



## Local ballot measure: Q

# Q

## Santa Cruz County Water and Wildlife Protection Initiative

### Ballot question

**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY SAFE DRINKING WATER, CLEAN BEACHES, WILDFIRE RISK REDUCTION, AND WILDLIFE PROTECTION INITIATIVE:** Shall voters enact on ordinance to fund projects to protect drinking water sources, rivers, creeks, streams, groundwater resources, beaches, and parks, reduce catastrophic wildfire risks, and preserve native wildlife, habitats, working lands, and agriculture, by levying \$87 per parcel per year, raising approximately \$7.3 million annually, with citizens' oversight, annual reports, public spending disclosure, and all money distributed locally, until ended by voters?

### Pregunta de Boleta

**INICIATIVA PARA AGUA POTABLE SEGURA, PLAYAS LIMPIAS, REDUCCIÓN DEL RIESGO DE INCENDIOS FORESTALES Y PROTECCIÓN DE LA VIDA SILVESTRE DEL CONDADO DE SANTA CRUZ:** ¿Deben los votantes promulgar una ordenanza para financiar proyectos para proteger las fuentes de agua potable, ríos, arroyos, recursos de agua subterránea, playas y parques, reducir los riesgos de incendios forestales catastróficos y preservar la vida silvestre nativa, los hábitats, las tierras de trabajo y la agricultura, mediante la imposición de \$87 por parcela por año, recaudando aproximadamente \$7.3 millones anuales, con la supervisión de los ciudadanos, informes anuales, divulgación del gasto público y todo el dinero distribuido localmente, hasta que los votantes lo terminen?

### What your vote means:

| YES  | NO   |
|--|--|
| A "yes" vote on Measure Q is a vote to add Chapter 4.65 to the County Code and allow a special parcel tax of \$87 to be collected annually until ended by voters for specific eligible projects. | A "no" vote on Measure Q is a vote against adding Chapter 4.65 and the collection of a special parcel tax. |

### For and against Measure Q

Titles used by argument signers are for identification purposes only and does not necessarily reflect the position of the organization in question.

If an asterisk (\*) follows a name, it means the person is signing on behalf of that agency/organization.

| FOR  | AGAINST   |
|--|---|
| <b>John Ricker</b> , Retired Water Resource Manager  | <b>Mark Bingham*</b> , President and Fire Chief, Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs Association    |
| <b>David Hopper</b> , Fire Captain, Local Firefighter  | <b>Stacie Brownlee*</b> , Treasurer and Fire Chief, Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs Association |
| <b>John Laird</b> , State Senator, 17 <sup>th</sup> District                                   | <b>Rob Oatey*</b> , Secretary and Fire Chief, Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs Association       |
| <b>Nancy B Macy*</b> , Chair, Valley Women's Club Environmental Committee                      | <b>Jason Nee*</b> , Vice President and Fire Chief, Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs Association  |
| <b>Ana V. Hurtado-Aldana*</b> , Treasurer, Friends of Watsonville Parks and Community Services |   |



# Local ballot measure: Q

Arguments and replies are the opinions of the authors. We print them exactly as submitted, including errors.

| Argument for Measure Q  | Rebuttal argument for Measure Q   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Vote YES on Measure Q to Protect Santa Cruz County’s Natural Water Sources – and Protect our Communities and Local Forests from Wildfire!</b></p> <p>In the past few years, our communities have been threatened by more and more extreme wildfires. Drought and pollution are growing threats to our local natural water sources – the rivers, creeks and streams that provide our groundwater reserves.</p> <p><b>Vote YES on Measure Q:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Protect Water Quality:</b> Safeguard natural water sources, including rivers, creeks, and streams and the surrounding areas, to reduce pollution, trash, plastics, and toxic chemicals.</li> <li>• <b>Protect Natural Water Sources:</b> Protect areas where rainfall replenishes our natural water supply to secure clean water reserves for future droughts.</li> <li>• <b>Reduce Wildfire Risks:</b> Reduce catastrophic wildfire risks by removing hazardous overgrown brush, conducting prescribed burns, and creating critical shaded fire breaks – and help our forests recover from recent fires.</li> <li>• <b>Keep Beaches Clean and Protect Marine Life:</b> Prevent pollution and trash from reaching our local beaches and the ocean.</li> <li>• <b>Preserve Wildlife Habitats:</b> Safeguard local forests, wetlands, and wildlife habitats, ensuring these ecosystems remain vibrant and healthy amidst threats like droughts and climate change.</li> </ul> <p><b>Fiscal Accountability and Local Control:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Local Funds for Local Needs:</b> All money raised will stay in Santa Cruz County and cannot be taken by the State.</li> <li>• <b>Independent Transparent Oversight:</b> Dedicated citizens’ oversight, public spending disclosures, and annual audits will ensure funds are spent responsibly and only on voter-approved purposes.</li> <li>• <b>Leverage State Matching Funds:</b> Measure Q will allow Santa Cruz County to qualify for state and federal grants, expanding our local ability to protect our communities against wildfires and our water sources from pollution, at no additional cost to local taxpayers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Vote YES on Measure Q for Water and Wildfire Protection!</b></p> <p><b>John Ricker</b>, Retired Water Resource Manager<br/> <b>David Hopper</b>, Fire Captain, Local Firefighter<br/> <b>John Laird</b>, State Senator, 17<sup>th</sup> District<br/> <b>Nancy B Macy*</b>, Chair, Valley Women’s Club Environmental Committee<br/> <b>Ana V. Hurtado-Aldana*</b>, Treasurer, Friends of Watsonville Parks and Community Services</p> | <p><b>Vote NO on Measure Q</b></p> <p>Now coined the “Water and Wildfire Measure” in their media displays, this play on your emotions – <u>it is misleading and irresponsible branding.</u></p> <p>These funds are managed by County Departments, approved by County Supervisors, with an advisory board appointed by the County Supervisors and Cities – <u>its not “independent transparent oversight.”</u></p> <p>There is <u>no guarantee any funds will be spent to reduce wildfire risks</u>, or distributed to Fire Agencies best suited as subject matter experts to conduct wildfire resilience and fuel reduction projects.</p> <p>There is <u>no way to prevent the County, charged with managing the revenues, from supplanting ongoing County Operating Expenses</u> with Measure Q funding.</p> <p><u>This measure funds programs that do not focus on clean water or wildfires</u> – funds can be used for park construction, litter clean up, after school programs, visitor services, and trail head facilities (toilets).</p> <p>There is no advocate for the unincorporated areas of our County residing in Independent Fire Districts. <u>You will pay and yet may see no benefit.</u></p> <p>Priority funding given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agencies with matching funds – the County is best positioned for matching funds</li> <li>• Programs with multiple benefits – the County is best positioned to supplant funds to create multiple benefits</li> <li>• Invest in disadvantaged communities – transferring local tax dollars to other parts of the County for non-wildfire programs</li> </ul> <p>Measure Q employs a broad brushstroke to address a vast array of 17 environmental concerns without providing specific solutions, details, or accountability. Its bad policy and legislation designed to fund the County!</p> <p>Join us in <b>VOTING NO ON MEASURE Q!</b></p> <p><b>Mark Bingham*</b>, President, Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs Association</p> |



