Interlocal Agreement(s) For Wildland Fire Management Activities

Travis County
and
The University of Texas at Austin

Parks and Recreation Board Meeting
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Background

- The majority of PARD's lands are protected as *natural areas*.
- A *natural area* is an area that retains or has reestablished its natural character, typically dominated by native plants and animals.
- They provide critical services to Austin residents:
  - Mental health
  - Social benefits
  - Economic benefits
  - Recreational opportunities
  - Water cleansing
  - Air cleansing
  - Climate regulation
- Most PARD natural areas have not been managed to maintain ecosystem health.
- Have been degraded by past management, invasive species, and loss of biodiversity, which make them more vulnerable to heat, drought, disease, and wildfire.
- These vulnerabilities will be exacerbated by climate change.

Background

- Further, in 2019, the City Auditor found that PARD is not strategically addressing wildfire risk on parkland and recommended that PARD create and implement land management plans to manage natural areas and address wildfire risk.
  - (Office of the City Auditor. October 2019. Wildfire Preparedness Audit Report)

- PARD is in the process of procuring a land management plan for several thousand acres of natural areas.

- Fire is a natural process
  - Is critical for:
    - Economical restoration and management of land at large scales
    - Sustainability and resiliency of natural systems

- Prescribed fire will be an important piece of the land management plan to reintroduce fire safely.

Purpose

- To achieve these goals and commitments, PARD is seeking to establish cooperative agreements with a group of land managing entities (and Austin Fire Department) in the Austin area, including interlocal agreements with:
    1. Travis County, and
    2. The University of Texas at Austin

- The interlocal agreements with Travis County and the University of Texas at Austin will each allow for mutual support and cooperation for prescribed fire management and training, land management planning, as well as planning and assistance for certain hazardous events.

- Collectively, these agreements will be important for PARD in fulfilling the commitments made in response to the Wildfire Audit as well as implementing restoration and land management plans for Preserves and other parkland natural areas.

Purpose

- These entities each use prescribed burning as an important land management tool, but no single entity can implement burns with only in-house resources. Thus, cooperation with other entities is critical.
- Land managing entities have been successfully cooperating on prescribed fire management in the area for at least 20 years.
- These agreements will allow PARD to become part of this group and benefit from the mutual support, cooperation, and training provided among the organizations.

Responsibilities:

- The Parties will provide qualified staff and equipment to assist with:
  - Prescribed burns
  - Training
  - Land management planning
  - Certain emergency events
- Voluntary cooperation as able and available.
- Standards for fire operations and training:
  - National Wildfire Coordinating Group
    - https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/pms310-1
  - Texas Prescribed Burning Board
    - https://www.texasagriculture.gov/Home/ProductionAgriculture/PrescribedBurnProgram.aspx
- No funds exchanged
- "We're going to help each other."

PARD Long-Range Plan Strategies & SD23 Outcomes:

PARD Long-Range Plan Strategies:

- Create and implement land management plans
- Protect and actively manage natural areas
- Pursue sustainability and resiliency goals
- Relief from Urban Life

Strategic Direction 2023 Outcomes:

- Health & Environment
- Safety
- Government that Works for All

Requested Committee Action:

Make a recommendation to the Parks and Recreation Board to recommend to the City Council to authorize the negotiation and execution of interlocal cooperation agreements for Wildland Fire Management Activities with:

1. Travis County
2. The University of Texas at Austin