

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
June 5, 2008

**SAN GERONIMO CREEK WATERSHED ENHANCEMENT PLAN**

File No. 08-040-01  
Project Manager: Joel Gerwein

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$100,000 to the County of Marin to prepare an enhancement plan for the San Geronimo Creek Watershed in Western Marin County.

**LOCATION:** San Geronimo Creek Watershed, Marin County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Resource Enhancement

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**EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)
  - Exhibit 2: [Marin County Ordinance #3482](#)
  - Exhibit 3: [Site photos](#)
  - 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 an amount not to exceed \$100,000 (one hundred thousand dollars) to the County of Marin (“County”) to develop an enhancement plan to support the restoration of natural biological and hydrological functions in the San Geronimo Creek Watershed, subject to the condition that, prior to disbursement of any funds, the County shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work plan, schedule, budget, and the names of any contractors to be employed for preparation of the restoration plan.”

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.

2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding preparation of coastal resource enhancement plans.
  3. The proposed project area has been identified in the certified Local Coastal Plan of Marin as requiring public action to resolve existing or potential resource protection problems.”
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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The proposed project involves the preparation of an enhancement plan for the San Geronimo Creek Watershed in western Marin County (Exhibit 1). The objectives of the San Geronimo Creek Watershed Enhancement Plan (“Plan”) are to identify measures to restore natural biological and hydrological functions, with a focus on enhancement of habitat for federally endangered coho salmon and federally threatened steelhead. The Plan will serve as a pilot effort to provide guidance for the enhancement of coho salmon and steelhead populations in watersheds throughout greater Marin.

San Geronimo Creek is an un-dammed tributary to Lagunitas Creek that provides some of the best remaining habitat for coho within the Lagunitas Creek watershed. The Lagunitas Creek watershed has been identified as one of the most important watersheds in California for coho recovery and it also supports a significant population of steelhead. The coho salmon population in the Lagunitas Creek watershed makes up 10-20% of the total population in the Central California Coast Evolutionarily Significant Unit. This watershed has been the focus of salmonid restoration efforts for over twenty years, but there is no document to provide specific guidance for restoration and enhancement actions on the private lands that make up the San Geronimo Valley floor. Lands in the lower reaches of the Lagunitas Creek watershed are relatively well protected (they include State Parks, National Parks and Recreation Areas, and County and Water District property) and maintain habitat values important to coho and other native species. However, much of the land in the upper watershed is privately owned, and habitat values in this area are threatened by increased erosion, sedimentation and stormwater runoff, loss of riparian areas and floodplains to development, and invasive species. Coho outmigration research has documented that approximately 1/3 of Lagunitas Creek coho rear in headwater reaches in the San Geronimo Creek watershed. Ongoing development in the San Geronimo Creek watershed has underscored the need for planning to guide efforts to protect and enhance habitat for salmon and other species.

In recognition of the need for the Plan and to ensure that incremental impacts do not undermine its purpose, the Marin County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted an urgency ordinance on February 12, 2008 that enacted a building permit moratorium on currently unapproved new construction inside the County's mandated Stream Conservation Area within the San Geronimo Valley (Exhibit 2). The moratorium will last a maximum of two years under the terms of the ordinance. On developed properties, emergency or disaster repairs and up to 500 square feet of additional space will be permitted as long as no net increase in the building footprint occurred. Pending development applications received prior to January 1, 2008 that do not propose buildings within the Stream Conservation Area will not be subject to the moratorium. The ordinance states that “It is urgent and necessary to perform the needed and planned studies to develop appropriate parameters of any future development before such development is allowed to occur so that appropriate protection of the habitat and environment based upon the particular

stream geomorphology applicable to the area can determine where the development may occur with the least impact upon the fish populations.”

In order to provide a comprehensive approach to enhancing salmonid populations, the Plan will include the following components:

- 1) An analysis of existing watershed information that includes the identification and prioritization of data gaps.
- 2) Geomorphic and habitat assessments to fill high priority data gaps during the plan period.
- 3) An analysis of the following parameters as they relate to enhancement and restoration of salmonid habitat: geology, land use, current and historical hydrology, water quantity and quality, channel geomorphology, riparian habitat, biota, and watershed health.
- 4) Criteria for establishing degradation thresholds that relate to current and future land use trends, such as limits on impervious cover.
- 5) Implementation goals and strategies, including a prioritized list for implementation.
- 6) Designs for demonstration projects on private lands. These demonstration projects would highlight specific management practices supporting the enhancement and protection of salmonid habitat. The Plan would include three conceptual site designs, describing how and where the habitat enhancement or protection practices could be implemented at specific sites. Preliminary designs and cost estimates would be developed for up to five types of practices. These practices could include riparian vegetation enhancement at the parcel scale and biotechnical bank stabilization methods consistent with stream geomorphology for constrained and unconstrained reaches.
- 7) A public outreach process to explain the purpose of the plan and to gather input on stakeholder enhancement priorities as well as implementation strategies. Workshops would also be offered to provide guidance on implementing recommended enhancement practices.