## Local ballot measure: Q

Arguments and replies are the opinions of the authors. We print them exactly as submitted, including errors.

| Argument against Measure Q  | Rebuttal argument against Measure Q  |
|---|--|
| <p>Your Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs’ Association does not support this measure because it does not directly contribute to wildfire risk reduction nor directly fund all local fire agencies that are responsible for wildfire risk reduction.</p> <p>The Fire Chiefs struggle with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The governance structure places decision-making in the hands of Santa Cruz County departments who themselves will be competing for funding.</li> <li>• Direct fiscal apportionment to the County and cities but nothing to fire agencies best positioned to provide wildfire risk reduction in the unincorporated areas of the county.</li> <li>• The advisory board serves 4 years terms, and no more than two terms. but can be extended indefinitely by the appointing agency.</li> <li>• How this tax will apply to every non-exempt parcel in the County regardless of income capacity.</li> </ul> <p>The measure as written over 16 pages identifies 17 areas of focus; wildfire risk reduction is just one of the areas competing for these funds. in light of the CZU wildfire experience, we believe funding should be prioritized, not minimized, to protect our communities and for it to be placed in those best positioned to protect them.</p> <p><b>Mark Bingham*</b>, President and Fire Chief, Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs Association</p> <p><b>Stacie Brownlee*</b>, Treasurer and Fire Chief, Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs Association</p> <p><b>Rob Oatey*</b>, Secretary and Fire Chief, Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs Association</p> <p><b>Jason Nee*</b>, Vice President and Fire Chief, Santa Cruz County Fire Chiefs Association</p> | <p>We all share responsibility for minimizing wildfire risk and supporting recovery, and we want well-funded local fire departments to respond in the moment.</p> <p>We <u>also</u> need to fund smart preparation that protects our homes, businesses, and natural areas.</p> <p>Measure Q supports both.</p> <p><b>Measure Q provides dedicated funding for wildfire risk reduction:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removing hazardous overgrown brush</li> <li>• Clearing debris from emergency access roads for first responders</li> <li>• Creating open-space buffers to protect homes and businesses</li> <li>• Proactively managing land and forests to prevent spread of wildfires</li> <li>• Safely conducting prescribed burns</li> </ul> <p><b>Local fire departments are eligible for Measure Q’s largest financial grants.</b> These funds will help buy wildland fire engines, lifesaving equipment, and more.</p> <p><b>Measure Q also protects water quality, clean beaches, and wildlife habitat.</b> Measure Q isn’t only about wildfires: we must also protect our natural water sources, groundwater, beaches, marine and wildlife habitat, wetlands, forests, parks, and open space from growing threats of climate change, extreme weather, pollution, and drought.</p> <p><b>Vote YES on Measure Q:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect Water Quality</li> <li>• Protect Natural Water Sources</li> <li>• Reduce Wildfire Risks</li> <li>• Protect Forests</li> <li>• Keep Beaches Clean</li> <li>• Protect Marine Life</li> <li>• Preserve Wildlife Habitats</li> </ul> <p>Measure Q will also attract millions in state and federal matching funds. All funds are subject to local control and independent oversight.</p> <p><b>Firefighters, the Fire Safe Council of Santa Cruz County, the Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association, and hundreds more agree – Vote YES on Measure Q for Water and Wildfire Protection!</b></p> <p>Learn more: <a href="http://www.VoteYesOnQ.com">www.VoteYesOnQ.com</a></p> <p><b>Joe Christy</b>, Founding Member and Former President, Fire Safe Council of Santa Cruz County</p> <p><b>Barb Satink Wolfson*</b>, Fire Advisor, Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association</p> <p><b>Mariah Roberts</b>, Executive Director, County Park Friends; Co-Founder, LEO’s Haven at Chanticleer Park</p> <p><b>Laurie Egan*</b>, Executive Director, Coastal Watershed Council</p> <p><b>Gary Griggs</b>, Distinguished Professor of Earth Sciences; Chair, Ocean Science Trust</p> |



## Local ballot measure: Q

### Impartial Analysis of Measure Q

**Jason M. Heath**, County Counsel

**By: Ruby Márquez**, Chief Assistant County Counsel

Measure Q was placed on the ballot by an initiative petition called the “Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction, and Wildlife Protection Initiative,” which collected the required number of voter signatures and was certified by the County Clerk in May 2024.

Measure Q seeks to add Chapter 4.65 to the Santa Cruz County Code which would impose a Special Parcel Tax in the amount of eighty-seven dollars (\$87) on each parcel located within the County, with identified exceptions. If passed by a majority of voters, it is estimated that the measure would raise approximately \$7.3 million annually for specific purposes as described below. The tax would begin in fiscal year 2025-2026 and continue until ended by voters.

