



## Fountain Wind Project & Fall River Resource Conservation District

# Fuel Break Project: Big Bend Road and Highway 299

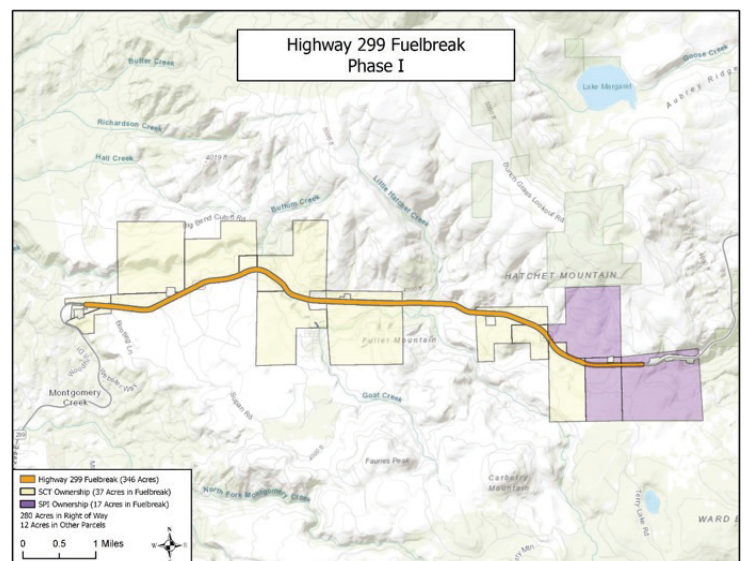
### Introduction

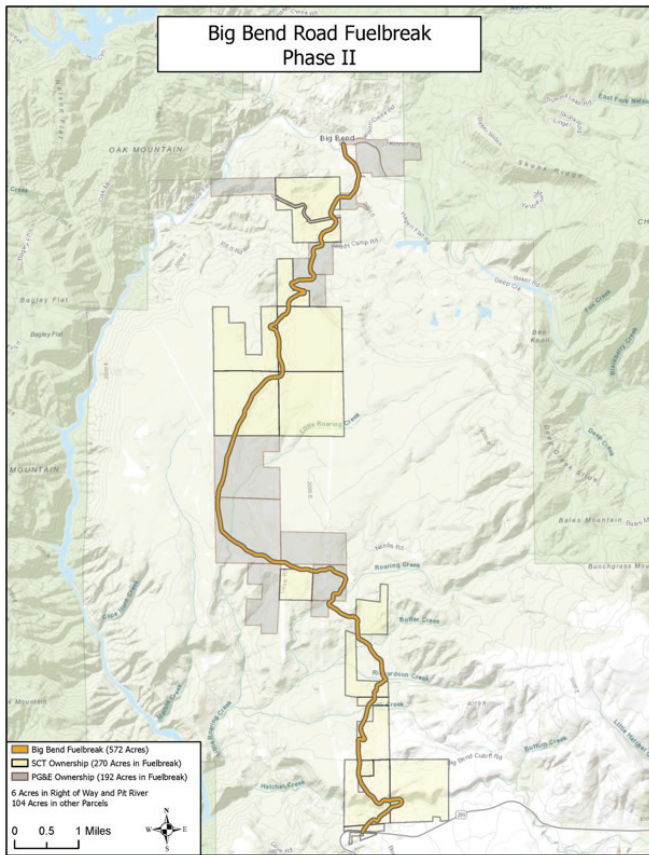
ConnectGen recognizes that improved fire safety and fire protection is a matter of extreme importance in Shasta County. In addition to the inherent fire safety and fire protection benefits created by the Fountain Wind Project, ConnectGen has identified additional fire protection enhancements in the vicinity of the project. ConnectGen has been working with the Fall River Resource Conservation District (“Fall River RCD”) to develop and implement a fuel reduction and fuel break project in the greater Burney, California area. After extensive consultation with local landowners and stakeholders in the vicinity of the Fountain Wind Project, it became apparent that a fuel break and fuel reduction project along approximately 23 linear miles of Big Bend Road and Highway 299 (the “Fuel Break Project”) has been a long-standing need of the community.

To address this need, ConnectGen has committed funding in the amount of \$250,000 to the Fall River RCD for design, permitting and implementation of the Fuel Break Project. Funding would be provided subject to the Fountain Wind Project’s successful completion of the California Environmental Quality Act review process, receipt of Conditional Use Permits from Shasta County, and commencement of construction of the Fountain Wind Project, which is expected to occur in spring 2022. In addition to the Fuel Break Project, the Fountain Wind Project will improved fire protection for the area by introducing a series of fire breaks within the project, increasing timberland access through a network of new and enhanced roads, and implementing an extensive Fire Prevention Plan in coordination with Shasta County, and CAL FIRE.

