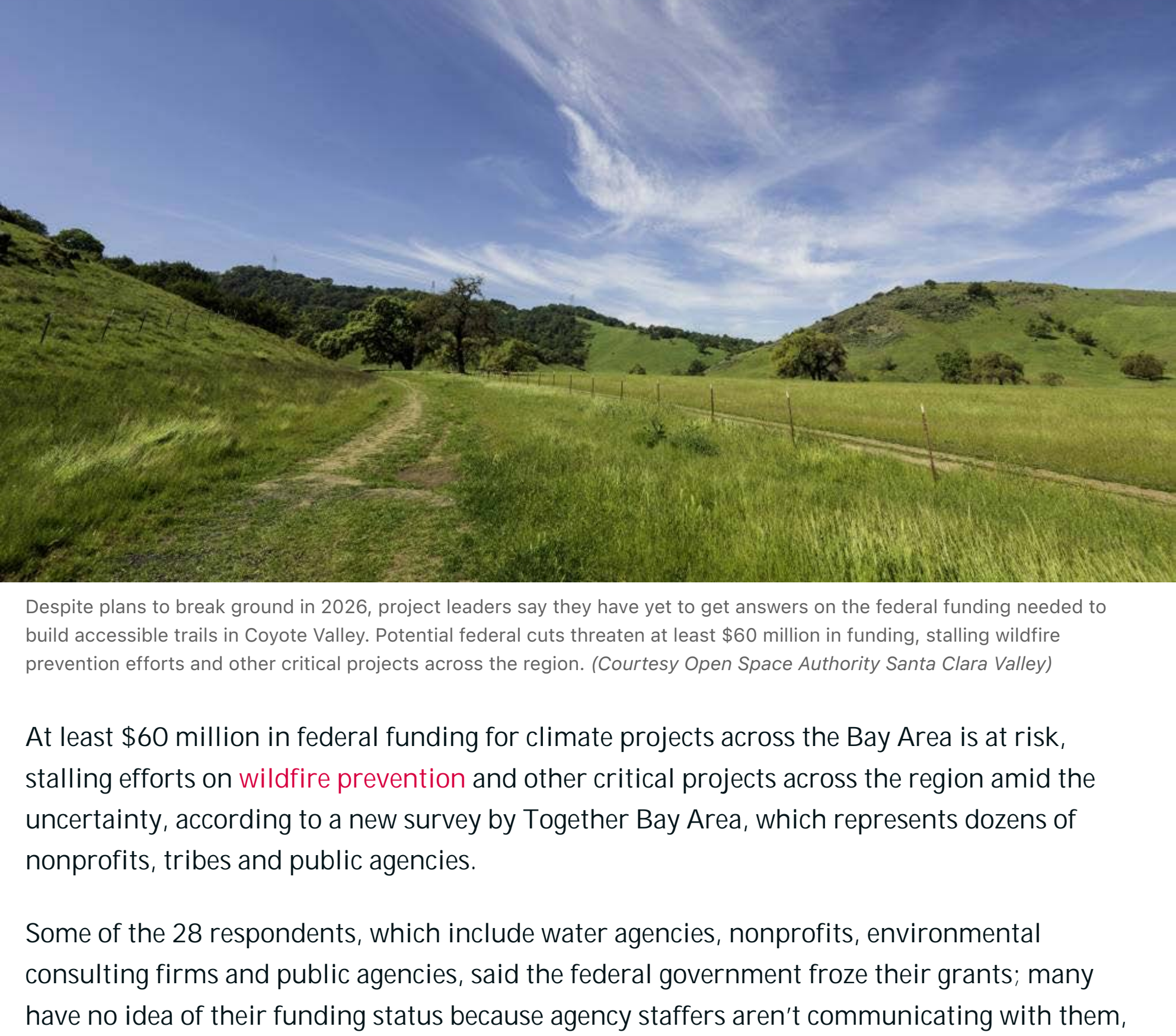


SCIENCE

# Uncertainty Looms Over Bay Area Climate Projects Under Trump: ‘We’re in Triage’

By Ezra David Romero  Mar 25

 Save Article



Despite plans to break ground in 2026, project leaders say they have yet to get answers on the federal funding needed to build accessible trails in Coyote Valley. Potential federal cuts threaten at least \$60 million in funding, stalling wildfire prevention efforts and other critical projects across the region. *(Courtesy Open Space Authority Santa Clara Valley)*

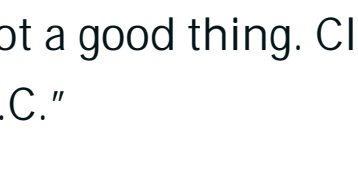
At least \$60 million in federal funding for climate projects across the Bay Area is at risk, stalling efforts on **wildfire prevention** and other critical projects across the region amid the uncertainty, according to a new survey by Together Bay Area, which represents dozens of nonprofits, tribes and public agencies.