The proposed measure would fund projects focusing on water conservation, water quality, flood protection and restoration, protection of public access to beaches, wildlife protection, pollution reduction, development of shaded fuel breaks and reduction of hazardous fuels, forest management, wetlands restoration, trail development, park improvements, recreation programs, climate risk-reduction, and other projects as identified. Additionally, the proposed code chapter establishes a basis for prioritizing among eligible projects and recognizes areas of acute need.

The proposed measure places responsibility on the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors to annually distribute the funds collected by the special parcel tax for eligible projects, as follows:

- Forty percent of the available funds will be distributed for eligible projects through a grant program administered by the County of Santa Cruz;
- Twenty percent of the available funds will be distributed to incorporated cities within the County for eligible projects;
- Twenty percent of the available funds will be distributed in the unincorporated parts of the County for eligible projects; and
- Twenty percent of the available funds will be distributed to the Resource Conservation District and a local land stewardship implementation partner for completion of eligible projects on private lands that result in a public benefit.

Voters are referred to the Voter Information Guide for the full text and details of Proposed Chapter 4.65.

In accordance with California law, this measure contains certain accountability measures that must be followed for funds collected from a special tax. This includes: 1) using the funds only for specific identified purposes, 2) creating a separate account, or accounts, where the funds will be deposited and kept, and 3) submitting an annual report that contains the amount of funds collected and expended, and the status of any projects required or authorized to be funded by the measure.

The measure also includes creating a nine-member Citizens Oversight Advisory Board to conduct hearings and receive public input on allocations related to expenditures, receive annual reports from local agencies on projects funded, and approve a five-year vision plan to help identify and prioritize fund expenditures.

A special tax placed on the ballot by a citizen initiative measure only requires a majority (50% +1) by voters for approval.

A “yes” vote on Measure Q is a vote to add Chapter 4.65 to the County Code and allow a special parcel tax of \$87 to be collected annually until ended by voters for specific eligible projects.

A “no” vote on Measure Q is a vote against adding Chapter 4.65 and the collection of a special parcel tax.



## Local ballot measure: Q

### Fiscal Impact Statement Measure Q

Edith Driscoll, Santa Cruz County Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax Collector

This measure would levy a Special Parcel Tax in the annual amount of \$87 dollars on each parcel within Santa Cruz County with identified exceptions for parcels owned by a Public Agency or designated as Agricultural Land Use shall not be subject to the tax. The stated purpose is to enact a Special Parcel Tax to protect local drinking water sources including lakes, rivers, creeks, and streams; reduce wildfire risks; protect and enhance marine life, beaches, coastal habitats, wetlands, redwoods, parks and publicly accessible natural areas, and other native wildlife and habitats; and preserve working lands and local agriculture. The Special Parcel Tax will be levied annually unless ended by voters.

#### Fiscal Effect

As provided by the proponents of the measure, the proposed Special Parcel Tax is expected to annually generate an estimated \$7.3 million dollars to be allocated specifically as follows:

1. Forty Percent (40%), or an estimated \$2.9 million dollars, will be provided annually to the County to be administered as a grant program for eligible County projects.
2. Twenty Percent (20%), or an estimated \$1.46 million dollars, will be provided annually to incorporated cities within Santa Cruz County. Funds will be allocated to the cities on a per capita basis; with a minimum per city distribution of no less than \$200,000 annually for eligible projects.
3. Twenty Percent (20%), or an estimated \$1.46 million dollars, will be provided annually to the County for use in the unincorporated parts of the County for eligible projects.
4. Twenty Percent (20%), or an estimated \$1.46 million dollars, will be allocated annually into a separate fund. The fund will be equally and jointly managed by the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County and a land stewardship implementation partner for completion of eligible projects on private lands that result in a public benefit.

#### Accountability of Funds

The proposed tax will be collected on the property tax roll in the same manner and at the same time as other property taxes and shall be subject to all the laws pertaining to the levy, collection and enforcement of property taxes. The proceeds of this tax will be deposited annually into a separate interest earning fund established by the County. Funds shall be used to carry out the purposes of this act as outlined in its defined expenditure plan after payment of administrative fees related to collection of the tax and the Citizen Oversight Advisory Board. A Citizen Oversight Advisory Board will be formed to implement necessary areas of the Act and will receive annual reports on projects funded and will provide annual oversight reports to the County Board of Supervisors.

### Full text of Measure Q

The People of the County of Santa Cruz ordain as follows:

#### Section 1. Title.

This Act shall be known and may be cited as the "Santa Cruz County Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction, and Wildlife Protection Act."

#### Section 2. Findings and Declarations.

WHEREAS, protecting water quality and local drinking water sources for Santa Cruz County residents is of immense importance.

WHEREAS, nearly 100% of Santa Cruz County's drinking water comes from local streams and groundwater aquifers fed by rainfall.

WHEREAS, drought, over-drafted groundwater basins, depleted streams, and degraded riparian habitats threaten Santa Cruz County's water supply and water quality.

WHEREAS, sustaining water quality, reliability of water sources, and ecological function of Santa Cruz County's watersheds will require sustained support for water resource management and stewardship.



## Local ballot measure: Q

WHEREAS, Santa Cruz County's beaches, coast, and marine life are uniquely important, and must be protected from pollution.

WHEREAS, Santa Cruz County experienced several atmospheric river events in 2022 and 2023, causing widespread flooding and damaging roads, homes, stream channels, storm drains, levees, and other important surface and storm water infrastructure.

WHEREAS, the breach of the Pajaro River levees in early 2023 resulted in major evacuations and flooding that devastated and disproportionately impacted low-income communities. Funding is necessary to not only repair damages, but also to protect Santa Cruz County's drinking water resources from pollutants.

WHEREAS, the 2020 CZU Lightning Complex Fire was the most destructive wildfire in Santa Cruz County in over a century and caused extensive physical and financial damage to the County's communities, water resources, and natural resources, destroyed over 900 homes in the County, and caused an estimated \$340 million in total damage. With such extensive damage, recovery and rebuilding efforts are still underway three years later.

