

- **Board of Directors**  
**Engineering and Operations Committee**

August 15, 2006 Board Meeting

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7-4

### **Subject**

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Authorize entering into a five-year agreement with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, with a yearly amount not to exceed \$665,000 to provide weed abatement services

### **Description**

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Under Public Resources Code Section 4114 and other provisions of law, the state of California maintains fire prevention and fire suppression forces, including the necessary equipment, personnel and facilities required to prevent and extinguish brush and forest fires during the fire season. Since 1994, Metropolitan has utilized the services of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) to provide fire prevention services and perform other labor-intensive work. Pursuant to Metropolitan Water District Administrative Code Section 8103(h), a contract for services with another governmental agency does not require competitive bid. Given that CDF work crews are available only when they are not fighting fires, weed abatement contractors are used to supplement the work as needed.

Since 2001, the work performed for Metropolitan by CDF has been accomplished through a five-year Master Agreement that permits the use of CDF services from multiple locations. Prior to 2001, contracts were utilized with individual CDF geographical areas. This Master Agreement has greatly simplified and streamlined our relationship with CDF and has worked very well.

CDF has consistently provided fire prevention and vegetation control services at a rate that is far more competitive than that charged by private contractors. The services provided to Metropolitan by CDF work crews include vegetation management for Diamond Valley Lake (DVL), Lake Skinner, the Southwestern Riverside County Multi-Species Reserve (Reserve), Lake Mathews Shoreline Vegetation Control Project, dams and dikes, fee parcels that comprise portions of the distribution system right-of-ways, Mills plant, Diemer plant and other Metropolitan properties and right-of-ways. More specifically, under a new agreement, Metropolitan will provide all design work and materials and CDF will provide the labor for the following tasks:

- Cut and remove non-native vegetation from the Lake Mathews shoreline by means of hand cutting with weed whackers and stacking vegetation growing below the Lake Mathews high water mark of 1,390 feet to maintain capacity of the operating reservoir.
- Weed abatement for fire management, to include cutting and removal of non-native vegetation from the Reserve, DVL, Lake Skinner, Lake Mathews, Eagle Valley, Metropolitan's pipeline and distribution system, and other Metropolitan structures, properties, plants, facilities and right-of-ways.
- Weed abatement for fire management in areas planted under the DVL seed application contract, especially for native seed mixes in the east and west wildlife corridors, as well as in the east and west recreation areas.
- Vegetation maintenance for fire management around the Reserve, lakeshores, Metropolitan's pipeline and distribution system, and other Metropolitan structures, properties, plants, facilities and right-of-ways.
- Conduct prescribed burns within the Reserve consistent with the Reserve's Fire Management Plan.
- Clear and maintain designated fuel breaks in and adjacent to the Reserve.

- Maintain necessary dirt roads, erosion control and other structures, and remove vegetative and other materials.
- Maintain trails within the DVL recreation area and the Reserve.
- Install, paint, repair and/or maintain trail-related structures and facilities, including but not limited to fence repairs.

Cost comparisons have identified an average hourly labor rate of approximately \$16 per CDF crewmember as compared to \$25 to \$35 per contractor crewmember. Consequently, the last time a private contractor was used (FY 93/94) for the Lake Mathews Shoreline Vegetation Control Project, it cost Metropolitan \$860,000, more than three times the cost of using CDF for the same project the following year (\$260,000 for FY 94/95).

The tasks identified are performed under the supervision of Metropolitan and/or designated Reserve representatives.

## **Policy**

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Metropolitan Water District Administrative Code Section 8115(a): Contracts over \$250,000

### **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)**

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CEQA determination for Options #1, #2 and #3:

The proposed action is not defined as a project under CEQA pursuant to Section 15378(b) of the State CEQA Guidelines because it involves government fiscal activities, which do not involve any commitment to any specific project that may result in a potentially significant physical impact on the environment (Section 15378(b)(4) of the State CEQA Guidelines).

The CEQA determination is: Determine that the proposed action is not subject to CEQA pursuant to Sections 15378(b) and 15378(b)(4) of the State CEQA Guidelines.

## **Board Options**

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### **Option #1**

Adopt the CEQA determination and authorize the General Manager to enter into a five-year agreement with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, with a yearly amount not to exceed \$665,000.

**Fiscal Impact:** A maximum of \$665,000 per year. The funds are included in the FY 2006/07 Operations and Maintenance budget.

**Business Analysis:** Metropolitan would continue its practice of proactively managing its lands in a responsible and efficient manner. The current agreement has proven to be an economical and efficient way to retain on-call services for weed abatement and property maintenance.

### **Option #2**

Adopt the CEQA determination and use private contractors to perform the same tasks.

**Fiscal Impact:** Approximately \$2.7 million per year. This level of funding is not fully budgeted for FY 2006/07.

**Business Analysis:** Metropolitan would continue its practice of proactively managing its lands, but in a less efficient manner. This would likely result in the need to procure multiple contracts to cover the wide geographic area that can be covered by the single CDF contract.

**Option #3**

Adopt the CEQA determination and authorize the General Manager to enter into a five-year agreement with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, with a yearly amount not to exceed \$240,000.

**Fiscal Impact:** At least \$240,000 per year. The funds are included in the FY 2006/07 Operations and Maintenance budget. At additional cost, supplemental contracts with private contractors could be proposed to do the level of work that could be accomplished with a single CDF agreement proposed in Option #1. At this time, this combination of the CDF and private contracts would have an unknown maximum fiscal impact, though it would likely exceed the \$665,000 of Option #1 to accomplish the same amount of work.

**Business Analysis:** Through a combination of a smaller CDF contract and private contractors, it is possible to complete the same amount of work as with the larger CDF contract alone. Metropolitan would continue its practice of proactively managing its lands, but in a less efficient manner, due to the fact that it would likely result in the need to procure multiple contracts to cover the wide geographic area that can be covered by the single CDF contract.

**Staff Recommendation**

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Option #1

  
Eddie A. Rigdon  
Manager, Water System Operations

7/24/2006  
Date

  
Jeffrey Kightlinger  
General Manager

7/25/2006  
Date