### Fuel Break Project

After initial identification of the project by ConnectGen in the fall of 2020, the Fall River RCD conducted an inspection of the fuel loadings along Big Bend Road and portions of Highway 299 between Big Bend Road and Hatchet Ridge. The locations of the proposed fuel break treatment areas are currently overstocked, unhealthy, and prone to high intensity wildfire. Based on the type and density of vegetation that was recorded during the inspection, the Fall River RCD recommended implementation of a 300-foot-wide shaded fuel break, 150-feet on either side of the portions of Big Bend Road and Highway 299 pictured on the right.





A shaded fuel break is a forest management strategy used for mitigating the threat of wildfire in areas where there has been a dangerous buildup of combustible vegetation. A shaded fuel break is created by the process of selectively thinning and removing the more flammable understory vegetation and fallen material while leaving the majority of larger, more fire tolerant trees in place. Shaded fuel breaks provide safe egress for residents and ingress for first responders while thinned forest stands and removal of ladder fuels provide anchor points for fire suppression and increase the chances of saving homes, and potentially lives.

The Fuel Break Project would reduce ladder fuels and establish a 300-foot-wide shaded fuel break totaling 23 linear miles, including 15 miles of Big Bend Road and 8 miles along Highway 299, representing approximately 873 total acres. The proposed treatment areas are along primary access points for local residents and would help to protect approximately 105 habitable structures. Material removed from these fuel breaks will be delivered to a locally owned and operated small scale bioenergy facility, such as Hat Creek Bioenergy, which is planned to be operational by 2022, or to an existing bioenergy facility such as Burney Forest Power.

The Fall River RCD has conducted meetings and gained support from local stakeholders, including the Big Bend Community Land Trust Inc. Board of Directors, the Big Bend Volunteer Fire Company, approximately twenty landowners representing over 1,500 acres of privately owned land, Indian Springs Elementary School, Cove Crest Farms, and a number of local businesses. Additionally, meetings have taken place with Shasta Cascade Timberlands, one of the largest landowners in the area, who is supportive of the Fuel Break Project. The California Department of Transportation (“CAL TRANS”) is also interested in participating in the project.

To further leverage the contribution by ConnectGen, the Fall River RCD submitted a grant application to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (“CAL FIRE”) in May 2021 as part of the California Climate Investments Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. This program provides matching funds for fuel break projects which allows the Fall River RCD to double the size, scope, and benefit of the project.

## Fuel Break Project Benefits

The Fuel Break Project is located on primary evacuation routes for the residents of Big Bend, Hillcrest, Moose Camp, and Montgomery Creek, and could likely impact residents from Burney and Johnson Park in the event of a fire traveling from the east toward those communities. The project would serve to protect approximately 105 habitable structures located near the treated areas. The communities that stand to benefit from the Fuel Break Project are located in low-income, high wildfire threat areas which have received limited vegetation treatments in the recent past.

The project will also serve to reduce hazardous fuel along critical transportation corridors within these Wildland Urban Interface (“WUI”) areas in eastern Shasta County and offers direct public safety benefits to local residents and landowners in a CAL FIRE-designated high-priority treatment area.

In addition, the project will serve to lessen the probability of high-severity wildfires spreading into and through the WUI areas, destroying property and surrounding forest lands, by allowing first responders to safely deploy fire suppression resources along these corridors. The Fuel Break Project will serve to protect critical infrastructure, including communication towers, electrical transmission and distribution lines, as well as a small elementary school located within the town of Big Bend.

## About Fall River Resource Conservation District

The Fall River RCD was organized in 1957 and consists of approximately 1.2 million acres in northeastern California, including parts of Shasta, Siskiyou, Lassen, and Modoc Counties. The mission of the Fall River RCD is to support private and public landowners in the use and management of natural resources that will ensure the sustained highest economic, social, and environmental benefits of these resources.

The Fall River RCD is uniquely positioned to lead the implementation of the Fuel Break Project given its track record of project execution in eastern Shasta County and its existing partnerships with State and local entities such as the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, CAL TRANS, and CAL FIRE. The Fall River RCD has successfully developed and implemented over twenty-five projects in the last 10 years totaling over \$10 million.

## About Fountain Wind Project

The Fountain Wind Project is a proposed 216 MW wind project in northeastern Shasta County. The project will be located on privately owned timberlands near Highway 299, approximately six miles west of Burney, and is anticipated to be operational by the end of 2023. The Fountain Wind Project is proud to support local organizations such as the Fall River RCD and is committed to supporting Shasta County through its proposed Community Benefit Program. This program consists of approximately \$2,000,000 in funding to local programs covering education, public safety, fire protection, and workforce development.