

CITY COUNCIL COMMUNICATION



MEETING DATE: October 24, 2023

ITEM NUMBER: 9.I

SECOND READING:

{{customfields.ResoOrdNumber}}

TYPE OF ITEM: Consent

PRESENTED BY:

Pryce Hadley, Parks & Natural Resources, pryce.hadley@longmontcolorado.gov

SUBJECT/AGENDA TITLE:

A Resolution Of The Longmont City Council Approving An Intergovernmental Agreement Between City Of Longmont And Boulder County Sheriff's Office For Fire Mitigation Services At Button Rock Preserve

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City of Longmont has engaged in forest stewardship work at Button Rock Preserve since 2004 with the goals of protecting the community's drinking water source from wildfire and safeguarding the preserve's wildlife habitat. Forest stewardship entails cutting trees to thin forest stands to a more natural density to reduce fuel for wildfire and improve wildlife habitat.

In line with best practices established by the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), forestry projects at Button Rock Preserve often require building burn piles to manage slash (tree branches) generated during cutting. Pile burning during winter months and in accordance with burn plans and permits is the most cost-effective and logistically feasible manner of removing this fuel from the landscape.

Boulder County Sheriff's Office (BCSO) maintains its own fire department to suppress wildland fires and conduct prescribed fire operations in unincorporated Boulder County including on parkland directly bordering Button Rock Preserve (e.g., Hall Ranch Open Space). Partnering with BCSO on pile burning would leverage the department's considerable expertise, staffing, and equipment fleet and enable Longmont to meet fire mitigation goals more safely and effectively at Button Rock Preserve. Adopting a not-to-exceed IGA would allow Longmont to reimburse BCSO Fire Management for the labor and materials costs necessary to lead pile burn operations at Button Rock Preserve.

COUNCIL OPTIONS:

1. Approve the Resolution as presented
2. Approve the Resolution with modifications
3. Deny the Resolution

RECOMMENDED OPTIONS:

Option 1

FISCAL IMPACT & FUND SOURCE FOR RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Cost to the City of Longmont for services rendered by Boulder County Sheriff's Office (BCSO) is not to exceed \$15,000 per calendar year without additional, specific written authorization of both parties to the IGA by their respective Department Directors (Boulder County Sheriff and Longmont Water/Waste Director).

The shared goal of the parties is to utilize available funding to maximize fire mitigation activities on Button Rock Preserve to protect against the destructive effects of potential wildfires. Funding for forest stewardship at Button Rock Preserve is budgeted annually in the Water Fund. Funding proposed in the 2024 draft budget is sufficient to cover the cost of BCSO fire mitigation services.

BCSO is responsible for determining the date, time, duration, and staffing of pile burns. The goal is to consolidate fire mitigation activities in the fewest number of days as applicable laws, weather conditions, safety considerations, and other relevant circumstances allow. BCSO agrees not to charge more than \$2,500 for a single day of prescribed burning without prior approval of the City.

Staffing by appropriately trained and certified City of Longmont Parks & Natural Resources Division staff (e.g., rangers, natural resource technicians, etc.) will help defray the cost of services provided by BCSO during pile-burning operations. Longmont employs over a dozen trained FTE natural resource staff equipped to assist in winter pile-burning operations.

BACKGROUND AND ISSUE ANALYSIS:

Button Rock Preserve is a 3,000-acre property in the foothills west of Lyons that is owned and managed by the City of Longmont as a protected watershed for our community's drinking water supply. A Forest Stewardship Plan was adopted by the City in 2003 (updated 2017) to guide forest restoration and wildfire mitigation in the Preserve through the thinning of the ponderosa pine forest that has grown unnaturally dense in the past century. These fire-adapted forests require regular removal of small trees and downed wood for optimal forest health, either through natural processes such as fire or through mechanical treatments like selective thinning.

Since 2004, the City has conducted annual selective thinning projects in different parts of the Preserve to remove fuels and lower forest density. To date, over 1,300 acres of forest have been treated by staff, contractors, and conservation corps crews through thinning efforts.

In August 2020, the City of Longmont entered into an Intergovernmental Agreement to work cooperatively with other Boulder County entities and local Federal agencies, to coordinate

and advance cross-jurisdictional forest health projects. This effort resulted in the formation of the Saint Vrain Forest Health Partnership (SVFHP) and later supported an unprecedented cross-boundary forest health project, managed by Boulder County and the City of Longmont, resulting in the treatment of over 200 acres of forest at Button Rock Preserve in 2023.

In line with best practices established by the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), forestry projects at Button Rock Preserve often require building burn piles to manage slash (tree branches) generated during cutting. As of 2023, Longmont has hundreds of existing burn piles located in recent forest project sites that need to be addressed in a safe and timely manner. Pile burning during winter months and in accordance with burn plans and permits is the most cost-effective and logistically feasible manner of removing this fuel from the landscape.

The 2017 Forest Stewardship Plan and the 2023 Button Rock Preserve Management Plan accepted by City Council explicitly support the use of prescribed fire as a management tool at Button Rock Preserve. Both plans are based in a comprehensive review of scientific literature and consultation with CSFS regarding responsible forest stewardship practices.

Boulder County Sheriff's Office (BCSO) maintains its own fire department to suppress wildland fires and conduct prescribed fire operations in unincorporated Boulder County. BCSO Fire Mgmt. is responsible for prescribed fire on Boulder County Parks & Open Space (BCPOS) property including parkland directly bordering Button Rock Preserve (e.g., Hall Ranch Open Space, Billings Open Space, Riverside Ranch Open Space). This proximity gives BCSO unique insight into safe fire management practices in terrain and elevations identical to the Preserve. Partnering with BCSO on pile burning would leverage the department's considerable expertise, staffing, and equipment fleet and enable Longmont to meet fire mitigation goals more safely and effectively at Button Rock Preserve. Adopting a not-to-exceed IGA would allow Longmont to reimburse BCSO Fire Mgmt. for the labor and materials cost necessary to lead pile burn operations at Button Rock Preserve. Parks & Natural Resources staff certified as wildland firefighters, including rangers and natural resource technicians, would support BCSO Fire Mgmt. on pile burn operations to help defray costs, build in-house capacity for fire management, and ensure resource protection objectives are achieved.

ATTACHMENTS:

Att 1 - Resolution

Att 2 – Intergovernmental Agreement