AGN. NO. _____

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR LINDSEY P. HORVATH February 4, 2025

Immediate Action to Remove Toxic Fire Debris and Contaminant Runoff from LA County Beaches

The 2025 Palisades Fire, which started on January 7, 2025, was an unprecedented wildfire which occurred adjacent to the Pacific Ocean. With more than 6,837 structures damaged directly along, and near Santa Monica Bay, ash and fire debris pose an immediate risk to our ocean and public health. And after the rainstorm of January 26, 2025, those fears were realized and LA County beaches are now blanketed in ash, fire debris, and other “first-flush” contaminants.

Prior to the rain, the Department of Public Works (DPW) staff took steps to ensure stormwater infrastructure remained clear for storm runoff, while also preventing burned material from entering waterways. DPW teams inspected all Flood Control Facilities in Eaton Fire area, removed burnt vegetation from debris basins, reservoirs, and channels, inspected and begun cleaning inlets/outlets, and coordinated with Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) and municipal public works departments to preposition k-rails, straw wattles, and gravel.

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Following the first rain event after the wildfires, staff from the Department of Beaches and Harbors (DBH) inspected all beaches for debris and other potential impacts. At the Santa Monica, Will Rogers and Topanga State Beaches, there was a fine dark ash sediment that was deposited on the shore and the water appeared darker. Additionally, there was scattered debris, metal, and wood materials found at the Topanga State Beach and Point Dume. While a small number of debris was removed by crews from Venice to Manhattan Beach, ash sediment and debris remains on beaches and in the water. Subsequently, the Department of Public Health (Public Health) ordered an Ocean Water Closure for Las Flores State Beach to Santa Monica State Beach on January 27. Beach users have been cautioned to avoid water and sand contact where fire debris and heavy ash are observed until further notice as fire debris runoff and pollutants in the water and on the sand may contain toxic or carcinogenic chemicals.

The Palisades Fire has increased sedimentation and appears to have introduced harmful pollutants into our coastal waters. Public Health collects ocean water samples weekly to ensure water meets State standards for bacteria in ocean water. Ocean water is analyzed by Public Health for three types of "indicator bacteria": total coliform, fecal coliform or E. coli, and enterococcus. When results exceed State standards, beaches are posted with warning signs in the vicinity of the high bacteria counts. During a significant rainfall, bacteria levels in ocean waters increase as contaminants within the runoff enter the ocean and result in Public Health issuing a Rain Advisory due to the increase in contaminants. Public Health does not have the ability to test for toxic or carcinogenic chemicals such as lead and asbestos that may have been released during the recent fires. Therefore, Public Health collected samples for testing by the Los Angeles Regional

Water Quality Control Board and is awaiting sampling results. Until those results are available, little is known about the water quality, ash sediment, and debris to get an understanding of what key pollutants may have been transported on to our beaches and into our coastal water due to runoff from the Palisades Fire. An analysis of initial pollutant levels and stormwater runoff effects is urgently needed to help inform members of the public about potential health and environmental risks.

The Board has previously contemplated the issues of trash and pollution in approving the motion authored by Supervisor Horvath "Protecting Santa Monica Bay and LA County Beaches from Trash and Pollution" in September 2023. In the report back, DBH's post-storm protocol states they assess the state of its critical facilities and the conditions of beaches, and then deploy a tiered cleanup protocol, first and foremost prioritizing public safety. Cleanup is typically performed using a combination of heavy equipment and manually operated rakes, depending on the availability of equipment and operational conditions. Much of the ash sediment is in the wet sand area which DBH does not address in a normal operation. The unprecedented scale and severity of the recent fires is beyond the Department's ability to safely and effectively remove and dispose of the ash sediment or any other potentially toxic debris from our beaches and ocean water without additional resources.

With more rain expected, we require urgent support and answers on the necessary steps to avoid further contamination of our County's beautiful beaches.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Department of Public Works (DPW), in coordination with the Department of Beaches and Harbors (DBH), and Office of Emergency

Management (OEM) to:

a. Submit a request to all appropriate state and federal agencies for additional resources and expertise to safely and rapidly remove ash sediment and debris from impacted beaches and coastal waters.
b. Consult and seek opportunities for assistance from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Environmental Restoration's Office of Response and Restoration which is responsible for evaluating and restoring coastal habitats damaged by hazardous waste releases, oil spills and other debris.
c. Explore and leverage partnerships with organizations that are dedicated to making our oceans and beaches clean for the enjoyment of all people.
d. Identify any additional state and federal resources available to help restore and remediate our beaches.

2. Direct DBH, in consultation with the DPW and OEM, to report back to the Board in 5 days on whether protocols identified from the December 11, 2023 Board report were followed and what additional protocols and resources are needed to respond before and after a rainstorm event to remove any fire debris and ash from beaches and water, including recommendations for an on-call contractor to help facilitate rapid removal.
3. Direct the Department of Public Health (Public Health), in coordination with DBH, DPW, and the State Water Resources Control Board, to report back to the Board in 10 days on the following:

a. Existing testing protocols for water quality and debris on beaches and

ocean water.

b. Collaboration with the State Water Resources Control Board to expand ocean water sampling to include potential toxins and chemicals.

c. Current efforts in response to the fires and storm runoff in partnership with state and local partners.

d. Recommendations on how protocols could be improved and the resources needed to address impactful events other than a storm, including coordinating with relevant public agencies and research institutions.

4. Direct DPW, in coordination with DPH, DBH, and OEM, to report back in 15 days with best practices for cleaning up beaches and coastal waters from toxic or carcinogenic chemicals and debris based on municipal action following similar natural disaster events, such as the Lahaina and Thomas Fires.

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