Some of the 28 respondents, which include water agencies, nonprofits, environmental consulting firms and public agencies, said the federal government froze their grants; many have no idea of their funding status because agency staffers aren’t communicating with them, and others are blindly billing for their projects with no assurance they will be reimbursed.

The funding limbo comes as the Trump administration has taken **drastic steps to reshape the Environmental Protection Agency**, cut or freeze hundreds of grants and deemphasize programs that promote climate awareness. EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin said the cuts will eliminate “forced discrimination programs” and “serve every American with equal dignity and respect.”

**Sponsored**

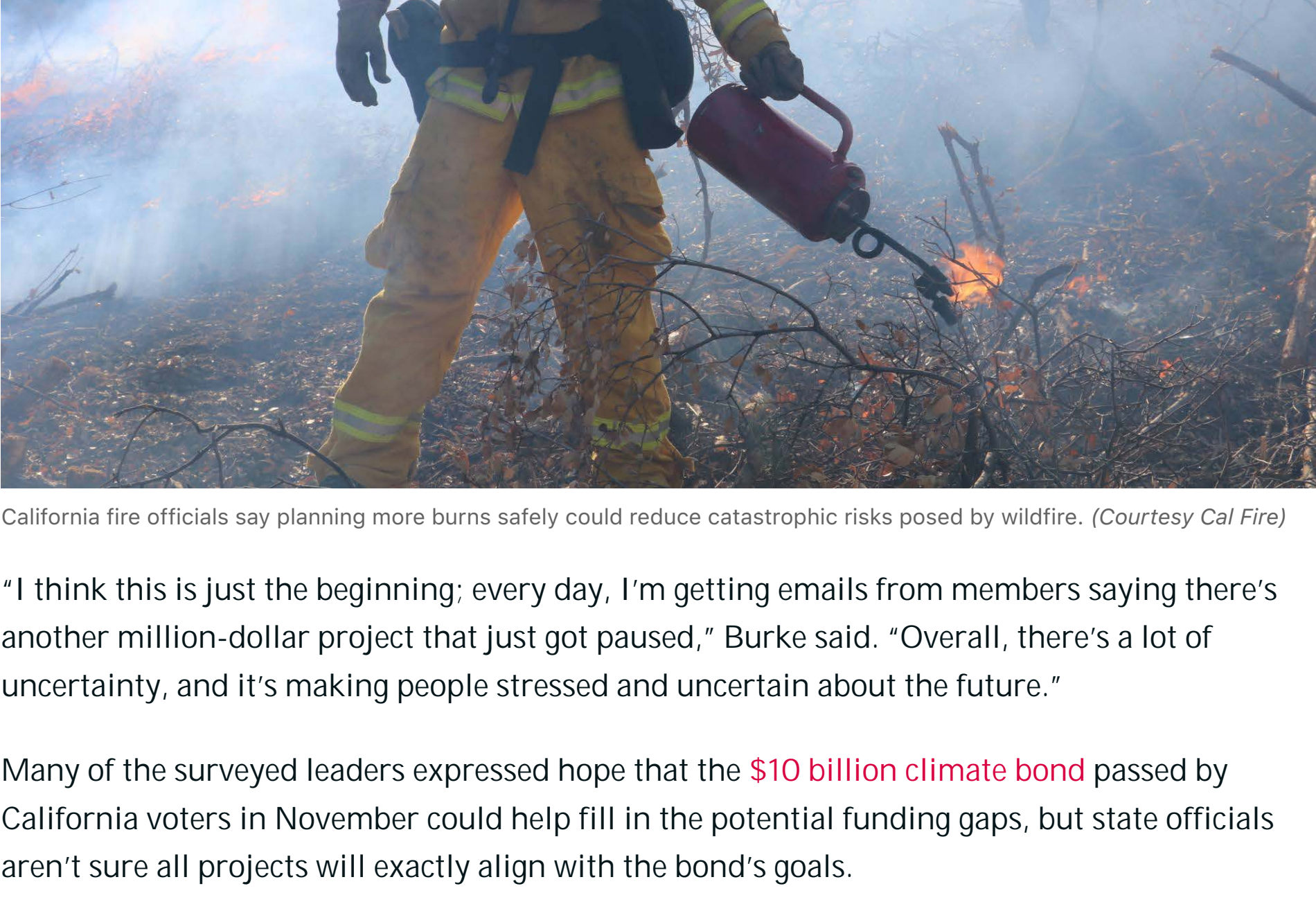
Paint Smarter  
recycle leftover  
paint



