



DATE: November 18, 2020

MEMO TO: Nels Leutwiler, Chair
Committee of the Preservation Foundation Board

FROM: Jim Anderson
Director of Natural Resources

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend approval of a \$60,000 grant from unrestricted funds to support a communications campaign as part of the Buckthorn Eradication Pilot Project at Middlefork Savanna.

FINANCIAL DATA: As of October 31, 2020, unrestricted funding totaled \$160,873; however, \$101,630 has been obligated from this fund through previous grant awards for a remaining balance of \$59,243.

If funding is approved, \$32,500 will be transferred from unrestricted funds in 2021, and \$27,500 will be transferred from unrestricted funds in 2022.

Project Expenses	2021 Expenses	2022 Expenses	Total Expenses
Communications firm contract	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$40,000
Native landscaping guide (qty. 500)	\$5,000		\$5,000
Direct mail campaigns	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$5,000
Buckthorn-free yard signs (qty. 500)	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$10,000
Requested funds from Foundation	\$32,500	\$27,500	\$60,000

BACKGROUND: In 2015, the District began a pilot project to eradicate buckthorn in a 2,900-acre landscape surrounding Middlefork Savanna Forest Preserve. The project area includes the 687-acre District property, as well as residential and light industrial areas, corporate campuses, education facilities, and other public lands in multiple municipalities.

Over the past five years, nearly 100% of the buckthorn has been removed from Middlefork Savanna and replaced with native plantings, and staff has worked to influence and incentivize the nearly 700 unique landowners in the project area to do the same.

In July 2017, the Forest Preserves distributed a homeowner survey to all 535 residents within the buckthorn eradication pilot area. In July 2018, survey results were sent to the same households, sharing key findings and inviting all recipients to join the movement toward a buckthorn-free area of substantial proportion. In December 2019, staff and partners organized a focus group who recommended increased public outreach and promoting victories of the past five years directly to Middlefork Savanna neighbors, as well as the broader community. Connecting the surrounding landowners to the success of this project will lead to multiplied restoration efforts and creative, neighbor-driven solutions to the biggest buckthorn removal barriers identified thus far.

In 2020, the District received a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Chi-Cal Rivers Fund to support a 50/50 cost-share program to assist landowners in buckthorn removal and replacement with native plants. These funds will expand invasive buckthorn management to a landscape scale at Middlefork Savanna, improving ecosystem function and habitat complexity.

We request funding to support a two-year communications campaign that will provide contractual support from a communications consultant and support to print and produce materials such as a native landscaping guide, direct mail communications, and “buckthorn-free” yard signs. In 2021, deliverables will include increased press coverage, direct communication with landowners, development of engaging homeowner resources, and launch of a yard sign program that will act as a conversation starter.

In 2022, the previous year’s campaign successes will be measured and analyzed by the same external communications firm. The second year of the grant period will focus on addressing gaps in outreach and analyzing key strategies from this pilot project since the beginning. The final products will include an analysis of the pilot project to-date, as well as the design of a process framework that can be applied to other priority areas within the preserves in the future.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Chief Development Officer/Executive Director of the Preservation Foundation, Director of Finance, Chief Operations Officer.

PRESERVATION FOUNDATION BOARD:

Date: _____ Roll Call Vote: Ayes: ____ Nays: _____
 Voice Vote Majority Ayes; Nays: _____