

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 30, 2004

**ALHAMBRA CREEK RESTORATION AND
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE PROJECT**

File No. 04-025
Project Manager: Brenda Buxton

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$40,000 to the Muir Heritage Land Trust to carry out a watershed education project for high school students in the City of Martinez, Contra Costa County area focusing on the restoration of Alhambra Creek.

LOCATION: City of Martinez, Contra Costa County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Coastal Education

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Map
Exhibit 2: January 16, 2004 Memorandum to Coastal Conservancy
Exhibit 3: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31119(a) of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed forty thousand dollars (\$40,000) to the Muir Heritage Land Trust for an environmental education project with the City of Martinez area students, focusing on the restoration of the Alhambra Creek watershed in the City of Martinez. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, Muir Heritage Land Trust shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer a work program including a detailed project budget and schedule for completion of the project.
2. Conservancy funding shall be acknowledged in publications produced as a result of this project, in a manner which has been reviewed and approved by the Executive Officer.

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

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1. The proposed project is consistent with Public Resources Code Section 31119 regarding an educational project.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
 3. Muir Heritage Land Trust is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends authorization to disburse up to \$40,000 to Muir Heritage Land Trust (MHLT), a nonprofit organization, to provide an environmental education project to City of Martinez area school students that focuses on the protection and restoration of the Alhambra Creek watershed.

The MHLT has taken the lead in organizing the restoration of Alhambra Creek through a partnership with Martinez Unified School District, Urban Creeks Council, Friends of Alhambra Creek and the City of Martinez, called the Alhambra Creek Restoration and Environmental Education Collaborative. MHLT seeks to restore and reduce flooding on four hundred feet of Alhambra Creek in the City of Martinez that has been degraded by erosion and invasive species. To help fund this restoration effort, the MHLT has secured a \$197,000 grant from the Department of Water Resources, \$30,000 from the Conservancy as part of its Environmental Education and Restoration Grant Round (August 2003), as well as nearly \$60,000 from local industries. The planning phase of this project is near complete and construction is anticipated to start this summer.

Taking advantage of the project’s location on the Alternative Education Campus, the MHLT has made environmental education a central part of the restoration process. This authorization would allow the MHLT to continue the environmental education component of this restoration project. Using a place-based interdisciplinary curriculum consistent with the State’s science and other subject content standards, students will learn about riparian ecology, monitor stream function, and participate in the creek restoration project. Students have already been involved in the restoration design and planning for this project as part of the environmental education. This environmental education project will serve all of Martinez’s high school students but it specifically targets underserved high school students at the Alternative Education Campus who have not thrived in a traditional classroom environment. This project can offer them community service, internships, and career experience in addition to classroom learning. Conservancy funds would be used to help to pay for an environmental educator and other activities needed to run the environmental education project and would be matched by \$24,900 from other sources (see Project Financing).

In addition to funding a portion of the creek restoration, the Conservancy has worked with the MHLT to acquire key open space properties in the Alhambra Creek watershed. Since this education project focuses on a Conservancy project area, this authorization follows the approach outlined in Conservancy staff’s January 16, 2004 Memorandum to the Coastal Conservancy Board (Exhibit 2). Staff recommends this project because education about ecological processes com-

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bined with hands-on restoration experience is expected to have the lasting benefit of increasing students' interest in watershed protections and restoration.

Site Description: Alhambra Creek flows through the City of Martinez in Contra Costa County on its way to the Carquinez Strait of San Francisco Bay. The creek restoration site is directly adjacent to the Martinez Alternative Education Campus. The upper watershed of Alhambra Creek encompasses Franklin Ridge which has been a high priority for open space protection for the MHLT.

Project History: In August 2003, the Conservancy authorized \$30,000 to the MHLT as part of its Environmental Education and Restoration Grant Round to help fund creek restoration. The creek restoration project planning and design are nearly complete. The MHLT currently seeks funding for the environmental education component for the upcoming academic year.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$40,000
City of Martinez	\$10,000
Shell Oil Corporation	\$ 5,000
Contra Costa County Fish and Wildlife Committee	\$ 8,500
Friends of Alhambra Creek	\$ 1,400
Total Project Costs	\$64,900

Conservancy funds are expected to come from the California Beach and Coastal Enhancement Account, California License Plate Fund. The purpose of the referenced License Plate Fund account includes environmental education, coastal natural resource and enhancement projects, as well as other projects consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Public Resources Code Section 31119 authorizes the Conservancy to undertake educational projects for pupils in kindergarten through 12, which relate to the preservation, protection, enhancement, and maintenance of coastal resources. The Conservancy may award grants to non-profit organizations for that purpose.

The Alhambra Creek Restoration and Environmental Education Collaborative Project meets these criteria since the grantee, the Muir Heritage Land Trust, is a nonprofit organization. This project will educate high school pupils by using the sciences and other disciplines to learn about watershed protection, restoration, and maintenance of the riparian resources of the San Francisco Bay area.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with Goal 11, Objective C, this project will expand or improve educational or interpretive programs with are tied to on the ground restoration projects and serve urban populations.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** Letters of support are included in Exhibit 1.
4. **Location:** Alhambra Creek is located in Contra Costa County, one of the nine counties of the Conservancy's Bay Area Conservancy Program. The curriculum will include watershed processes and the relationship between streams and the estuarine resources of San Francisco Bay.
5. **Need:** Without funding from the Conservancy the MHLT will have to dramatically scale back if not entirely eliminate the education portion of the Alhambra Creek project.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** This project will serve as an organizational and funding model for other creek watershed restoration and education groups seeking to restore their watersheds and educate watershed residents.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** This project is scheduled to start at the end of August 2004 and funding must be secured immediately.
8. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
9. **Cooperation:** This project is a partnership between a local land trust, school district, creek advocacy group, and local business. The success of the project to date has been because of the large degree of cooperation between these parties who all support the creek restoration and the education project.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

Development of an educational project does not have the potential to result in a physical change to the environment, and therefore does not constitute a "project" for purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as defined in 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15378.

In regard to the creek restoration activities, the school children will participate in design and planning of the restoration project, remove exotics, and grow and plant native riparian species. Activities such as removing exotics and planting native species are exempt under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations §15301(i) (existing facilities) which exempts the maintenance of wildlife areas and stream channels to protect fish and wildlife resources. Removing invasive exotic species that

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degrade native wildlife and fish habitat and planting native species will protect and enhance fish and wildlife resources. Furthermore, Section 15304 exempts the minor public or private alterations in the conditions of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy mature scenic trees. This project will not involve the removal of healthy mature scenic trees. Upon Conservancy approval, staff will file Notices of Exemption.