STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Capital Outlay Budget Change Proposal (COBCP) - Cover Sheet
DF-151 (REV 07/20)

Fiscal Year	Business Unit	Department	Priority No.
2025-26	3540	Forestry and Fire Protection	MA-36

Budget Request Name	Capital Outlay Program ID	Capital Outlay Project ID
3540-081-COBCP-2026-GB	2485	0005020

Project Title
Hemet-Ryan Air Attack Base: Replace 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)
$ 1,810	Working Drawings	$ 93,053

Budget Request Summary

The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) requests a supplemental appropriation of $1,810,000 General Fund for the working drawings phase of the Hemet-Ryan Air Attack Base: Replace Facility project, located in Riverside County. This is a continuing project. Total estimated project costs are $93,053,000. This additional authority is necessary to fund higher than expected design costs related to natural gas and sewer connections for the facility.

Requires Legislation	Code Section(s) to be Added/Amended/Repealed	CCCI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	1/9/2025

A. COBCP Abstract:

The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) requests a supplemental appropriation of $1,810,000 General Fund for the working drawings phase of Hemet-Ryan Air Attack Base (Hemet-Ryan AAB): Replace Facility project. The project includes the construction of an air operations building, barracks/mess hall, an apparatus storage and warehouse building, a Firehawk helicopter hangar, a North American Rockwell OV-10 hangar, protective aircraft weather canopy for the Grumman S-2T airtankers, and a helicopter training tower. Additionally, the scope will include site work as needed.

Total project costs are estimated at $93,053,000, including preliminary plans ($2,278,000), working drawings ($3,741,000), and construction ($87,034,000). The construction amount includes the construction contract ($76,611,000), contingency ($3,831,000), architectural and engineering services ($2,991,000), agency retained items ($80,000), and other project costs ($3,521,000).

The preliminary plans phase began July 2020 and is estimated to be completed June 2026. The working drawings phase is estimated to begin June 2026 and is estimated to be completed May 2028. The construction phase is estimated to begin in May 2028 and is estimated to be completed March 2030.

B. Purpose of the Project:

Background

The Hemet-Ryan AAB is located at Hemet Airport, which is owned by Riverside County (County). Funding for the design of the replacement of this facility was appropriated in the 1998 Budget Act. After this appropriation, and prior to starting the design work, it was determined that the project should be re-scoped to relocate the facility to the March Air Reserve Base (ARB), primarily because there were safety issues at Hemet Airport. The design of the relocation project was initiated in 2000 and completed in 2001. In 2002, the funding source was shifted from General Fund to lease revenue bonds for the acquisition and construction phases of the project. Funding appropriated for the construction and acquisition phases of this project were shifted back to General Fund in 2005 due to the inability to obtain the required property rights to enable lease revenue bond funding. During the three-year period in which CAL FIRE attempted to obtain the required property rights at the March ARB, Riverside County determined it would be in the best interest of the County to address the safety issues identified at Hemet Airport. The County has addressed CAL FIRE's safety concerns at Hemet Airport by suspending Glider Port Operations, controlling the use of the parallel runway, and providing security and access upgrades.

Since these immediate safety issues have been addressed, and because this location has always been considered optimum for this facility based on CAL FIRE's initial attack response time to the State Responsibility Area, CAL FIRE determined that the preferred location for this facility would be Hemet Airport. CAL FIRE has re-negotiated property rights to secure a long-term lease with the County. The County and CAL FIRE have executed a Memorandum of Understanding and a Joint Development Agreement to delineate the roles and responsibilities to facilitate the completion of this project at Hemet Airport. Additionally, the County has provided $2.5 million towards the completion of this facility at the existing location.

Problem

The need to replace the existing structures and infrastructure at the Hemet-Ryan AAB were first identified in 1995. The facility continues to age, and CAL FIRE continues to expand operational funds to keep the air base functional. The tarmac and taxiways are a combination of many different concrete pours and are deteriorating. Debris from the cracked and crumbling concrete can be pulled into the turbo prop engine intakes, leading to aircraft damage and posing a serious risk to people, other aircraft or nearby structures.

CAL FIRE has increased the capacities at the base, requiring 12-month operation for fixed wing

aircraft as well as 24-hour operation of the helicopter.