WHEREAS, Santa Cruz County is prone to periodic large wildfire events and the resulting damage to infrastructure, the environment, water resources, and communities can be costly and difficult to fully recover from.

WHEREAS, preserving and enhancing Santa Cruz County's forests and grasslands naturally removes carbon dioxide from the air.

WHEREAS, preventing catastrophic wildfires in Santa Cruz County will require sustained support for land stewardship and vegetation management practices.

WHEREAS, scenic beaches, lush forests, and rich farmland contribute to Santa Cruz County's local economy through industry and tourism.

WHEREAS, Santa Cruz County is home to numerous species of special concern and sensitive habitat types.

WHEREAS, working lands, including farms, rangeland, and sustainable forestry, are vital to the Santa Cruz County community and economy and can function in complementary ways to improve water quality, reduce wildfire risk, sequester carbon dioxide, conserve natural lands, parks, and wildlife, and provide other critical public benefits.

WHEREAS, Santa Cruz County, its cities, and local nonprofit organizations have received funding from state, federal, and local sources to acquire and protect open space and natural resources and further funding is needed to steward and manage these lands effectively to build resilience.

WHEREAS, the Santa Cruz County Office of Response, Recovery, and Resilience works to build community resilience and assist with response and recovery efforts from major flooding, wildfire, extreme weather, and other natural disaster events.

WHEREAS, the Santa Cruz County Department of Parks, Open Space, and Cultural Services and other local Parks Departments provide regional and neighborhood parks, coastal access, trails, and cultural and recreation programs and opportunities.

WHEREAS, the majority of Santa Cruz County voters perceive the need for additional funds to maintain local water resources, wildfire resilience, wildlife habitat, parks, beaches, and natural areas.

WHEREAS, changes in temperature and precipitation patterns are expected to amplify climate hazards in Santa Cruz County like extreme heat, drought, wildfire, landslides, flooding, sea-level rise, and worsened air quality, which threaten local water resources and increase wildfire risk.

WHEREAS, Santa Cruz County remains one of the only counties in the greater Bay Area without a dedicated, sustainable source of ongoing local public funding for natural resources management and stewardship activities.

### **Section 3. Statement of Purpose.**

It is the purpose and intent of the people of the County of Santa Cruz to enact a parcel tax to protect local



## Local ballot measure: Q

drinking water sources including lakes, rivers, creeks, and streams; reduce wildfire risks; protect and enhance marine life, beaches, coastal habitats, wetlands, redwoods, parks and publicly accessible natural areas, and other native wildlife and habitats; and preserve working lands and local agriculture.

### **Section 4. Santa Cruz County Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction, and Wildlife Protection Act.**

Chapter 4.65 is added to Title 4 of the Code of the County of Santa Cruz, to read as follows:

### **Chapter 4.65 – Santa Cruz County Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction, and Wildlife Protection Act**

#### **4.65.010 Definitions.**

- (A) “Act” means the Santa Cruz County Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction, and Wildlife Protection Act.
- (B) “Administrative Costs” means those costs not directly associated with planning, development, management, and implementation of Eligible Projects intended to implement the goals of the Act. The activities of the Citizens Oversight Advisory Board are not administrative costs.
- (C) “Advisory Board” means the Citizens Oversight Advisory Board established in section 4.65.060.
- (D) “Agricultural Land Use” means Parcels that are zoned Commercial Agriculture (CA) or Timber Production (TP).
- (E) “Board” means the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors.
- (F) “Community Development” means the feasibility, planning, design, permitting, and construction of recreational infrastructure and amenities.
- (G) “County” means the County of Santa Cruz.
- (H) “Department” means the Santa Cruz County Department of Parks, Open Space, and Cultural Services.
- (I) “Disadvantaged Community” means either of the following two definitions. If either method of definition referred to in subsections (1) or (2) is eliminated, or becomes obsolete, modifications to this definition may be made by the Board of Supervisors, upon recommendation by the Advisory Board.
  - (1) A census tract that ranks within the top forty percent (40%) highest scoring census tracts in the County as identified in the current State's CalEnviroScreen, or
  - (2) A census tract identified as disadvantaged in the United States Council on Environmental Quality Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool.
- (J) “Eligible Applicant” means Public Agencies as defined, Nonprofit Organizations as defined, and tribes.
- (K) “Eligible Project” means a project intended to implement the goals of the Act and which meets the requirements of the Act, and includes pre-project assistance and feasibility, planning, acquisition, construction, development, improvement, restoration, rehabilitation, maintenance, stewardship, or any combination thereof.
- (L) “Fund” means the Santa Cruz County Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction, and Wildlife Protection Fund.
- (M) “Nonprofit Organization” means any charitable organization described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended.
- (N) “Office” means the Santa Cruz County Office of Response, Recovery, and Resilience.
- (O) “Parcel” means a lot, unit, or plot of real property having identified boundaries and an identified owner and that is documented for property tax purposes and given an assessor’s parcel number by the Assessor of the County of Santa Cruz, excluding those designated as Agricultural Land Use and Public Agency.
- (P) “Property Tax Collection Fee” means an administrative fee of one percent (1%) of the funds collected through the Special Parcel Tax to provide for billing, collecting, apportioning, and reporting the Special



## Local ballot measure: Q

Parcel Tax charges on the property tax roll.

- (Q) "Public Agency" means any city, county, district, other local authority, or public body of or within the State.
- (R) "Special Parcel Tax" means the tax imposed by section 4.65.020.
- (S) "State" means the State of California.
- (T) "Treasurer" means the Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax Collector of the County.
- (U) "Working Lands" means areas that are utilized for timber production, grazed grassland or rangeland, or cultivation of crops that benefit the broader public for economic or humanitarian purposes beyond individual use.

