



VENTURA COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT

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December 19, 2023

Board of Directors
Ventura County Fire Protection District
800 S. Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

SUBJECT:

Approval of, and Authorization for the Fire Chief of the Ventura County Fire Protection District to Sign, a Lease and Services Agreement with Coulson Aviation (USA), Inc. ("CAI") for the Operation of Fire Suppression Assets with Service to Commence January 1, 2024, and to Continue for 366 Days; Approval of, and Authorization for the Fire Chief of the Ventura County Fire Protection District to Sign, an Agreement with Southern California Edison Company in the Amount of \$9,646,662 to Fund the Stand-By Time Portion of the Lease and Services Agreement with CAI to commence January 1, 2024, and End on December 31, 2024; and Authorize the Auditor-Controller to Process the Necessary Accounting Transactions. **(RECOMMENDATION 3 REQUIRES 4/5THS VOTE).**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Approve, and authorize the Fire Chief of the Ventura County Fire Protection District (Fire District) to sign, a lease and services agreement with Coulson Aviation (USA), Inc. (CAI) (attached hereto as "Exhibit 1") for certain fire suppression assets and their related operation to commence January 1, 2024, and to continue for 366 days.
2. Approve, and authorize the Fire Chief of the Fire District to sign, an agreement with Southern California Edison Company (SCE) (attached hereto as "Exhibit 2") to accept \$9,646,662 to fund the standby time portion of the lease and services agreement with CAI (Exhibit 1) for certain fire suppression assets and their related operation to commence on January 1, 2024, and to continue for 366 days.
3. Authorize the Auditor-Controller to process the necessary accounting transactions to establish the following appropriations (requires 4/5th vote):

Fire District S600, Unit 2721

Increase: Salary and Benefits	\$ 410,094
Increase: Service and Supplies	5,869,567
Increase: Charges for Services	1,092,248
Increase: Miscellaneous Revenue	4,823,331
Decrease: Restricted For Public Protection	
Fund Balance	364,082

FISCAL IMPACT:

Mandatory: No

Source of Funding: Southern California Edison Company, CAL FIRE, United States Forest Service, and Fire District Fund

Funding Match Required: No

Impact on Other Departments: None

Summary of Revenues and Costs:

	<u>FY 2023-24</u>	<u>FY 2024-25</u>
Revenue:		
Charges for Services	\$2,063,437	\$ 1,092,248
Miscellaneous Revenue	\$9,285,969	\$ 4,823,331
Total Revenue	\$11,349,406	\$ 5,915,579
Costs:		
Direct	\$12,037,217	\$ 6,279,661
Indirect-Agency/Dept.	0	0
Indirect-County CAP	0	0
Total Costs	\$12,037,217	\$ 6,279,661
Net Cost:	\$ 687,811	\$ 364,082
Recovered Indirect Costs:	\$ 0	\$ 0

Current FY 2023-24 Budget Projection for the Fire District - BU 2721				
	Adopted Budget	Adjusted Budget	Projected Budget	Estimated Savings/(Deficit)
Appropriations	185,804,176	208,900,088	208,900,088	-
Revenue	195,536,454	195,903,426	195,903,426	-
Net Cost	(9,732,278)	12,996,662	12,996,662	-

STRATEGIC PLAN:

This item contributes to the Board of Supervisors (Board's) 2024-2027 strategic priority of Healthy, Safe, and Resilient Communities. The lease and services agreement with Coulson Aviation Incorporated will increase public safety by enhancing regional wildland aerial firefighting capabilities to suppress brush fires.

DISCUSSION:

Wildland fire remains one of the most significant threats to life and property in California. A recent risk assessment conducted by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) concluded that an estimated 11 million residents, or the equivalent of 1 in 4 Californians, live in areas considered high risk of a wildfire. Given the devastating and destructive wildfires in the past decade, Governor Gavin Newsom, as well as fire agencies and utility companies throughout the state, have emphasized that wildfire mitigation and suppression are a top priority. As a regional fire agency, the Fire District plays a key role in wildfire mitigation and suppression in Southern California.

