Atascadero City Council
Staff Report – Fire Department

Stadium Park Fire Study

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Council:

1. Receive and file the report and presentation from Dr. Christopher Dicus; and,
2. Continue to support the current Stadium Park Use Policy; and,
3. Approve a fuel management plan using the grant funds provided by the San Luis Obispo County Community Fire Safe Council.

DISCUSSION:

The City Council implemented a use policy for Stadium Park in 2000 which restricted organized functions in the park during fire season. The fire department is convinced that the use of Stadium Park during fire season could result in catastrophic loss of life if a fire started in or near the park during an event.

In an attempt to increase options for the use of the park during fire season, staff sought to analyze the fire behavior and fire threat in-house. Staff realized that the software required to properly evaluate the fire threat in and around Stadium Park was too expensive and beyond the capabilities of staff. The department applied for three different grants to fund a fire behavior study of the park. Staff focused these grant requests to the SLO County Fire Safe Council over the course of four years. In the summer of 2010, the fire department received notification that the Fire Safe Council had approved the grant request and authorized up to $15,000 for a comprehensive study and fire modeling and up to $17,000 for fuel management and abatement.

In January 2011 the “Stadium Park Fire Hazard Assessment” was completed. Unfortunately the study confirmed what staff had believed in 2000 regarding fire safety of the park. According to the study under the heading entitled Major Conclusions, Dr. Christopher Dicus states, in short:
The potential of a fast-moving, high-intensity fire is highly realistic in Stadium Park, which would significantly threaten public safety, particularly during large-attendance events.

The greatest fire hazard exists during extreme weather events, which would facilitate extreme rates of spread and long-range spotting of embers that would significantly accelerate fire spread and threaten adjacent properties.

Fuel treatments, even a light-handed approach such as mowing & trimming of grass, removal of small-diameter dead-and-down woody fuels, and reduction of ladder fuels into tree canopies, could significantly reduce fire spread and intensity.

Ingress & egress is currently poor and could threaten public safety during a fire event.

Water sources should be developed and enhanced within and surrounding Stadium Park.

The San Luis Obispo County Community Fire Safe Council grant has paid 100% of the cost of the study and required no local match. Staff supported the contractor with data, GIS information, field trips to the site and surrounding areas and provided fire history which cost the City approximately $5,000 in staff time.

There was minimal cost to the City for staff time to supervise the contract and contractor for fuel management and abatement in the Park. The Council needs to consider that $17,000 is available for fuel management. These funds are one-time funds and do not require a local match. Additionally, the San Luis Obispo County Community Fire Safe Council does expect the City to maintain the fuel management plan, once implemented.

Staff anticipates the cost to maintain Stadium Park, once the fuel management is complete, will be between $1,000 & $5,000 annually. The range is largely due to the unpredictability of winter; the more winter rains received, the more the fuel management will cost.

In conclusion, staff recommends Council continue to support the current Stadium Park Use Policy and approve fuel management using the grant funds provided by the San Luis Obispo County Community Fire Safe Council.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

No fiscal impact for recommendations listed. If Council chooses to provide ongoing maintenance, cost would be $1,000 to $5,000 annually.
ALTERNATIVES:

1. Continue to Support the existing Stadium Park Use Policies.

2. Accept the “Stadium Park Fire Hazard Assessment” and direct staff to complete fuel modification and abatement.

3. Accept the “Stadium Park Fire Hazard Assessment” and return monies for fuel modification and abatement to the San Luis Obispo County Community Fire Safe Council.

4. Accept the “Stadium Park Fire Hazard Assessment” and request the San Luis Obispo County Community Fire Safe Council to transfer the remaining funds to the City’s Chipping Program.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. The current Stadium Park Use Policies
2. “Stadium Park Fire Hazard Assessment” Christopher A. Dicus, Ph.D.
3. Consultant CV
The Current Stadium Park Use Policies:

CITY OF ATASCADERO

Stadium Park Public Use Rules and Policies
Established 4/25/2000

1. Stadium Park is available for unrestricted hiking. All other public assembly gatherings must be approved by the City prior to the event. All public gatherings, regardless of size, are required to conform to these established rules and policies.

2. No smoking or open flames are allowed within the Stadium Park boundaries.

3. Public Assembly Events are permitted in Stadium Park on approval of the City Manager, providing the following conditions are met:
   The Event Holder submits the following plans prior to approval
   a. Parking and transportation plans
   b. Fire safety plan developed in cooperation with the Fire Department
   c. ADA/Handicapped accessibility plans
   d. Security plans/APD notification plan
   e. No public assembly events are permitted during the declared fire season.