### **4.65.020 Imposition of Special Parcel Tax.**

- (A) Commencing with Fiscal Year 2025-26, an annual Special Parcel Tax in the amount of eighty-seven dollars (\$87) is hereby imposed on each Parcel located within the County.
- (B) The Special Parcel Tax is levied on each Parcel as of January 1 of each year and shall be levied on the owner who owned the Parcel on that date unless the Parcel is excluded from taxation.
- (C) The Special Parcel Tax shall be collected at the same time and in the same manner as ad valorem property taxes.
- (D) All laws, regulations, and procedures regarding exemptions, due dates, installment payments, corrections, appeals, refunds, late payments, liens, and collections for secured roll ad valorem property taxes in the County shall be applicable to the collection of the Special Parcel Tax.
- (E) Properties owned by a Public Agency or designated as Agricultural Land Use shall not be subject to the Special Parcel Tax.

### **4.65.030 Santa Cruz County Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction, and Wildlife Protection Fund.**

There is hereby established in the County Treasury a special fund entitled the Santa Cruz County Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction, and Wildlife Protection Fund.

All revenues generated by the Special Parcel Tax, together with any interest and penalties thereon, shall be collected each fiscal year and deposited into the Fund. The Office and the Department, or a successor agency, may create any other funds, accounts, or subaccounts necessary or desirable for purposes of accounting for the monies in the Fund. Revenues in the Fund shall be used exclusively to carry out the purposes of this Act. Revenues in the Fund may also be used to enforce and administer the Special Parcel Tax, including to pay costs for submission of any measure to the voters for the establishment or alteration of the tax and to pay any costs associated with the collection of the tax.

### **4.65.040 Expenditure Plan.**

- (A) The Board shall distribute the proceeds in the Fund according to this section. The intended purpose of these expenditures is to confer the following benefits on the people of Santa Cruz County: water quality and protection including drought protection, drinking water quality, water supplies and availability, improvements to watersheds, and clean beaches and ocean; wildfire risk reduction including forest management, creation of defensible spaces, and fire resilience; wildlife and habitat protection including conservation of native biodiversity, restoring critical habitats and wildlife corridors, and stewarding natural and working lands; and safe recreation including developing, restoring, stewarding, or maintaining clean and safe parks, public access facilities, places to play, natural areas, trails, and other programmatic and recreational activities.
- (B) The Board shall distribute the moneys in the Fund each fiscal year according to the following schedule, after withdrawing and allocating the Property Tax Collection Fee and Advisory Board costs authorized under the Act:
  - (1) Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction, and Wildlife Protection Program.





## Local ballot measure: Q

- (a) Forty percent (40%), on an annual basis, to Eligible Applicants for Eligible Projects in the county to be administered as a grant program by the Office and the Department, or a successor agency named by the Board if the Office or the Department cease to exist. The Office and the Department shall jointly award monies from the Fund, through agreements and grants, providing for diversity in the types of projects awarded and the recipients of awards to support all geographic areas in the County.
  - (b) The Office and the Department shall make awards to Eligible Projects as defined in subdivision (K) of section 4.65.010 for activities which may include, but are not limited to, the following:
    - (i) Conservation of water supplies and groundwater recharge by enhancing watershed health, improved land management, and protecting land adjacent to County and city water sources.
    - (ii) Improving water quality through the control of soil erosion by restoring and repairing trails, culverts, drainage, water courses, floodplains, wetlands, and riparian areas.
    - (iii) Natural or nature-based flood protection and restoration projects, including green infrastructure to reduce neighborhood flooding.
    - (iv) Protection of public access to local beaches and enhancement of visitor experiences by ensuring that public beaches are safe, clean, and accessible.
    - (v) Development and implementation of green infrastructure solutions that protect coastal areas and estuaries from erosion and the impacts of sea level rise.
    - (vi) Wildlife and marine-life protection and habitat improvement.
    - (vii) Pollution reduction projects, such as litter removal or urban forestry to reduce air pollution.
    - (viii) Development of shaded fuel breaks, defensible spaces, or the reduction of hazardous fuels to prevent catastrophic wildfire, especially along roadways, trails, and in the wildland-urban interface.
    - (ix) Forest management to lower dangerous fuel loads and mitigate conditions that could lead to catastrophic wildfires.
    - (x) Stewardship of private lands in the public benefit for fire resiliency, water quality, erosion control, or other ecosystem services.
    - (xi) Conservation of native biodiversity by reducing invasive species and protecting or restoring critical habitats and wildlife corridors.
    - (xii) Restoration of wetlands and the recovery of anadromous fish species.
    - (xiii) Creation of wildlife bridges, culverts, directional fencing, or other wildlife-friendly infrastructure.
    - (xiv) Trail development, staging areas, and other access facilities on lands open to the public.
  - (c) The Office and the Department shall prioritize awards for Eligible Projects that meet implementation priorities identified in subdivision (A) of section 4.65.050 or that address extreme weather, natural disasters, climate change impacts, water pollution, or saltwater intrusion impacts.
  - (d) An amount that equals not more than five percent (5%) of the funds allocated annually pursuant to paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of subdivision (B) of section 4.65.040 may be used to pay the Administrative Costs associated with paragraph (a).
  - (e) Funds shall be deposited in a separate account, or accounts, to be overseen by the Office and the Department, or a successor agency, and expended pursuant to this section. Any funds unexpended at the close of each fiscal year shall remain in the account, or accounts, and expended pursuant to paragraph (a) of subsection (1) in the subsequent or future fiscal years. Funds may be accrued for expenditure in future years to enable sufficient funding for larger or long-term projects.
- (2) Neighborhood Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction, and Safe and Clean Parks Program.
- (a) Twenty percent (20%), on an annual basis, to incorporated cities within the County for Eligible



## Local ballot measure: Q

Projects conducted by the incorporated cities. The Board shall allocate funds to incorporated cities on a per capita basis. However, if any city does not achieve a minimum allocation of two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) annually on a per capita basis, no less than two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) shall be made available to that city and the remainder shall be allocated on a per capita basis to the other cities meeting the minimum allocation.