Given this designation, the Fire District has been presented with the opportunity to continue partnering with SCE and CAI to provide Large Helitanker (LHT) services that will benefit Ventura County and the residents and businesses within the SCE service territory for 2024. Fire season has changed over the past decades to year-round.

In 2021, 2022, and 2023, Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA), Los Angeles County Fire Department, and the Fire District (also known as the Ventura County Fire Department) entered into an agreement with SCE and CAI, where SCE agreed to provide the three host agencies funds to contract CAI's fire suppression assets/equipment and the operation of those assets/equipment. Specifically, the SCE funds were used to pay for the fixed lease costs, or the standby time portion, of a lease and services agreement with CAI. The three host agencies paid CAI for the costs associated with operating the assets and equipment during flights and missions.

Collectively, this program is called Quick Response Task Force (QRF) and was designed to enhance the regional wildland aerial firefighting capabilities using various innovative technologies. The CAI LHTs are equipped with technology to collect data on flight time conducting suppression missions versus standby hours, gallons of water or retardant dropped and the number of drops per fire incident, number and location of wildfires attacked, and whether and to what extent the LHT is utilized outside of SCE's service territory. This data collection is required by SCE's funding agreement. CAI LHTs are also equipped with SMART Delivery System Controller technology, which allows for automated target drops for night vision goggle firefighting operations. SMART gives pilots the capability to adjust water/retardant flow rates based on speed and altitude. The QRF Program has proven to be a successful partnership, and the Southern California region realized the benefits of having these additional resources available.

This program has been extended to increase the effectiveness of aerial response to wildland fires for calendar year 2024. This extension for the 2024 calendar year will allow our agency to be equipped year-round for an extended fire season. SCE has agreed to provide the Fire District \$9,646,662 for calendar year 2024 to cover the fixed lease and standby time costs of an agreement with CAI to host a CH-47 Helitanker for

366 days in Ventura County. This aerial firefighting resource will have the capability of dropping 3,000 gallons of water or fire retardant during daytime and nighttime operations. The Ch-47 helitanker will be based at Camarillo Airport and operate primarily within the defined fire-threat areas of the SCE service territory, as illustrated in the map (Exhibit 3). The agreement with CAI would make the LHT services available to respond to incidents 24/7 for calendar year 2024.

The table below is the estimated budget for the CAI 2024 lease and services agreement:

Equipment/Personnel	Detail	Total
Estimated Costs:		
CH-47 Helitanker Lease	\$26,357 per day x 366-days (fixed cost)	9,646,662
CH-47 Helitanker Flight Time	200 Estimated Flight Hours	2,092,472
Helicopter Management Costs	Staffing	820,189
	Total Costs	\$12,559,323
Estimated Funding Sources:		
Southern California Edison	Fixed cost contribution	\$9,646,662
State and Federal Agencies	Assumes 75% of flight time is reimbursable	2,184,496
Fire District Funds	Estimated unreimbursed flight time	728,165
	Total Funding Sources	\$12,559,323

The Fire District would be responsible for the costs of flight time and missions of the CH-47 Helitanker. The Fire District is estimating 200 flight hours for the 366-day term. It is expected that 75% of flight time and mission costs will be reimbursed by State and Federal agencies.

This Board letter has been reviewed by the County Executive Office, Auditor-Controller's Office, and County Counsel. If you have any questions, please contact me at (805) 389-9704 or Business Services Bureau Manager Tom Kasper at 389-9764.



Dustin Gardner
Fire Chief

DG/TK/NC:bw

Attachments:

Exhibit 1 – Public Aircraft Lease and Services Agreement with CAI

Exhibit 2 – Funding Agreement with SCE

Exhibit 3 -- SCE Service Territory Map