LEARN MORE

“We found out that nature-based solutions to the climate crisis are slowing down and stopping because of the federal administration’s orders,” said Annie Burke, the executive director of Together Bay Area. “That’s not a good thing. Climate change doesn’t care about what’s happening in Washington, D.C.”

The surveyed groups are spread across the nine Bay Area counties and Santa Cruz County; the climate projects in jeopardy include efforts to protect endangered fish species, adapt to wildfire risk and shield communities from the dangers of flooding.

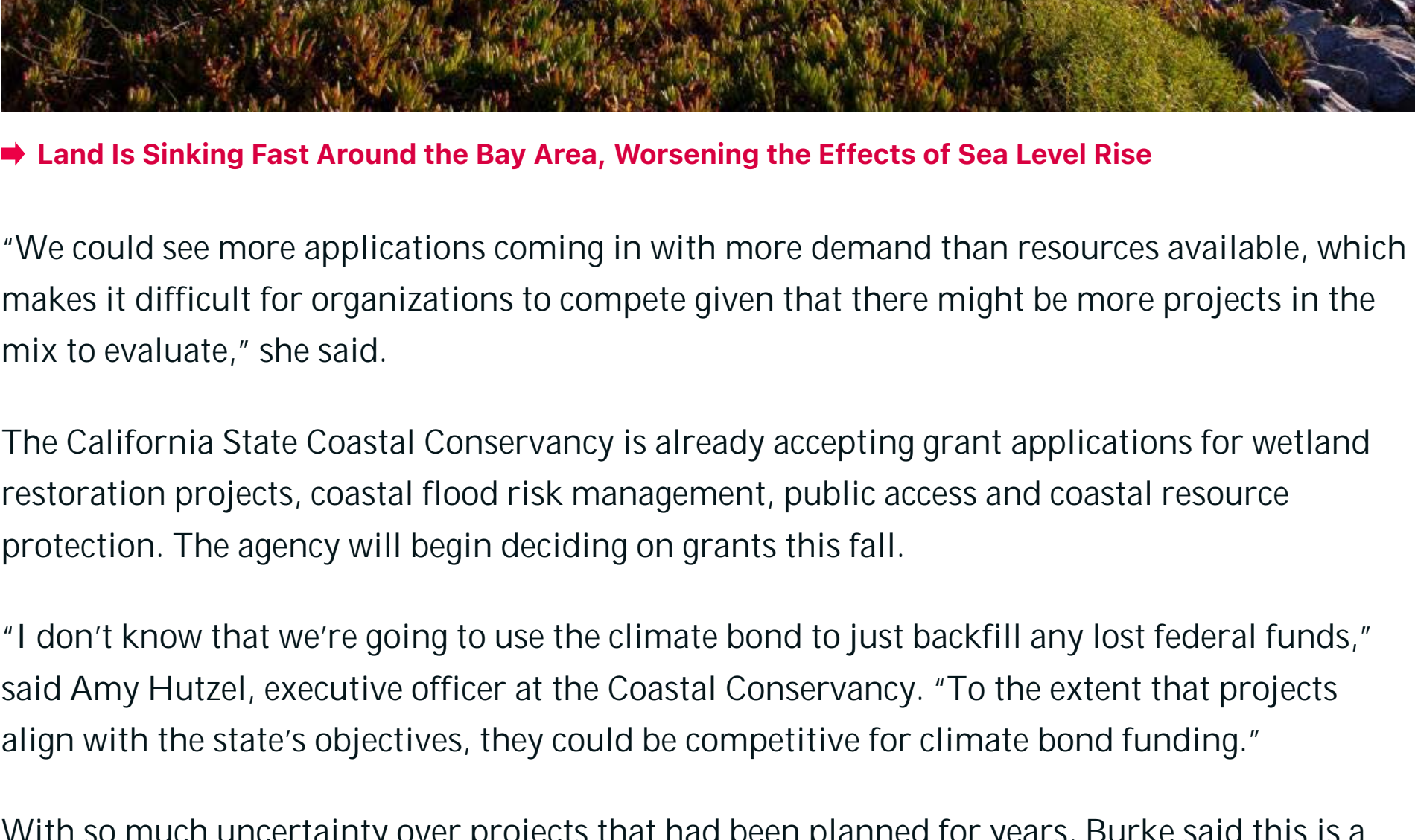


California fire officials say planning more burns safely could reduce catastrophic risks posed by wildfire. *(Courtesy Cal Fire)*

“I think this is just the beginning; every day, I’m getting emails from members saying there’s another million-dollar project that just got paused,” Burke said. “Overall, there’s a lot of uncertainty, and it’s making people stressed and uncertain about the future.”

Many of the surveyed leaders expressed hope that the **\$10 billion climate bond** passed by California voters in November could help fill in the potential funding gaps, but state officials aren’t sure all projects will exactly align with the bond’s goals.