- (b) Each incorporated city shall use funds for Eligible Projects as defined in subdivision (K) of section 4.65.010 for activities which may include, but are not limited to, the following:
- (i) Conservation of water supplies and groundwater recharge by enhancing watershed health, improved land management, and protecting land adjacent to city water sources.
  - (ii) Improving water quality through the control of soil erosion by restoring and repairing trails, culverts, water courses, floodplains, wetlands, and riparian areas.
  - (iii) Natural or nature-based flood protection and restoration projects, including green infrastructure to reduce neighborhood flooding.
  - (iv) Protection of public access to local beaches and enhancement of visitor experiences by ensuring that public beaches are safe, clean, and accessible.
  - (v) Development and implementation of green infrastructure solutions that protect coastal areas and estuaries from erosion and the impacts of sea level rise.
  - (vi) Pollution reduction projects, such as litter removal or urban forestry to reduce air pollution.
  - (vii) Development of shaded fuel breaks, defensible spaces, or the reduction of hazardous fuels to prevent catastrophic wildfire, especially along roadways, trails, and in the wildland-urban interface.
  - (viii) Forest management to lower dangerous fuel loads and mitigate conditions that could lead to catastrophic wildfires.
  - (ix) Stewardship of private lands in the public benefit for fire resiliency, water quality, erosion control, or other ecosystem services.
  - (x) Establishment, repair, construction, or maintenance of safe and clean parks.
  - (xi) Establishment, repair, construction, or maintenance of river parkways and other trails, restrooms, picnic areas, and public recreation facilities.
  - (xii) Park cleanliness, beautification, and litter removal.
  - (xiii) Equitable access to nature through increased mobility and public transportation services to local parks.
  - (xiv) After school and recreation programs, including sports and aquatic facilities, senior citizens programs, and high-quality environmental education and cultural programs.
  - (xv) Visitor services for parks and open space preserves to protect natural resources, enhance visitor safety and enjoyment, and support volunteerism and environmental education.
  - (xvi) Support of activities conducted by a community conservation corps as certified pursuant to Public Resources Code section 14507.5.
  - (xvii) Trail development, staging areas, and other access facilities on lands open to the public.
- (c) Priority shall be provided for Eligible Projects that meet implementation priorities identified in subdivision (A) of section 4.65.050 or that:
- (i) Address extreme weather and natural disasters, climate change impacts, water pollution, or saltwater intrusion impacts, or
  - (ii) Meet the greatest need of communities lacking adequate access to parks and recreational facilities in the incorporated cities, or



## Local ballot measure: Q

- (iii) Repair or enhance existing parks and recreational facilities.
- (d) Funds shall be deposited in separate accounts to be overseen by the incorporated cities and expended pursuant to this section. Any funds unexpended at the close of each fiscal year shall remain in the accounts and be expended pursuant to this section in the subsequent or future fiscal years. Funds may be accrued for expenditure in future years to enable sufficient funding for larger or long-term projects.
- (3) County Safe Drinking Water, Clean Beaches, Wildfire Risk Reduction, and Safe and Clean Parks Program.
  - (a) Twenty percent (20%), on an annual basis, for Eligible Projects in the unincorporated parts of the County to the Office and the Department, or a successor agency named by the Board if the Office or the Department cease to exist. The Office and the Department shall jointly allocate funds to Eligible Projects.
  - (b) The County shall use funds for Eligible Projects as defined in subdivision (K) of section 4.65.010 for activities which may include, but are not limited to, the following:
    - (i) Conservation of water supplies and groundwater recharge by enhancing watershed health, improved land management, and protecting land adjacent to county water sources.
    - (ii) Improving water quality through the control of soil erosion by restoring and repairing trails, culverts, drainage, water courses, floodplains, wetlands, and riparian areas.
    - (iii) Natural or nature-based flood protection and restoration projects, including green infrastructure to reduce neighborhood flooding.
    - (iv) Protection of public access to local beaches and enhancement of visitor experiences by ensuring that public beaches are safe, clean, and accessible.
    - (v) Development and implementation of green infrastructure solutions that protect coastal areas and estuaries from erosion and the impacts of sea level rise.
    - (vi) Pollution reduction projects, such as litter removal or urban forestry to reduce air pollution.
    - (vii) Development of shaded fuel breaks, defensible spaces, or the reduction of hazardous fuels to prevent catastrophic wildfire, especially along roadways, trails, and in the wildland-urban interface.
    - (viii) Forest management to lower dangerous fuel loads and mitigate conditions that could lead to catastrophic wildfires.
    - (ix) Stewardship of private lands in the public benefit for fire resiliency, water quality, erosion control, or other ecosystem services.
    - (x) Establishment, repair, construction, or maintenance of safe and clean parks.
    - (xi) Establishment, repair, construction, or maintenance of river parkways and other trails, restrooms, picnic areas, and public recreation facilities.
    - (xii) Park cleanliness, beautification, and litter removal.
    - (xiii) Equitable access to nature through increased mobility and public transportation services to local parks.
    - (xiv) After school and recreation programs, including sports and aquatic facilities, senior citizens programs, and high-quality environmental education and cultural programs.
    - (xv) Visitor services for parks and open space preserves to protect natural resources, enhance visitor safety and enjoyment, and support volunteerism and environmental education.
    - (xvi) Support of activities conducted by a community conservation corps as certified pursuant to Public Resources Code section 14507.5.



