STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Capital Outlay Budget Change Proposal (COBCP) - Cover Sheet
DF-151 (REV 07/21)

Fiscal Year	Business Unit	Department	Priority No.
2026-27	3540	Forestry and Fire Protection	MA-07

Budget Request Name	Capital Outlay Program ID	Capital Outlay Project ID
3540-019-COBCP-2026-GB	2485	0016321

Project Title
Witch Creek Fire Station – Relocate Facility

Project Status and Type
Status: ☒ New ☐ Continuing Type: ☒Major ☐ Minor

Project Category *(Select one)*

☐CRI *(Critical Infrastructure)*	☐WSD *(Workload Space Deficiencies)*	☐ECP *(Enrollment Caseload Population)*	☐SM *(Seismic)*
☒FLS *(Fire Life Safety)*	☐FM *(Facility Modernization)*	☐PAR *(Public Access Recreation)*	☐RC *(Resource Conservation)*

Total Request (in thousands)	Phase(s) to be Funded	Total Project Cost (in thousands)
$ 3,300	Acquisition	$ 25,450

Budget Request Summary

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) requests $3,300,000 General Fund for the acquisition phase of the Witch Creek Fire Station: Relocate Facility project, located in San Diego County. This is a new project. The total estimated project costs are $25,450,000.

Requires Legislation	Code Section(s) to be Added/Amended/Repealed	CCCI
☐ Yes ☒ No		

Requires Provisional Language	Budget Package Status
☐ Yes ☒ No	☒ Needed ☐ Not Needed ☐ Existing

Impact on Support Budget

One-Time Costs	☐ Yes	☒ No	Swing Space Needed	☐ Yes	☒ No
Future Savings	☒ Yes	☐ No	Generate Surplus Property	☐ Yes	☒ No
Future Costs	☒ Yes	☐ No			

If proposal affects another department, does other department concur with proposal? ☐ Yes ☐ No
Attach comments of affected department, signed and dated by the department director or designee.

Prepared By	Date	Reviewed By	Date
Department Director	**Date**	**Agency Secretary**	**Date**

Department of Finance Use Only

Principal Program Budget Analyst	Date submitted to the Legislature
Michael McGinness	1/9/2026

A. COBCP Abstract:

CAL FIRE requests $3,300,000 General Fund for the acquisition phase of the Witch Creek Fire Station – Relocate Facility located in San Diego County. This is a new project. The project will include acquisition of a new site to relocate the Witch Creek Fire Station, as well as the following: a fire station, combined barracks/apparatus building, Battalion Chief Office, generator/pump building, storage building, telecommunication tower, fuel vaults, septic system, water system, electrical system, security systems, storm water detention systems, and other appurtenances to support operations. The project will include site work and utilities as needed.

Total project costs are estimated at $25,450,000, including acquisition ($3,300,000) preliminary plans ($1,140,000), working drawings ($1,140,000), and construction ($19,870,000). The construction amount includes the construction contract ($16,287,000), contingency ($814,000), architectural and engineering services ($1,303,000), agency retained items ($326,000), and other project costs ($1,140,000).

The acquisition phase is estimated to begin July 2026 and is estimated to be completed in July 2028. The preliminary plans phase is estimated to begin in July 2028 and estimated to be completed in July 2029. The working drawings phase is estimated to begin in July 2029 and is estimated to be completed in August 2030. The construction phase is estimated to begin in September 2030 and estimated to be completed in June 2032.

Purpose of the Project:

Background

The Witch Creek Fire Station, built in 1952 on a 1.5-acre state-owned parcel, is a one-engine station located in the city of Ramona in San Diego County. The station's response area includes approximately 56,000 acres of State Responsibility Area (SRA), including substantial Indian Reservation land and the Cleveland National Forest, with some portions of the forest being within the station's Direct Protection Area (DPA). Projected population growth is anticipated to be concentrated around the western portion of the response area, where expensive custom ranch homes and large estates on private property are being constructed. The northwest section of the SRA is bordered by Lake Sutherland and is also being developed into custom home sites.

Located one-quarter mile east of the Old Julian Highway on Highway 78, Witch Creek FS responds to over 200 emergencies each year, and is staffed to conduct fire inspections, issue permits, and provide various support functions to the communities it serves.

The station's layout includes 1,000 square feet of living area and an apparatus bay that houses one CAL FIRE fire engine. The station is powered through San Diego Gas and Electric but does not have an emergency back-up power supply. Heating for the building is provided through a low-pressure gas system with 500 gallons of storage for cooking and heating.

The Ramona Fire Station is 13 miles west of Witch Creek FS, and the Warner Springs Fire Station is 19 miles east. The response times for both stations to the Witch Creek area are lengthy due to excessive traffic through central Ramona and the downtown corridor, and the narrow, winding, two lane roads from Warner Springs. This makes the Witch Creek FS essential for initial attack success for central San Diego County since there are no existing Local Response Authorities within the entire Witch Creek Fire Station response area.

Problem

The station is surrounded by horse training facilities, and the waste from these animals has contaminated the station's domestic well water supply. Department of Health Services (DHS), Office of Drinking Water, tested the well water in 2007 and the results indicated presence of E-Coli and

Coliform bacteria. DHS required the station to cease use of the well water for domestic use, after which the station commenced purchasing bottled water.