Julie Alvis, deputy assistant secretary for administration at the California Natural Resources Agency, said around \$2.7 billion will likely be available from the climate bond this year, but that won’t be certain until the state budget is finalized in July. Key areas for grants include safe drinking water, water infrastructure, wildfire prevention, clean energy and climate resilience, Alvis said.



➔ **Land Is Sinking Fast Around the Bay Area, Worsening the Effects of Sea Level Rise**

“We could see more applications coming in with more demand than resources available, which makes it difficult for organizations to compete given that there might be more projects in the mix to evaluate,” she said.

The California State Coastal Conservancy is already accepting grant applications for wetland restoration projects, coastal flood risk management, public access and coastal resource protection. The agency will begin deciding on grants this fall.

“I don’t know that we’re going to use the climate bond to just backfill any lost federal funds,” said Amy Hutzell, executive officer at the Coastal Conservancy. “To the extent that projects align with the state’s objectives, they could be competitive for climate bond funding.”

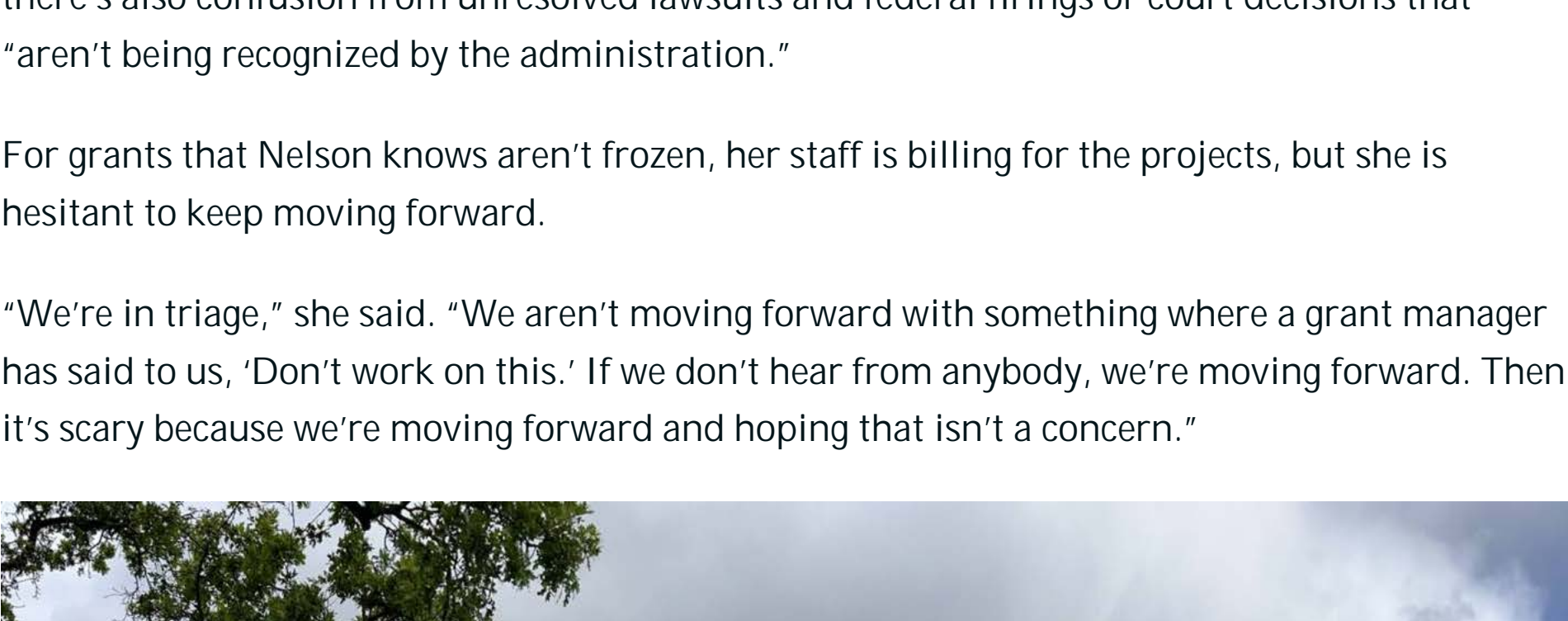
With so much uncertainty over projects that had been planned for years, Burke said this is a moment for California and private funders to help organizations meet their missions, which play into the state’s climate goals.

