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Open Space Authority Loma Fire Response Targets Watershed Restoration and Recovery

October 24, 2016 – San Jose, CA: The Open Space Authority Board of Directors has authorized General Manager Andrea Mackenzie to issue requests for proposals and budget amendments to cover the cost of short and long term fire response efforts. Nearly 2,000 acres of open space lands burned in the recent Loma fire. Preliminary post-fire evaluation by Authority staff indicate wildlife habitat and natural resources will require extensive rehabilitation and restoration. Immediate priorities include ensuring public safety from landslides and other hazards, barring illegal access (particularly preventing motorized vehicles from damaging exposed slopes), and reducing environmental impacts such as soil erosion and the flow of debris and sediment into the Chesbro and Uvas Reservoirs.

General Manager Andrea Mackenzie said, “Our sympathy goes out to all of those who experienced trauma and loss from the Loma Fire. All of us at the Open Space Authority are grateful to CalFire and the numerous agencies that worked tirelessly to contain the fire and minimize losses of life, property and damage to natural resources.”

“Early estimates indicate that the Open Space Authority’s restoration and recovery costs may exceed \$1 million. Our internal Loma Fire Response Team will manage the short and long term impacts on water supplies, trees, vegetation and wildlife,” said Mackenzie. The Open Space Authority will work with the County, CalFire, the Watershed Emergency Response Team, Santa Clara Valley Water District, the Hollister office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and other partners on the post-fire restoration effort. The Authority will seek partnerships and funding assistance for its restoration work from local, state and federal agencies.

Of the total 4,475 acres burned, 1,930 acres, or 43%, were primarily upper watershed lands managed by the Open Space Authority. The fire burned 1,500 acres of open space on Mt. Chual, on the east-facing side of the Santa Cruz Mountains, leaving steep slopes bare of trees and other vegetation in its wake. Due to wind and extremely dry conditions, the Mt. Chual area burned the hottest and consumed most of the trees, along with chaparral and other vegetation. .

Derek Neumann, the Authority’s Field Operations Manager, said, “Our immediate concerns for the Mt. Chual open space lands are erosion and runoff which the winter rainstorms will exacerbate. Storms

could likely unleash significant amounts of debris and sediment into the creeks and streams, which will clog drainage and affect water quality in the downstream Chesbro Reservoir. The Authority's Upper Uvas watershed property also burned and likely will release debris and sediment into creeks that drain to the Uvas Reservoir.

"We are also extremely concerned about potential damage to the land and safety posed by trespassers that ride motorized vehicles on the slopes left bare by the fire. We have increased our presence at Mt. Chual and are installing fencing and signage to discourage trespassers and educate them about the need to allow the vegetation to regenerate and get re-established," said Neumann.

"We won't know until spring 2017 whether the seeds in the soil were destroyed," said Galli Basson, Resource Management Specialist at the Open Space Authority, "Hopefully the winter rains will cause them to regenerate. It is even possible that some rarely seen native plants will emerge that are dependent on fire to release their seeds."

Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve was home to three of five Drop Zones that CalFire used to stage equipment and personnel to battle the fire. Open Space Authority field staff assisted the firefighters with their knowledge of the terrain. Hidden Lake, a source of water on the preserve, was used to fight the fire. The preserve remains closed while Authority staff remove hazards and rehabilitate the staging area and roads.

Education Program Coordinator Teri Rogoway said, "Our docents are already preparing educational programs to help visitors understand what to expect over the next several years in terms of regeneration and restoration of vegetation and wildlife. Wildfire is a process that occurs naturally and is also practiced as a land management tool. It can be beneficial to open space lands and even contribute to diverse species and habitat over time. For instance, after a much smaller fire on open space lands, docents saw whispering bell flowers for the first time in more than ten years."

The Open Space Authority will continue to inform and educate the public about the Loma Fire restoration and recovery effort through interpretive signage, programs, newsletters, social media and other venues.

***The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority** conserves the natural environment, supports agriculture, and connects people to nature, by protecting open spaces, natural areas, and working farms and ranches for future generations. Since 1993, the Open Space Authority has protected nearly 20,000 acres of open space, preserving the region's scenic beauty, protecting water resources and other natural capital, and providing outdoor recreation opportunities for Santa Clara County residents. Visit openspaceauthority.org or call 408-224-7476.*