

## COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

January 17, 2008

### **GREEN VALLEY CREEK WATERSHED ASSESSMENT AND INTEGRATED PLAN**

File No. 07-106-01

Project Manager: Deborah Hirst

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$125,000 to the Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District to assess limiting factors for salmonids, conduct landowner outreach and prepare an integrated watershed plan to improve anadromous fish habitat in Green Valley Creek, tributary to the Russian River, in western Sonoma County.

**LOCATION:** Sonoma County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Resource Enhancement

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#### **EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Map of Green Valley Creek Project Area](#)

Exhibit 3: [Green Valley Creek Area Sediment Assessment Outreach](#)

Exhibit 4: [Letters of Support](#)

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#### **RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to \$125,000 to the Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District (GRRCD) to assess limiting factors for salmonids, conduct landowner outreach and prepare an integrated watershed plan to improve anadromous fish habitat in Green Valley Creek in western Sonoma County, subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of Conservancy funds, the GRRCD shall submit for the review and approval of the Conservancy’s Executive Officer a work program, including a final budget, and the names of all contractors that the GRRCD intends to use to complete the project. “

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:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007.

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2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding enhancement of coastal resources.”
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### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The proposed authorization would enable the Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District (GRRCD) to assess limiting factors for salmonids, conduct land owner outreach and prepare an integrated watershed plan to improve anadromous fish habitat in Green Valley Creek, tributary to the Russian River, in western Sonoma County.

The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) identifies the Guerneville Hydrologic Sub Area (HSA), including Green Valley Creek, as having the highest possible rank for restoration and management potential in the Central California Coast Coho Evolutionarily Significant Units in the *Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon* (2004). Green Valley Creek is one of only five remaining streams where all three year classes of wild juvenile coho are known to exist in the Russian River system. This critical habitat supports steelhead trout and, in the lower reaches, Chinook salmon and also provides important summer stream flows for the Russian River. At the same time, DFG stream habitat surveys show threats to the habitat as the percentage of accumulated fine sediment in the watershed has risen from 15% to 71% as compared with cobble and spawning gravel between 1969 and 1993. Russian River Captive Broodstock Program data also document a dramatic drop in number of wild coho juveniles from 300 in 2001 to 10 in 2004. The *Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon* recommendations for the Guerneville HSA call for assessment, prioritization and treatment of excess sediment sources in the watershed.

The proposed project will enable GRRCD to form a steering committee and produce an integrated watershed plan with specific recommendations for the enhancement of riparian areas and salmonid habitat, and the control of sediment. This integrated plan will incorporate the work of current and on-going projects in the watershed being conducted by DFG, University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE), the Atascadero/Green Valley Creek Watershed Group (AGVCWG), the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA), Pacific Watershed Associates and Dragonfly Stream Engineering. The GRRCD will work with UCCE to collect and analyze stream flow and water quality data and produce a roads assessment and erosion source inventory for the Green Valley Creek watershed. The proposed project will also enable the GRRCD to promote fish-friendly land stewardship practices with landowners through outreach, educational workshops and program materials. As nearly all of the property in the Green Valley Creek watershed is privately owned, collaboration with landowners is crucial to the implementation of best management practices and resource restoration improvements for the benefit of salmonid habitat in this region. The proposed project will identify specific implementation projects for the watershed.

GRRCD has successfully completed a number of watershed assessment plans and subsequent resource enhancement projects in the Estero Americano and the Dutch Bill Creek watersheds with Conservancy support. The GRRCD has considerable experience working with state funding partners and local private property owners, and provides strong leadership for habitat protection in a number of watershed areas including Salmon and Dutch Bill Creeks.

**Site Description:** Located between Occidental and Forestville approximately 8 miles inland from the coast, Green Valley Creek is an important tributary to the Russian River. Green Valley

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watershed contains 18.7 miles of upper watershed streams that support steelhead, remnant populations of coho and Chinook salmon. The watershed provides critical summer flows to the Russian River in addition to its function as spawning and rearing habitat. The overwhelming majority of land in the watershed is owned privately and faces water demand pressures as the areas' resident population continues to grow.

**Project History:** With support from the Conservancy, the GRRCD has successfully planned and implemented sediment assessment and resource enhancement projects in Salmon Creek, Estero Americano and Dutch Bill Creek watersheds in western Sonoma County. The proposed project will focus a similar strategy on the Green Valley Creek watershed through community outreach, sediment risk mapping and coordination with agency partners to prioritize resource restoration and enhancement projects. The proposed roads assessment and sediment risk analysis will be conducted in an area where the Russian River Coho Salmon Captive Broodstock Program and the Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon, with associated stream habitat surveys and instream habitat enhancement projects, are currently engaged. DFG has been conducting stream surveys in the area since the late 1960s to assess conditions for salmonids and other aquatic species. The most recent habitat and biological inventories for the area were updated by DFG in 2006. Since 2001, UCCE, DFG and a number of partners have been conducting a captive broodstock breeding program to support native salmonid populations in the Russian River. Green Valley Creek is among the tributaries being used for this effort and monitoring data has been collected both on broodstock outcomes and stream habitat. Building on these efforts, the GRRCD will integrate data on sediment threats, baseline water quality monitoring, potential for habitat restoration and input gathered from landowner outreach to produce the integrated watershed plan, identify priority projects to improve habitat, and promote fish-friendly land stewardship practices in the Green Valley Creek watershed.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	\$125,000
Department of Fish and Game (secured)	\$ 75,000
Department of Fish and Game (anticipated)	\$165,539
Gold Ridge RCD	<u>\$ 18,700</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$384,239</b>