“What’s going to save us is us working locally, regionally, to advocate for funding in Sacramento,” she said. “If we don’t think differently and organize differently, it’s going to set us back years, if not decades, in the work to adapt to and mitigate the climate crisis.”

## ‘We’re in triage’

At least \$6 million for restoring native habitat for endangered salmon, mitigating flooding issues and reducing wildfire risk is in question, said Kellyx Nelson, executive director of the San Mateo Resource Conservation District, which uses nature-based solutions for climate resilience and natural disaster mitigation.

“I can’t tell you exactly what the risk is because some of the greatest impact to us right now is uncertainty,” Nelson said. “Information is changing hour by hour, almost minute by minute. Some of it comes down to interpretation because it’s not even clear what’s happening.”

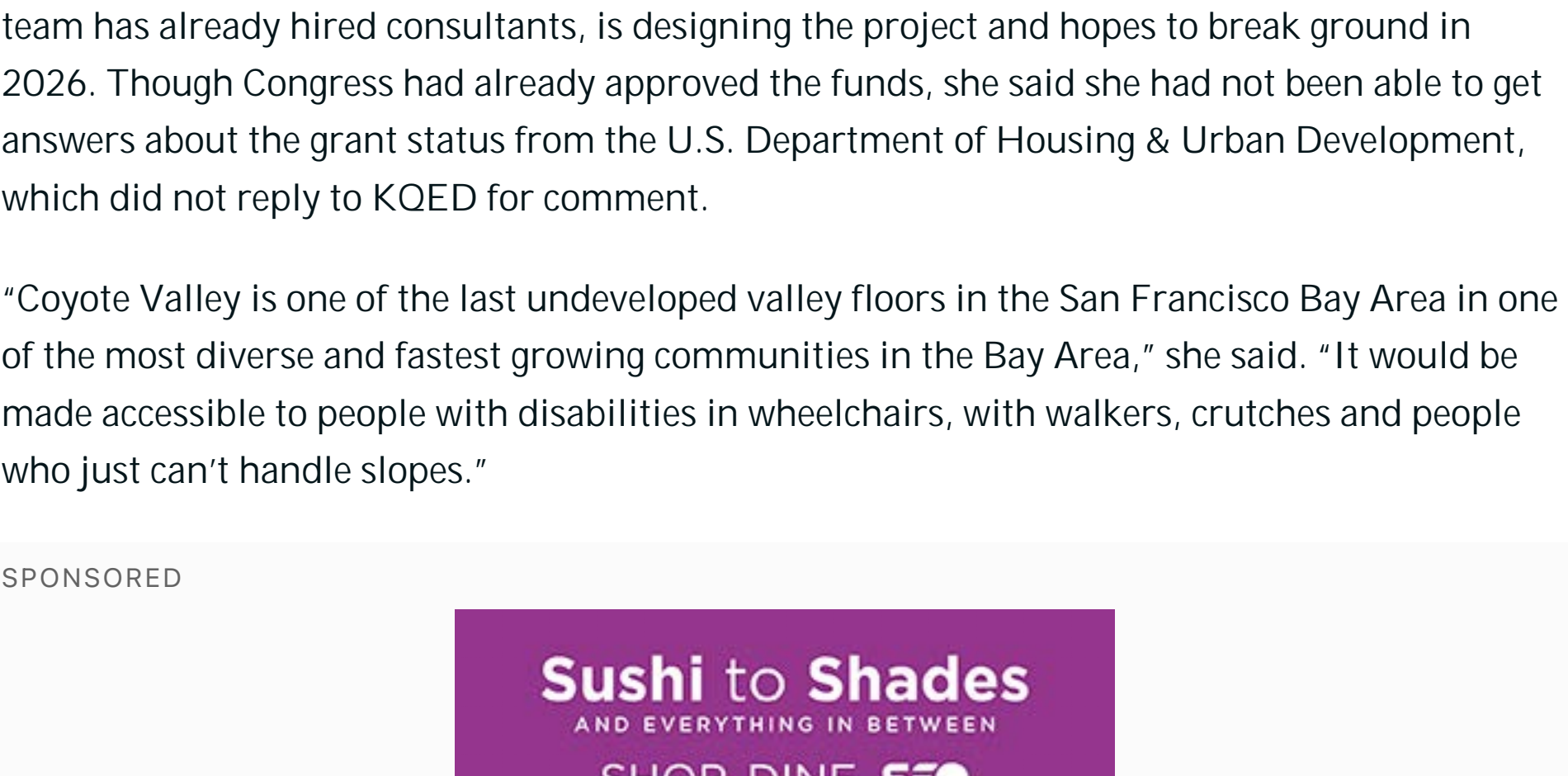


Kellyx Nelson, executive director of San Mateo County Resource Conservation District, stands next to a retention pond on land managed by flower grower Dave Repetto in San Mateo County, California. *(Courtesy Tara Lohan)*

Funding for local grants comes from various sources, including the Biden-era infrastructure act and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. But federal agencies are either not communicating with her staff, were fired or don’t know the status of their grants, Nelson said, adding that there’s also confusion from unresolved lawsuits and federal firings or court decisions that “aren’t being recognized by the administration.”

For grants that Nelson knows aren’t frozen, her staff is billing for the projects, but she is hesitant to keep moving forward.

“We’re in triage,” she said. “We aren’t moving forward with something where a grant manager has said to us, ‘Don’t work on this.’ If we don’t hear from anybody, we’re moving forward. Then it’s scary because we’re moving forward and hoping that isn’t a concern.”



Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve, south of San José, could lose \$800,000 in funding for accessible trails designed for people with disabilities. *(Courtesy Open Space Authority Santa Clara Valley)*

In Santa Clara County, south of San José, \$800,000 in funds are at risk that would create trails for people with disabilities within the **Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve**.

Andrea Mackenzie, general manager of the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority, said the team has already hired consultants, is designing the project and hopes to break ground in 2026. Though Congress had already approved the funds, she said she had not been able to get answers about the grant status from the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, which did not reply to KQED for comment.

“Coyote Valley is one of the last undeveloped valley floors in the San Francisco Bay Area in one of the most diverse and fastest growing communities in the Bay Area,” she said. “It would be made accessible to people with disabilities in wheelchairs, with walkers, crutches and people who just can’t handle slopes.”

SPONSORED

Sushi to Shades

AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

SHOP. DINE. SFO

KQED

Explore tiny wildlife wonders up close with science and nature news by the award-winning Deep Look team.

Email Address:

Sign Up

To learn more about how we use your information, please read our [privacy policy](#).

KQED

- TV

Radio

Podcasts

Events

Newsletters

Mobile Apps

For Educators

For TV/Film Producers
- News

Science

Arts & Culture

Technology

Labor

Crossword
- Donate

Help Center

About

Community Representation Statement

Careers

Accessibility

Corporate Sponsorship

Financial and FCC Files

Contact Us



Copyright © 2025 KQED Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Service](#) [Privacy Policy](#)

 Live Radio    The World 