STATE OF CALIFORNIA
COBCP - Narrative
DF-151 (REV 07/21)

Fiscal Year	Business Unit	Department	Priority No.
2026-27	3540	Forestry and Fire Protection	MA-34

Budget Request Name	Capital Outlay Program ID	Capital Outlay Project ID
3540-023-COBCP-2026-GB	2485	0006681

Project Title
Howard Forest Helitack 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)
$ 1,898	Preliminary Plans	$ 76,520

Budget Request Summary

The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) requests $1,898,000 General Fund for the preliminary plans phase for the Howard Forest Helitack Base: Replace Facility project to replace the existing facility in Mendocino County. This is a continuing project. Total estimated project costs are $76,520,000.

Requires Legislation	Code Section(s) to be Added/Amended/Repealed	CCCI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 $1,898,000 General Fund for the preliminary plans phase of the Howard Forest Helitack Base: Replace Facility project. The project includes construction of a helicopter hangar, support vehicle garage, barracks building, generator/pump/storage building, wash rack canopy, hazmat/retardant storage, and helicopter training tower. The scope of work will include site work as needed.

Total project costs are estimated at $76,520,000, including acquisition ($550,000), preliminary plans ($3,126,000), working drawings ($4,009,000), and construction ($68,835,000). The construction amount includes the construction contract ($54,881,000), contingency ($2,744,000), architectural and engineering services ($4,085,000), agency-retained items ($40,000), and other project costs ($7,085,000).

The acquisition phase began July 2018 and was completed June 2021. The preliminary plans began March 2024 and are estimated to be completed December 2026. The working drawings are estimated to begin in July 2027 and estimated to be completed in December 2028. The construction phase is estimated to begin in January 2029 and estimated to be completed in December 2030.

B. Purpose of the Project:

Background

The Howard Forest Helitack Base (HB) is located near the City of Willits in Mendocino County. The base's primary response area includes the following regions: Mendocino Unit (MEU), Southern Humboldt County (HUU), Southern Trinity County (SHU), Western Tehama and Glenn Counties (TGU) and Northern Lake and Colusa Counties (LNU), and the Mendocino National Forest (MNF).

Problem

Personnel are outgrowing the space at Howard Forest HB. CAL FIRE periodically increases personnel due to fire activity or adverse weather predictions resulting in further overcrowding. Fire station storage for HB crews is limited; personal effect lockers are stored in the fire station garage. Fitness for duty and overall personal wellness is challenging. Continued use of the fire station for these operations threatens operational readiness for both the fire station and the helitack functions.

CAL FIRE has replaced its existing helicopter fleet of Super Huey helicopters with Sikorsky S70i Blackhawk helicopters. However, there is currently no hanger capable of housing the new helicopter at the Howard Forest HB, and the helipad and secondary helipad does not have the proper clearance and will not support the weight of the new airship. The site does not have a garage facility for the helicopter; therefore, the helicopter and support vehicles would be stored outdoors in the elements year-round and not adequately protected from the high temperatures and sun damage in the summer. The helicopter and support vehicles stored outdoors significantly reduce their serviceable lifespan. As the fire year continues to grow in length and complexity due to climate change, it is imperative that CAL FIRE continues to update facilities to meet immediate fire life safety needs.

The new facility site is planned to be constructed adjacent to the current location, but additional land was needed to accommodate the helicopter and secondary helipads, approach, and landing airspace buffer land.

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 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.

D. Alternatives:

1. Approve the funding request for preliminary plans.

Advantages

- Continue with the Capital Infrastructure Plan the proposed site is strategically located and is large enough to construct the necessary facilities.
- Will implement legislatively revised operations and staffing plans to add the new CAL FIRE HB
- New HB facilities will increase the efficiency of CAL FIRE personnel which will save on operational cost and provide for faster initial attack responses
- Construction of proposed facilities will allow for CAL FIRE personnel to meet strategic goals and operations schedules.
- Will decrease the dependence and reduce the burden on the federal and local government partners with fire protection by providing more rapid initial attack and longer operations time with the new helicopter.

Disadvantages

- One-time cost to the General Fund.

2. Defer project

Advantages

- This alternative has no advantages.

Disadvantages

- The efficiency of CAL FIRE personnel will suffer without proper facilities which increase operations cost and provide for slower initial attack responses. A project that could otherwise be completed sooner will be delayed further than necessary.
- The burden of service will continue for the federal and local government partners for initial and extended attack operations.

E. Recommended Solution:

1. Which alternative and why?

Alternative #1—Continue with the proposed plan for replacing the HB facility and provide preliminary plans funding for the project. It is the most cost-effective solution while meeting operational requirements and provides infill development on state lands.

2. Detailed scope description.

   Design and construction of the new Howard Forest HB will include the following:

   - Multi-blade capable helicopter hangar
   - Lighted helipads
   - Support vehicle garage/shop
   - Barracks building
   - Generator/pump/storage building
   - Vehicle wash rack
   - Hazmat/retardant storage building
   - Helicopter training tower/hoist to provide rescue training facilities
   - Site work as needed

3. Basis for cost information.

   The cost is based on costs of projects managed by the Department of General Services (DGS) for HBs at Vina, Bieber, and Prado with updates provided by CAL FIRE.

4. Factors/benefits for recommended solution 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 and meet the program requirements.

5. Complete description of impact on support budget.

   New furniture will need to be purchased. Maintenance and repair costs for the new facility will be low at the beginning of its 50-year lifespan, but the new systems are more technologically advanced than the existing facility and will not need to be constantly updated to provide adequate fire suppression response.

6. Identify and explain any project risks.

   There are no risks associated with the completion of this project.

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

   Caltrans-Division of Aeronautics, DGS-Division of the State Architect, and CAL FIRE-Office of the State Fire Marshal.

F. Consistency with Government Code Section 65041.1:

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

Yes, the recommended solution replaces infrastructure adjacent to an existing site.

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

Yes, the new HB will meet and enhance the operational logistics to fly the new helicopter and crew quickly in response to emergencies, natural disasters and provide initial attack on fires, thereby protecting property and natural resources of the State of California.

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 CAL FIRE'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 requires compliance with local government planning models. The growth-inducement potential is one of the potential environmental impacts addressed in the California Environmental Quality Act process.