## Local ballot measure: Q

- (xvii) Trail development, staging areas, and other access facilities on lands open to the public.
- (c) Priority shall be provided for Eligible Projects that meet implementation priorities identified in subdivision (A) of section 4.65.050 or that:
  - (i) Address extreme weather and natural disasters, climate change impacts, water pollution, or saltwater intrusion impacts, or
  - (ii) Meet the greatest need of communities lacking adequate access to parks and recreational facilities in the county, or
  - (iii) Repair or enhance existing parks and recreational facilities.
- (d) Funds shall be deposited in a separate account, or accounts, to be overseen by the Office and the Department, or a successor agency, and expended pursuant to this section. Any funds unexpended at the close of each fiscal year shall remain in the account, or accounts, and expended pursuant to this section in the subsequent or future fiscal years. Funds may be accrued for expenditure in future years to enable sufficient funding for larger or long-term projects.
- (4) Water Quality, Ecosystem Protection, and Fire Resilience on Undeveloped and Working Lands Program.
  - (a) Twenty percent (20%), on an annual basis, for Eligible Projects in the County to be administered, or implemented, or both, by the entities identified in subdivision (D) of section 4.65.050. This program recognizes that a majority of lands in the County are in private ownership, and projects on these private lands to ameliorate flood risk, improve water quality, mitigate fire risk, or take similar actions for the public benefit are critical to steward natural resources to enhance resilience and reduce the overall risk of climate change and natural disasters.
  - (b) Funding allocated under paragraph (a) of subsection (4) shall be provided for Eligible Projects as defined in subdivision (K) of section 4.65.010 for activities which may include, but are not limited to, the following:
    - (i) Agricultural protection and enhancement of ecosystem function, soil health, water quality, drought, or flood resilience on Working Lands.
    - (ii) Implementation of climate-risk reduction and resilience stewardship programs.
    - (iii) Technical assistance, education, and outreach for natural resources planning, stewardship, and restoration on private lands, including Working Lands and agricultural, rural residential, forest, and undeveloped land.
    - (iv) Conservation of water supplies and groundwater recharge by enhancing watershed health and improved land management.
    - (v) Improving water quality through the control of soil erosion by improving land and storm water management, restoring and repairing trails, culverts, drainage, water courses, floodplains, wetlands, and riparian areas.
    - (vi) Natural or nature-based flood protection and restoration projects, including green infrastructure to reduce neighborhood flooding.
    - (vii) Development and implementation of green infrastructure solutions that protect coastal areas and estuaries from erosion and the impacts of sea level rise.
    - (viii) Development of shaded fuel breaks, defensible spaces, or the reduction of hazardous fuels to prevent catastrophic wildfire, especially along roadways, trails, and in the wildland-urban interface.
    - (ix) Stewardship of private lands in the public benefit for fire resiliency, water quality, erosion control, or other ecosystem services.
    - (x) Trail development, staging areas, and other access facilities on lands open to the public.
    - (xi) Conservation of native biodiversity by reducing invasive species, improving habitat quality, and protecting or restoring wildlife corridors.



## Local ballot measure: Q

- (xii) Restoration of wetlands and the recovery of anadromous fish species.
- (xiii) Creation of wildlife bridges, culverts, directional fencing, or other wildlife-friendly infrastructure.
- (c) Priority shall be provided for Eligible Projects that meet implementation priorities identified in subdivision (A) of section 4.65.050 or that:
  - (i) Address extreme weather and natural disasters, climate change impacts, water pollution, or saltwater intrusion impacts, or
  - (ii) Create habitat or green infrastructure buffers on lands impacted from climate change or natural disasters, or
  - (iii) Meet current State or federal climate planning best management practices.
- (d) Funds shall be deposited in a separate account, or accounts, to be overseen by the entities identified in subdivision (D) of section 4.65.050 and expended pursuant to this section. Any funds unexpended at the close of each fiscal year shall remain in the account, or accounts, and expended pursuant to this section in the subsequent or future fiscal years. Funds may be accrued for expenditure in future years to enable sufficient funding for larger or long-term projects.

### **4.65.050 Implementation.**

- (A) To the extent feasible, priority shall be given to Eligible Projects that do at least one of the following:
  - (1) Serve as a local source of match funding that makes eligible or makes more competitive grant applications to other public or private sources.
  - (2) Support multiple benefits that maximize climate resiliency and adaptation, including water conservation, air quality improvements, climate pollution reductions, habitat protection, and public health improvements.
  - (3) Invest resources for stewardship, development, restoration, Community Development, and other improvements in Disadvantaged Communities for flood protection, drought protection, improved water quality, groundwater supplies, improved public access to resources, or recreation, including improvements to lakes, rivers, creeks, beaches, ocean, wetlands, and the coast.
- (B) Recognizing the acute need to improve forest health and reduce fire risk in the forested northern area of the County, no less than six hundred thousand dollars (\$600,000), on an annual basis, shall be made available from subsection (1) of subdivision (B) of section 4.65.040 for Eligible Projects on the property protected by the largest conservation easement in the County. Funds shall be used for Eligible Projects that benefit the public, for activities that include, but are not limited to, enhancing forest health, increasing fire resilience, providing public access or recreational values, preserving clean water, conserving natural resources, or restoring natural habitats.
- (C) Recognizing the acute need to improve watershed function and reduce flooding risk in the southern area of the County, no less than six hundred thousand dollars (\$600,000), on an annual basis, shall be made available from subsection (1) of subdivision (B) of section 4.65.040 for Eligible Projects that benefit the residents of the Pajaro Valley, as defined by geography that includes the City of Watsonville, the census defined urban area that borders the City of Watsonville, and areas within a mile of the following water bodies: the Watsonville Slough system, Pinto Lake, and the Pajaro River and its tributaries in Santa Cruz County. Funds shall be used for Eligible Projects that benefit the public, for activities that include, but are not limited to, improving watershed health, reducing risk of flooding, providing public access or recreational values, improving water quality, conserving natural resources, and restoring natural habitats. Consistent with this purpose, funds shall be awarded to between one and three Eligible Applicants, whether Nonprofit Organization or Public Agency.
- (D) Projects funded pursuant to subsection (4) of subdivision (B) of section 4.65.040 shall be implemented by the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County and a land stewardship implementation partner. Funds shall be allocated evenly between the two entities. If deemed appropriate and in furtherance of the



## Local ballot measure: Q

public benefits of the Act, the land stewardship implementation partner may elect to work with a special district to administer their allocation of funds. The land stewardship implementation partner shall be selected based on criteria as described in paragraph (h) of subsection (3) of subdivision (A) of section 4.65.060.

- (E) The Treasurer shall deduct a Property Tax Collection Fee of no more than one percent (1%) annually that shall be deducted from the Fund before allocating the remaining proceeds pursuant to section 4.65.040.
- (F) Funds allocated pursuant to this Act shall be used to increase and enhance activities described within the Act. Funds shall not supplant expenditures from other federal, state, or local sources or funds independently generated by the County, incorporated cities, or grant awardees.