Funds for the proposed project are anticipated to derive from the FY05/06 authorization of Proposition 50 funds. The Conservancy is authorized to use Proposition 50 funds for the purpose of habitat restoration and resource enhancement. The proposed project will provide plans for the improvements of the habitat and ecological functioning of the Green Valley watershed for the benefit of salmonids in this Russian River tributary.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 6 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-31270), regarding

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enhancement of coastal resources.

Sections 31251 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies for the purpose of enhancement of coastal resources that, because of natural or human-induced events or incompatible land uses have suffered loss of natural values. Land use through the Green Valley Creek watershed has contributed to an increase of sediment delivery to the creek. The proposed watershed plan will identify problem areas and recommend solutions to restore the landscape.

Section 31251.2 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies for the enhancement of watershed resources that lie partially outside the coastal zone. The proposed grant to the GRRCD, a public agency, which involves identifying projects both within and outside of the coastal zone, will meet these goals by assessing sedimentation risks and potential for improving habitat for anadromous fish, which utilize the stream system of the Russian River coastal draining Green Valley Creek watershed of Sonoma County.

As required in Section 31252, the proposed project is consistent with the Sonoma County Local Coastal Program as described in the Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies below.

Pursuant to Section 31253, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of any coastal resource enhancement project. The GRRCD and its partners are providing a match of over 50% for this project. In determining the amount of Conservancy funding for this project, the factors identified in §31253 have been considered and applied, as described in detail below, under the heading “Consistency With Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines.”

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective A** of the Conservancy’s 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will develop a plan for the restoration and enhancement of biological diversity in a coastal draining watershed including recommendations for projects to address erosion and sediment threat to salmonid habitat working with local partners and promoting public outreach.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective A** of the Conservancy’s 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will develop an Integrated Watershed Plan to preserve and restore water quality, habitat and other coastal resources working with watershed partners and promoting public outreach in a coastal draining watershed.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective C** of the Conservancy’s 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will collect data on limiting factors for anadromous salmonids, including fish barriers, to plan for fisheries restoration in a coastal draining watershed working with existing partners and involvement of additional private property owners.

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

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on September 20, 2007, 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:** The project has received support from the community and elected officials including Assemblymember Patty Berg and Supervisor Mike Reilly. Letters of support are included in Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project will be conducted in the coastal draining Green Valley Creek watershed of western Sonoma County and will benefit anadromous fish spawning habitat in this section of the greater Russian River watershed.
5. **Need:** Partner agency funding would not be sufficient to realize implementation of the Green Valley Creek watershed assessment and integrated plan without Conservancy participation.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Green Valley Creek project is of state-wide interest due to the importance of Green Valley Creek and the Guerneville HSA for the recovery of coho salmon and the continued presence of steelhead trout and Chinook salmon.

#### **Additional Criteria**

1. **Urgency:** The risk of continued sediment flow into Green Valley Creek from as-yet unidentified problem areas pose risk to the spawning and rearing habitat of the watershed without restoration intervention.
2. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The GRRCD will work with private property owners to identify road sedimentation risks and potential enhancement opportunities for the benefit of salmonid habitat and water quality.
3. **Leverage:** Funding for this project from the Conservancy will leverage other state funding for the watershed, see "Project Finance" above.
4. **Innovation:** The project will utilize data collected by multiple agencies, UCCE and volunteers to create an integrated watershed plan while also building support for the implementation of the plan with local land owners.

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- 5. Readiness:** The GRRCD has experience conducting sediment assessment and building relationships with land owners in western Sonoma and is prepared to move forward with the proposed project.
- 6. Cooperation:** The GRRCD has collaborated with area partners to promote natural resource stewardship and has cooperative relationships with funding agencies, watershed partners and property owners in the west Sonoma County community.

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Sonoma County Local Coastal Program, certified in 1981 and revised in 1999, in respect to Section IV concerning resources for agriculture and land management. The project will improve agricultural viability, watershed conservation and correct current detrimental land use and operational practices. The project will identify necessary stream bank stabilization and road improvements consistent with the soil conservation and water quality protection policies Sonoma County's General Plan Resource Conservation Element (Section 2.0-2.2 and 3.0). In addition, the project will develop a plan to enhance habitat for salmonids and utilize native plants for revegetation consistent with policies calling for the protection of biotic resources, endangered species and the Sonoma County marine fishery (Sections 5.1, 5.2 and 6.1).

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262, in that it involves only planning studies for possible future actions which the Conservancy has not approved, adopted, or funded. It is also categorically exempt under §15306, in that it consists of data collection, research, and resource evaluation. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon authorization of the project.