During the summer of 2016 the septic system was failing, the leach field was saturated, and sewer water was surfacing. CAL FIRE Technical Services personnel made an emergency repair and replaced sewer leach lines in the shadow of the old leach field. Station personnel continue to make every effort to mitigate the sewer problems by altering showering patterns, dish washing procedures, and by limiting toilet flushing.

The existing 73-year-old station has all the deficiencies typical of structures this old. The dorm type barracks does not provide privacy for male and female staff, and there is only one bathroom shared by both genders. The existing parcel is too small to build a modern fire station, which requires a minimum of five acres. Parking is inadequate, and there is no space for employee training, physical fitness, or office duties. The existing apparatus building is too small to accommodate a modern fire engine. The facility does not meet current seismic standards.

B. Relationship to the Strategic Plan:

This project relates to the following goals in the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection 2024 Strategic Plan:

Goal 5: Strength the Department's physical and digital infrastructure and streamline equitable access to information across core services.

Objective 2: Review and assess physical infrastructure across all levels of the Department to identify prioritized areas for improvement.

Goal 6: Identify core capabilities and strengthen operational capacity.

Objective 1: Ensure the Department has the resources and infrastructure to adapt to evolving operational demands and legal frameworks.

C. Alternatives:

1. Approve appropriation funding for acquisition.

   Advantages

   - A new fire station will support CAL FIRE's goal to be an efficient and effective essential services organization by providing the necessary facilities.
   - Relocating the Fire Station away from city congestion will decrease response time to the protected SRA.
   - A new location will provide the acreage necessary to construct a modern facility that meets current and anticipated mission needs, as well as all health, safety, and code requirements.
   - Continuation would keep a current project in forward motion, building on the investments made and resources used to date.

   Disadvantages

   - Additional cost to the General Fund.

2. Defer Funding

   Advantages

- This alternative defers the cost of facility replacement.

Disadvantages

- This alternative does not correct in a timely manner the deficiencies at the existing fire station that impede CAL FIRE's ability to provide emergency response.
- This alternative adds to the Department's backlog of critical capital improvements.
- Response times to SRA will continue to be long due to traffic congestion.
- This alternative will very likely increase the cost of facility replacement due to general construction market trends.

D. Recommended Solution:

1. Which alternative and why?

   The recommended solution is Alternative #1 – approve appropriation for acquisition. This alternative would bring all buildings and infrastructure up to the current code and regulations. This would provide for the shortest duration of interruption. Overall, the operational improvements would allow CAL FIRE to better meet the department's mission and strategic goals.

2. Detailed scope description.

   The project will include acquisition of a new site to relocate the Witch Creek Fire Station, and include the following: a fire station, combined barracks/apparatus building, Battalion Chief Office, generator/pump building, storage building, telecommunication tower, fuel vaults, septic system, water system, electrical system, security systems, storm water detention systems, and other appurtenances to support operations. The project will include site work and utilities as needed.

3. Basis for cost information.

   The estimated costs are based on the actual costs of other projects, with similar scope.

4. Factors/benefits for recommended solutions other than the least expensive alternative.

   The recommended solution is driven by the need to effectively deliver reliable critical emergency response resources to the State of California. Failure to implement the facility improvements outlined in this submittal will impact the operation of this mission-critical facility. The fire station structures are characterized by structural deficiencies, utility degradation and noncompliance with current codes and standards required for an essential services facility. Repairs and maintenance of aged buildings adds burden to staff during fire season and causes increased costs to the station's support budget. The current congested location hampers rapid emergency response to their assigned responsibility areas.

5. Complete description of impact on support budget.

   In accordance with funding agreements with Contract Counties that provide SRA fire protection, the state must allocate, in the form of a support budget item, a proportionate share of funds provided to CAL FIRE for capital outlay projects on a like-for-like basis. Maintenance and repair costs for the new facility will be low at the beginning of its 50-year lifespan. The new facility may require new/additional furnishings and supplies.

6. Identify and explain any project risks.

   There are no risks associated with the completion of this project. There is significant risk to the Department meeting its mission if the proposal is not funded.

7. List requested interdepartmental coordination and/or special project approval (including mandatory reviews and approvals, e.g. technology proposals).

This project will require a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance review

E. Consistency with Government Code Section 65041.1:

Does the recommended solution (project) promote infill development by rehabilitating existing infrastructure and how? Explain.

Yes. CAL FIRE promotes infill development, when possible, by renovating or replacing existing infrastructure in areas served by existing facilities.

Does the project improve the protection of environmental and agricultural resources by protecting and preserving the state's most valuable natural resources? Explain.

Yes. Due to the nature of the Department's mission, it can be necessary to locate facilities into areas that could have negative environmental and agricultural impacts; however, strategic placement of these facilities to provide more effective response to wildland fires will ultimately protect nearby forests, watersheds, agricultural land, and other valuable natural resources. Any impacts created at the new site will be minimized and appropriate mitigations will become part of the project.

Does the project encourage efficient development patterns by ensuring that infrastructure associated with development, other than infill, supports efficient use of land and is appropriately planned for growth? Explain.

Yes. CAL FIRE facilities are strategically located to meet the Department's mission. To the maximum extent possible, CAL FIRE prefers to develop close to existing roads, water, sewer, and other utilities to promote efficient development in the area and to mitigate future support costs for facility maintenance. Project planning includes incorporation within local government planning models. The growth-inducement potential is one of the potential environmental impacts addressed in the CEQA process.