The Following Rules will apply to all approved Public Assembly Events
   a. All events restricted to daylight hours, including set-up and clean-up.
   b. Picnic style seating on the ground with blankets and folding chairs only.
   c. Trash disposal required by the event holder.
   d. Vehicles are allowed in Stadium Park for deliveries only.
   e. Hazardous weather conditions may restrict use of Stadium Park for public assembly events.
   f. A $100.00 refundable Security Deposit must be paid at least 20 working days in advance of the proposed event.
   g. Portable restrooms are required for all public assembly events and must be removed as soon as possible or the next business day.

4. Park users are responsible for trash removal at the end of each event or visit.

5. The Community Services Department will be responsible to complete annual weed abatement in accordance with City regulations and in cooperation with the Atascadero Native Tree Association for the purpose of identifying and protecting seedlings and other flora as necessary. Pink tubes for the purpose of protecting oak seedlings should not be disturbed.

6. Only authorized and emergency vehicles are allowed in Stadium Park.

7. Park users should be aware that Stadium Park is an unimproved facility without typical park amenities. No restrooms, no water, electrical service, no paved access, no telephone. However, there is an abundance of poison oak, so please be careful.
Stadium Park Fire Hazard Assessment:

(Click to follow link)
Consultant CV:

CHRISTOPHER A. DICUS, Ph.D.
Natural Resources Management Department, California Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo, California, U.S.A.

EDUCATION
Louisiana State University: Doctor of Philosophy, Forestry
Utah State University: Master of Science, Forestry
Louisiana Tech University: Bachelor of Science, Forestry-Wildlife, Summa cum laude

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
Professor, Wildland Fire & Fuels Management –
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA, Sept. 2001-present.
- Coordinator: Wildland Fire & Fuels Management Concentration of Forestry & Natural Resources Major
- Coordinator: All Internships in Natural Resources Management Department
- Major advisor to 8 current graduate students and ~50 undergraduate students
- Faculty – Cal Poly Study Abroad (Australia 2009)

AWARDS & HONORS
- Cal Poly Academic Senate Distinguished Scholarship Award (Finalist-2010)
- Distinguished Alumnus of the Year, Louisiana Tech University School of Forestry (2006)
- Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
- Association for Fire Ecology
  o Board of Directors (2006-present)
  o Education Committee (2005-present)
- Society of American Foresters
  o Chair, Los Padres Chapter (2003-2010)
  o National Fire Working Group (2000-present)
- San Luis Obispo County FireSafe Council
  o Board of Directors (2002-present)
- International Association of Wildland Fire
- California Licensed Forester Association

PUBLICATIONS
Author of 1 book, 8 peer-reviewed research manuscripts (4 additional manuscripts currently in review to refereed journals), 14 proceedings papers (non-reviewed), 12 research and technical reports, 3 professional trade journals, and 19 invited editorials in various print periodicals. Selected publications follow.


C.A. Dicus 1 of 3
• Dicus, C.A. 2009. Fire on the landscape: Current policies and changing climate lead to higher costs, more severe wildfire. California Forests 13(2):16-17.

PRESENTATIONS – PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH CONFERENCES
50 oral presentations and 9 posters presented at international, national, regional, and local conferences. Selected oral presentations follow (others available upon request).


**PRESENTATIONS – MASS MEDIA**

Presentations and Interviews in 8 mass media outlets. Selected presentations follow.


• **Dicus, C.A.** 2008. Featured in “Creating Defensible Space: Protecting the People You Love” informational DVD. Available at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1CSfCnPC00](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1CSfCnPC00).


**OTHER SIGNIFICANT PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

• California Registered Professional Forester

• Honorary Research Associate
  
  o Univ. of Tasmania School of Geography & Environmental Studies (Australia) – March-June 2009

• Australian Black Saturday Bushfire Cooperative Research Center Research Task Force
  
  o Member of 6-person team that collected post-fire social and biophysical data in Marysville, Victoria, Australia (site of worst fire disaster in Australian history) – March/April 2009

• Reviewer – International Research Journals (8)

• Steering Committee
  
  o 2006 and 2009 International Fire Ecology and Management Congresses
  
  o 2010 Australian – U.S. Wildland-Urban Interface Research Colloquium

• Faculty (Wildland Fire Science) – Federal Continuing Education In Fuels Management (2004 – present)

• Faculty (Wildland Fire Science) – National Advanced Silviculture Program (2008 – present)

• Fire Behavior Modeling Workshops delivered to 5 public and private institutes

• University Courses [6] delivered exclusively to mid-career federal fire managers and ecologists

• Professional Facilitator – Living on the Edge Community Leaders Fire Workshops (2004 – present)

• **Fire Behavior Analyst** on major wildland fires including 2007 Zaca Fire and 2009 La Brea Fire