Hemet-Ryan AAB and Ramona AAB are the two state-owned and operated air attack bases in Southern California. Hemet-Ryan AAB is considered one of the busiest air tanker bases in the nation. The critical infrastructure of the air base is the underground plumbing that mixes and distributes the retardant used in the suppression of wildland fires. During the fire sieges of October 2003 and October 2007, there were as many as twenty air tankers operating out of Hemet-Ryan AAB. If the underground plumbing system were to experience a catastrophic failure, the air tankers would have to be redirected to the San Bernardino Air Tanker Base (ATB), a Federal ATB, and the Ramona AAB, in San Diego County. This movement would increase the flight time to many of the initial attack areas of Hemet-Ryan AAB. Flight time from the San Bernardino ATB to Hemet-Ryan AAB is ten minutes and from Ramona AAB to Hemet-Ryan AAB is fifteen minutes.

Time is a critical factor in the success or failure of CAL FIRE's initial attack response. Successful containment of wildland fires is dependent on control production units (engines, hand crews, and aircraft) arriving at the fire scene at a rate that exceeds the rate of fire spread. CAL FIRE Aviation resources provide one of the most effective tools in achieving the containment of wildfires. Aircraft can retard the rate of fire spread with repeated placement of retardant on the fire where there is the most activity. This allows the ground protection units to build a fire line and stop the fire growth. A 1998 study entitled *Hemet-Ryan AAB Relocation Study* stated, "The area served by Hemet-Ryan AAB includes some of the most seriously imperiled lands in the state." The report concluded, "...that any relocation of this AAB away from these areas must necessarily result in an increase to the number of fires exceeding the ten-acre failure threshold because retardant delivery is slowed in the critical initial attack phase." An increase in large fires will have a direct impact on an increase of expenditures from the State Emergency Fund.

There is increased threat to the safety of the public and firefighters if the ten-acre threshold is exceeded. As history shows, the fire season is not a localized event; it occurs statewide. When extreme fire conditions exist, it is rare that there is only one fire burning at a time. This puts a serious strain on the available resources to suppress and control these fires. The loss of Hemet-Ryan AAB would endanger the lives of firefighters and the public and likely increase property loss of the communities at risk.

Any impairment of Hemet-Ryan AAB would increase the initial attack response area of Ramona AAB; the Ramona aircraft would be required to respond to Riverside and Orange Counties. The increased primary responsibility of the Ramona aircraft into those areas will have a negative impact on the San Diego initial attack success rate.

Much of the retardant plant was originally installed in the 1950s and 1960s. The storage tanks for mixed retardant have many welded patches on them, and it is increasingly difficult to continue to weld on the tanks. Underground plumbing is an unknown factor that could last several years or have a catastrophic failure in one or more locations at any time. The failure of the plumbing system would cause the facility to be immediately unusable, until repaired. The only time a failure could occur is during actual reloading operations when the plumbing system is under pressure and in use. This would force the immediate redirection of empty air tankers to other tanker bases.

With the increase of air operations, for fires in the Southern California area, the risk to ground personnel and aircraft increases. The current facilities at Hemet-Ryan AAB require pilots to taxi up to the pit areas and then perform a 180-degree pivot to allow for reloading. During the 2003 and 2007 fire sieges, there were two incidents when aircraft wingtips struck an adjacent aircraft during this pivot maneuver. The damage was minimal but put both aircraft out of service until cleared for flight operations by mechanics. To reduce the risk of this happening again, the aircraft are now parked with a pit open between them. This precautionary move reduces the loading area from four reload pits to two. This does not affect operations until more than three aircraft are loading at a time. The taxi thru-pits in the new facility would eliminate this hazard and allow the loading of aircraft, as required, during a fire.

Hemet-Ryan AAB currently lacks a hangar, storage for assigned equipment and materials, and a helitack barracks/mess hall facility. Currently, the helicopter is parked outside, creating security problems, as well as accelerating engine deterioration, corrosion, and damage to the paint.

The existing facility consists of one triple wide trailer, used for the helitack barracks, and two old buildings, used for the air attack operations and the pilots' ready room. The control tower is an old CAL FIRE steel lookout tower. The helitender and trailer that support the helicopter are also outside and exposed to weather and security concerns.