### **4.65.060 Oversight and Accountability.**

- (A) The Board shall establish a Citizens Oversight Advisory Board.
  - (1) The Advisory Board shall be composed of nine (9) members, five (5) appointed by the Board with one selection from each of the five (5) Board supervisorial districts, and four (4) appointed with one selection from each incorporated city.
  - (2) The Advisory Board members shall not hold any elected office and shall have demonstrated expertise in the following areas:
    - (a) Water quality, water supply, or flood protection management.
    - (b) Wildfire or forest management.
    - (c) Wildlife, parks, or natural resources stewardship.
    - (d) Working Lands or agricultural expertise.
    - (e) Environmental justice, park equity, or public health.
    - (f) Knowledge and expertise in evaluating financial transactions or program cost- effectiveness.
  - (3) The Advisory Board shall do all of the following:
    - (a) Conduct hearings and receive public input on allocations related to this Act.
    - (b) Receive reports annually from the County on projects funded pursuant to subsections (1) and (3) of subdivision (B) of section 4.65.040.
    - (c) Receive reports annually from each of the incorporated cities on projects funded pursuant to subsection (2) of subdivision (B) of section 4.65.040.
    - (d) Receive reports annually from the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County and the land stewardship implementation partner on projects funded pursuant to subsection (4) of subdivision (B) of section 4.65.040.
    - (e) Report to the Board annually on the outcomes of the projects and programs funded through the Act as well as how the Act was used to leverage other public and private funds. Annual reports by the Advisory Board may also provide suggested direction on the types of projects to prioritize in the coming year.
    - (f) Approve a five-year vision plan to support grant criteria and awards.
      - (i) The plan shall be published by July 1, 2025, and updated every five years thereafter.
      - (ii) The Advisory Board may provide recommendations on the development of the plan by the Office and the Department. The Office and the Department shall also consult the incorporated cities, the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County, and the land stewardship implementation partner in the development of the plan.
      - (iii) The vision plan shall identify the activities and geographies prioritized for investment throughout the County in a concise format primarily based on content derived from existing plans, such as, but not limited to, the Santa Cruz County Regional Conservation Investment



## Local ballot measure: Q

Strategy, Santa Cruz County Parks Strategic Plan, Santa Cruz County Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, California Water Plan, California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan, California Outdoors for All Strategy, California Pathways to 30x30 Strategy, California Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy, Santa Cruz County Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, city climate adaptation plans, city parks and open space plans, or similar County, State, or local plans.

- (g) Select the land stewardship implementation partner by July 1, 2025, who shall serve in this role for a period of five years. After this initial period, the Advisory Board shall renew the land stewardship implementation partner or select another partner.
- (h) Utilize the following criteria for selecting the land stewardship implementation partner:
  - (i) The land stewardship implementation partner shall have a mission generally consistent with the purposes of the Act and the capacity and expertise to implement projects in the public benefit related to land, habitat, ecosystem, and natural resources management and protection.
  - (ii) The land stewardship implementation partner shall be a Nonprofit Organization as defined in subdivision (M) of section 4.65.010 that owns and stewards private lands on which Eligible Projects in the public benefit can be implemented.
  - (iii) The land stewardship implementation partner must be headquartered in Santa Cruz County with at least 10 years of experience working primarily in Santa Cruz County.
  - (iv) The land stewardship implementation partner must be able to submit annual reports to the Advisory Board and contribute to the development of the five-year vision plan.
- (4) Members of the Advisory Board shall serve a term of four years at the pleasure of the Board or appointing city, and no member may serve more than two consecutive four-year terms. The Board, or appointing city, may, by order, extend this length of service or waive this limit for individuals that they appointed. A member's position shall become vacant upon their death, resignation, or removal by the Board or appointing city. In the case of such a vacancy, the Board or appointing city shall appoint a successor to fill the unexpired term.
- (5) Costs associated with the Advisory Board shall be paid by revenues from the Special Parcel Tax. Reasonably budgeted amounts to pay for the Advisory Board shall be taken from the Fund and deposited in a separate account before monies from the Fund are distributed to the programs outlined in Section 4.65.040. These funds shall be overseen by the Office and the Department, or a successor agency, in their role as staff support to the Advisory Board.
- (6) The Office and the Department, or a successor agency, shall staff the Advisory Board, which shall comply with the provisions of the Ralph M. Brown Act, codified at California Government Code Section 54950 et seq.
- (7) Each member of the Advisory Board shall receive a stipend as compensation for their public service in an amount as determined by the Board annually by resolution.

### **4.65.070 Property Acquisition.**

All real property acquired pursuant to this Act shall be acquired in compliance with Chapter 16 (commencing with section 7260) of Division 7 of Title 1 of the California Government Code.

### **4.65.080 Sunset Date.**

The Special Parcel Tax levied pursuant to this Act shall be levied until ended by voters.

### **4.65.090 Severability.**

If any provision of this Act or the application thereof to any person or circumstance is held invalid or unconstitutional by a court of competent jurisdiction, such invalidity or unconstitutionality shall not affect any other provisions or applications. To that end, the provisions of this Act are declared to be severable. It is the intent of the voters that this Act would have been enacted regardless of whether any invalid provision had



## Local ballot measure: Q

been included or any invalid application had been made.

### **4.65.100 Amendment.**

Except for amendments that would change the amount of the Special Parcel Tax imposed by this Act, change the authorized uses of revenue generated by the Special Parcel Tax, change the administering agency for reasons other than failure of performance, or extend the period for which the Special Parcel Tax may be imposed, the Board of Supervisors may amend this Act without submitting the amendment to the voters for approval, provided that the amendment is consistent with and furthers the purposes of this Act as enacted by the voters.

### **4.65.110 Implementation Date.**

This Act shall take effect ten (10) days after the election at which it is adopted as certified by the Santa Cruz County Clerk (Elections Department) and reported to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors.