a reasonable amount of planning to address an anticipated emergency."

The removal of dead or damaged trees in the Very High Fire Severity Zone, where there is a substantial and immediate risk of fire due to fuel sources such as dead or damaged trees, poses an immediate risk to public health, safety, and welfare and therefore must be addressed immediately under CEQA Guidelines Section 15269.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt A Resolution Authorizing The City Administrator To Apply For, Accept, And Appropriate One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000) From The California Department Of Forestry And Fire Protection (Cal Fire) Fire Prevention Program To Remove Dead, Dying, And Hazardous Trees Within The Shepherd Canyon To Grass Valley Evacuation Route Area; And Making Appropriate California Environmental Quality Act Findings

For questions regarding this report, please contact David Moore, Tree Supervisor II, at (510) 615-5852.

Respectfully submitted,



Joe DeVries
Deputy City Administrator/
Chief Resilience Officer
Office of the City Administrator

Reviewed by:
Kristin Hathaway, Asst. Director
OPW – Bureau of Environment

David Moore, Tree Supervisor II
OPW – Parks & Tree Services Division

Prepared by:
Gordon Matassa, Administrative Analyst II
OPW – Parks & Tree Services Division

Attachments (3):

- A: Notice of Award
- B: Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Project Area Map
- C: Public and Private Assets within Proximity to the Project Area

**DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION**

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Website: www.fire.ca.gov



August 19, 2024

David Moore
City of Oakland
7101 Edgewater Drive, Building 4
Oakland, CA 94621

RE: PROJECT APPLICATION FOR THE CAL FIRE CALIFORNIA CLIMATE INVESTMENTS (CCI) WILDFIRE PREVENTION (WP) GRANTS

Dear Applicant:

The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) is pleased to inform you that your application for the grant project entitled **Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation Route (23-WP-SCU-57709101)** has been selected for funding.

You will receive the full agreement with instructions via email within 60 days. All documents must be returned to CAL FIRE no later than **October 31, 2024**. Failure to return documents by this date may result in loss of funding. It is important that you do not start on your grant project until you have received a confirmation that your grant agreement has been fully executed.

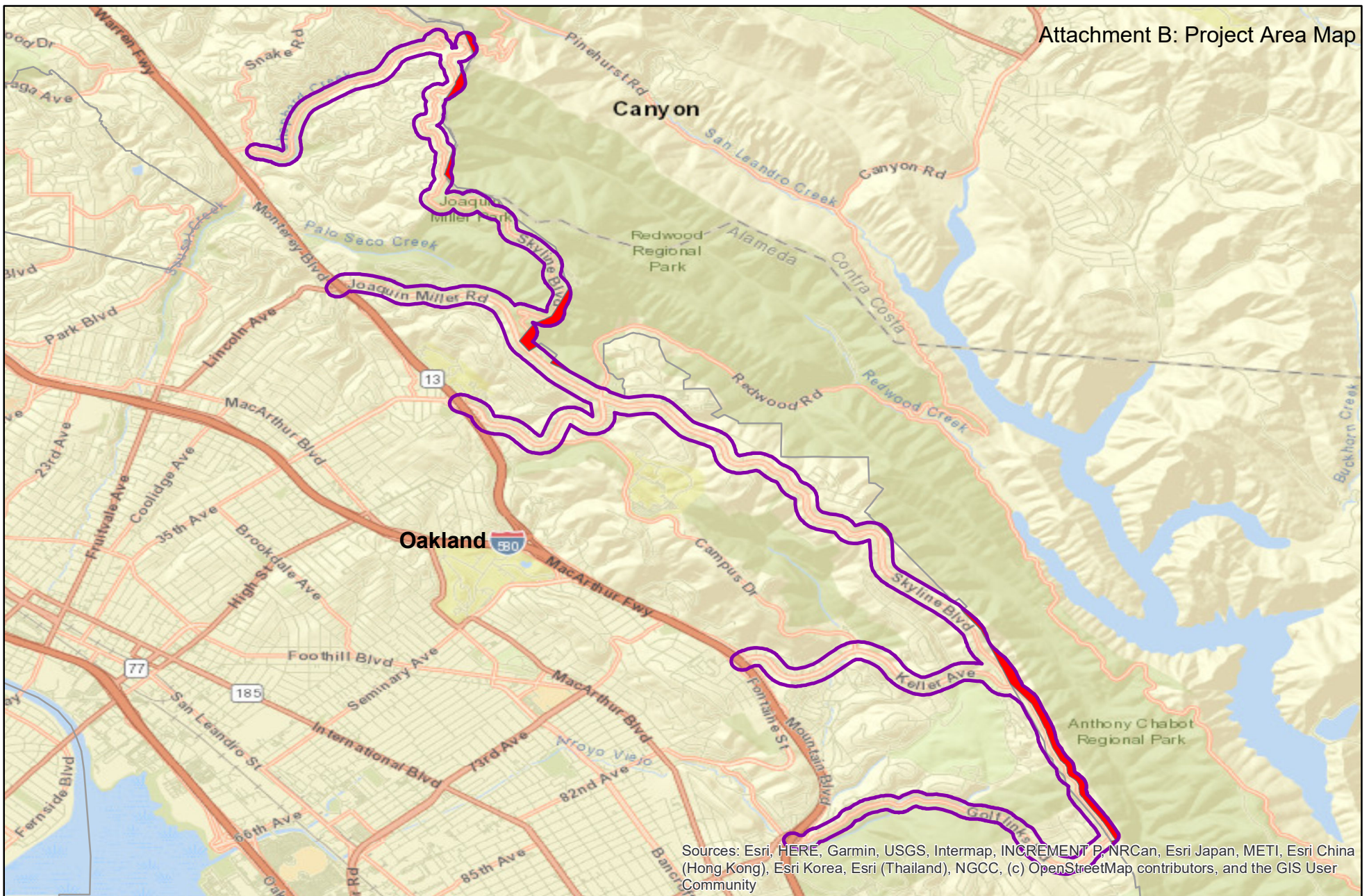
Please coordinate with your appropriate region staff to validate the polygons that were previously submitted for your project application. In addition, you may be required to provide information to complete the required emissions calculations for your project per the required Quantification Methodology. You will be contacted if this information is needed.

We look forward to working with you on your grant project. If you have any additional questions, please contact **Ed Orre** at **(408) 206-3704** or **Edgar.Orre@fire.ca.gov**.

Sincerely,




A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Natalie B.".

Natalie Burke
Staff Services Manager I
Wildfire Prevention Grants Program Manager



Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, Intermap, INCREMENT P, NRCan, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri Korea, Esri (Thailand), NGCC, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Legend

-  Project Boundary
-  SRA Treatment Areas
-  Oakland City Limits

Project Tracking Number: 23-WP-SCU- 57709101
 Project Name: Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation Route
 Project Proponent: Fuel Reduction



Attachment C: Public and Private Assets within Proximity to the Project Area for the Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation Route Fire Prevention Project

City of Oakland Assets:

- Six Oakland Fire Stations (Stations 6, 7, 21, 24, 25 & 28) that utilize Skyline Boulevard and its arterial routes as a primary means of incident response.
- Joaquin Miller Park, Joaquin Miller Community Center, the Woodminster Amphitheater, and other facilities within the park. This park has numerous access points for fire response from Skyline Boulevard running through the park's eastern boundary. The Woodminster Amphitheater is an outdoor stage event venue with seating for 2000 people. It also serves as an emergency shelter site and has an underground bunker. The Joaquin Miller Community Center and Sanborn Ranger Station host functions and are a hub for OPW and Parks, Recreation, and Youth Development operations.
- Oakland Public Works Shepherd Canyon Municipal Services Yard (5921 Shepherd Canyon Road) houses the Drainage and other divisions of Oakland Public Works and services the entire city.

Other Public Agency Assets:

- The East Bay Regional Communications System Authority (EBRCA) has two radio system repeaters in the Oakland Hills that are vital components of their system used by multiple agencies, including police, fire, and medical.
- Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) high-voltage power lines that run throughout the Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation Route project area.
- Nine East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) water reservoir tanks and other facilities in numerous locations in the project area:
 - The Palo Seco Reservoir, 10722 Skyline Boulevard.
 - The May Reservoir, Skyline Boulevard, 2000 feet southeast of Keller Avenue.
 - The City Line Pumping Plant, Sequoyah Road just west of Skyline Boulevard.
 - The City Line Reservoir, 14330 Skyline Boulevard.
 - The Madrone #2 Regulator and Madrone Reservoir, 300 feet east of Balmoral Drive and 400 feet north of Skyline Boulevard.
 - The Carisbrook Reservoir, 2677 Carisbrook Drive west of Skyline Boulevard.
 - The Castle Reservoir, 6020 Castle Drive west of Skyline Boulevard.
 - The Skyline Reservoir, north of Skyline Boulevard, 1000 feet southeast of Castle Drive adjacent to the Chabot Space & Science Center.
 - The Grass Valley regulator, 13711 Skyline Boulevard., 50 feet south of Barmeid Place.
- The East Bay Regional Parks District (EBRPD) Trudeau Center (11500 Skyline Boulevard) is a local event and regional training facility within the project area, routinely used by public safety agencies for joint planning and training including Oakland Fire, CALFIRE, East Bay Regional Parks Fire & Police, Berkeley Fire and the East Bay Municipal Utilities District. This facility is also utilized by the public for civic events and meetings of up to 100 people.
- The Anthony Chabot Equestrian Center (14600 Skyline Boulevard) is located within the project area and provides stables for up to 50 horses. This project would benefit this facility and its emergency evacuation planning by reducing the fire threat to its egress routes.

Attachment C: Public and Private Assets within Proximity to the Project Area for the Shepherd Canyon to Grass Valley Evacuation Route Fire Prevention Project

Educational, Religious, and Private Assets:

- Schools and educational institutions: Merritt College, Head-Royce Academy, Bishop O'Dowd High School, Skyline High School, East Bay Innovation Academy, Carl B. Munck Elementary, Growing Light Elementary, Joaquin Miller Elementary, Montera Middle School, Northern Light Middle School, Oakland Hebrew Day School, Grass Valley Elementary, Hintil Kuu Ka Preschool, First Covenant Treehouse Preschool, Chatham Preschool, and others.
- Sacred sites for the local Ohlone populations, including Rinihmu Pulte'irekne within Joaquin Miller Park.
- Places of worship: Oakland Mormon Temple, Oakland Greek Orthodox Church, First Covenant Church of Oakland, Skyline Community Church, East Oakland Assembly Pentecostal Church, Kaleo Christian Fellowship, Ascension Cathedral, Christian Layman Church, Living Faith Cristian Church, St. Paschal Baylon Catholic Church, East Bay Bible Church, Berith Christian Fellowship, Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and others.
- The Oakland Zoo, a 100-acre property and zoological conservation and research center that hosts 660 animals and thousands of visitors each day.
- The Chabot Space & Science Center (10000 Skyline Boulevard) – an astronomy, educational, and NASA-sponsored research facility is located within this project area and may have as many as 500 employees, visitors and students present during its hours of operation and evening presentations.
- Sunrise of Oakland Hills (11889 Skyline Boulevard), a senior housing and care facility, is home to over 150 senior citizens, many of whom are non-ambulatory. This project will directly benefit the residents of this elder care facility and aid with its evacuation preparedness and planning in the event of a wildfire.