The facility has standard aluminum frame windows that cannot be opened for natural ventilation, or for a possible emergency escape route from the building, contrary to uniform building codes. The kitchen, barracks and common area is a 3-module mobile home. This unit was acquired and used in 1974 and is not adequate for a 24-hour operation. Sleeping quarters are so small the staff must sleep in shifts and utilize common bed space, lowering morale and causing potential health hazards. The Riverside Unit is currently leasing/renting a home off base to accommodate the additional pilots required for the S70i Firehawk helicopter. The kitchen is too small to support the number of personnel assigned. Appliances are inadequate, but due to the cramped space, cannot be replaced with larger units.

The aircraft permanently assigned to the Hemet-Ryan AAB are two Grumman S-2T air tankers, one North American Rockwell OV-10 air attack plane, and one S70i Firehawk helicopter. Due to an extended fire season, the aircraft are assigned to this location on a year-round basis. At present time, there are no other large hangars that can accommodate these aircraft at Hemet-Ryan AAB. The proposed hangar would provide room for maintenance and storage in winter when the aircraft are inactive from firefighting responsibilities.

One air tanker or one air attack plane, and the helicopter, could be accommodated within the new structure for simultaneous maintenance activities.

The weather protective covers would provide weather protection for the two Grumman S-2T aircraft assigned. Similar covers are currently in use at the Fresno Air Attack Base.

C. 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 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.

D. Alternatives:

1. Approve the funding request for the supplemental appropriation for working drawings phase.

   Advantages

   - Would allow CAL FIRE/personnel to meet strategic goals and operations schedules.
   - Would keep a current project in forward motion, building on the investments made and resources used to date.

2. Do not proceed with the project.

   Advantages

   - This alternative has no advantages.

   Disadvantages

- This is a continuing project, not proceeding would be detrimental; an overall loss of both the investments made and resources used to date.

E. Recommended Solution:

1. Which alternative and why?

   The recommended solution is Alternative #1 — Approve the funding request for the supplemental appropriation for working drawings phase. This alternative will allow CAL FIRE to continue with the Capital Infrastructure Plan to replace Hemet-Ryan AAB.

2. Detailed scope description.
   - The new facility would include the following: Air operations building: an air operations building which will provide a control room (tower).
   - Barracks/Mess Hall: barracks/mess hall will replace the modular units.
   - Apparatus storage and warehouse building.
   - Combination helicopter/OV-10 hangar will provide secure storage and weather protection for these aircraft.
   - S-2T Canopies: Aircraft weather protective covers for S-2Ts that will provide weather protection and light maintenance area for the aircraft.
   - Helicopter training tower with hoist system for repelling training.
   - Retardant mixing station (with storage for fire retardant chemical) that will replace old and outdated equipment and provide the ability to deliver the quantity and type of retardant (Gel/Phoscheck) utilizing CAL FIRE staff when contract suppliers are not able to meet the state's criteria.
   - Site work that will consist of the demolition of the existing tower (to be relocated onsite to preserve its historical significance), barracks, operations and storage buildings, installation of sewer connections, fencing, paving, landscaping, associated utilities, and appurtenances, and other related site work.
   - This project also includes taxiway tie-in work, on-site tarmac improvements including retardant loading pits and associated utilities, helipad and associated paving, tarmac fencing, taxiways and associated paving, utilities and landscaping, and retardant waste and surface runoff mitigation.

3. Basis for cost information.

   The project costs are based on an estimate prepared by the Department of General Service.

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

   The operational efficiency of this facility and its ability to meet the mission needs of the department are the most important factors influencing this project. The replacement of these facilities will address current program and code issues as well as improving operational efficiencies for the major project components.

5. Complete description of impact on support budget.

The current facility is staffed to operate the existing retardant mixing plant. Operation of the new retardant mixing plant will require similar staffing. A temporary base will be established off site and adjacent to the existing facility during the construction phase of the project. Identify and explain any project risks.

There are no risks associated with completion of this project; however, the risk of deferring this project includes failure of mission critical facility infrastructure.

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

   This project requires a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliant environmental review. The plans for the new facility will be subject to review and approval by the State Fire Marshal and the Division of State Architect.

F. Consistency with Government Code Section 65041.1:

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

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

2. 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 wild land fires will ultimately protect nearby forests, watersheds, agricultural land and other valuable natural resources.

3. Does the project encourage efficient development patterns by ensuring that infrastructure associated with development, other than infill, support 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.