The Plan will be developed by consultants with contract administration and oversight provided by the Marin County Department of Public Works. Additional technical input will be provided by the Salmon Enhancement Plan Executive Committee, the Technical Advisory Committee (a group of government agencies, non-profits and academics meet regularly to advise the Marin Municipal Water District’s fish restoration program), and the Marin County Community Development Agency. Plan preparation will be coordinated with the Countywide Watershed Stewardship Planning process to review existing conditions and approaches to evaluating watershed health. The Plan is scheduled to be completed by October 2009.

The Plan will build on multiple habitat enhancement projects in the San Geronimo Creek watershed. These projects include the County's fish passage improvement program, and efforts to reduce fine sediment by the Marin County Open Space District, the Marin County Fire Department, and the Marin Municipal Water District. The Marin Resource Conservation District, Trout Unlimited, Wilderness Way, San Geronimo Valley Planning Group, Tomales Bay Association and others are also actively involved in restoration efforts. Projects in the watershed included repairing 35 gullies ranging from 2 to 20 feet deep and approximately 20 miles of unsurfaced roads, as well as stabilizing eight streambank erosion sites.

This planning effort addresses concerns raised during the Board of Supervisors review and adoption of the Countywide General Plan by the Salmon Protection and Watershed Network

(“SPAWN”), a local non-profit whose members include one-third of the residents of San Geronimo Valley, other environmental organizations, and leading salmon experts in California including Dr. Peter Moyle of the University of California Davis, Dr. Jon McCosker of the California Academy of Sciences, and the American Fisheries Society of California. The updated Marin Countywide General Plan was adopted by the Marin County Board of Supervisors on November 6, 2007.

The Plan will also further the implementation of the California Department of Fish and Game’s (“DFG”) 2004 “Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon” and National Marine Fisheries Service’s 2007 draft coho and steelhead recovery plan, entitled “A Framework for Assessing the Viability of Threatened and Endangered Salmon and Steelhead in the North-Central California Coast Recovery Domain.” The State and Federal recovery plans highlight the importance of protecting the best remaining habitat and improving degraded habitat to recover coho salmon. This project is consistent with the following Recovery Strategy recommendations concerning the Lagunitas Creek watershed:

BM-LA-04 Investigate opportunities for restoring historic runs of coho salmon. (DFG, Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon (February 2004) at p. 8.45 (“Recovery Strategy”).)

BM-LA-05 Commit ongoing resources and support of stewardship in the basin to include riparian enhancement and protection, sediment source reduction, habitat typing and surveying, coho salmon surveys and counts, water conservation, outreach and education, effectiveness monitoring of projects, and planning and assessment of potential restoration projects to benefit coho salmon. (*ibid.*).

BM-LA-11 Throughout the Lagunitas Creek drainage, work with private landowners to encourage biotechnical bank stabilization, riparian protections, woody debris retention, and timing of water withdrawals to help protect coho salmon. (*ibid.*).

The Plan will also further the following recommendation of DFG’s 1996 “Steelhead Restoration and Management Plan for California”:

Watershed, channel, and riparian restoration efforts on Lagunitas Creek and tributaries should be accelerated. (Steelhead Restoration and Management Plan at p.155).

The County is well qualified to oversee preparation of the Plan. The County has committed substantial resources to developing a long-term resource enhancement program for its watersheds, including the establishment of a Public Works Program specifically dedicated to fish passage improvement. In 2004, the County prepared a draft Watershed Management Plan focused on the watersheds of West Marin to support the policies and programs developed during the updates of the Marin Countywide Plan and Local Coastal Program and to guide County staff, resource managers and policy makers, and community organizations in their protection and restoration efforts.

**Site Description:** The San Geronimo Creek Watershed, located in unincorporated west Marin County, is the last large un-dammed headwaters of the Lagunitas Watershed (Kent Lake and Nicasio Reservoir eliminated the other two major headwaters areas in the last century). These 9 square-miles of habitat represents less than 9% of the total 102 square-miles of the entire Lagunitas Watershed, but provide upwards of one-third of the coho juvenile rearing habitat. San Geronimo Valley floor is relatively long (6 miles) and narrow (averaging 1/3 of a mile),

extending from White's Hill on the east, which is the watershed divide, to the western end of the Valley where it constricts to a narrow canyon near the entrance to Samuel P. Taylor State Park. San Geronimo Creek flows through the length of the Valley before it joins Lagunitas Creek (at Shafter Bridge) and flows out to Tomales Bay. (Exhibit 1). Eleven tributary streams, flowing a combined distance of eighteen miles, start in narrow, steep canyons and flow into San Geronimo Creek through the Valley. The three primary tributaries of San Geronimo Creek are Woodacre, Larsen, and Arroyo Creeks.

The San Geronimo Creek watershed is characterized by diverse vegetative communities and semi-rural residential communities (Exhibit 3). Vegetation on the Valley floor consists of riparian vegetation (alders and willows), grasslands, and oak-bay forests. The south-facing slopes are mainly grassy pastures with intermittent stands of small oaks and brush in the ravines. In contrast, the north-facing slopes are steep and densely forested with Douglas fir, maple, madrone, bay, and oak. The San Geronimo Valley contains the villages of Woodacre, San Geronimo, Forest Knolls, and Lagunitas, which comprise 1,336 total acres. The Valley also contains over 5,000 acres of publicly owned open space. San Geronimo Valley has approximately 3,500 residents living on 1,500 parcels. Approximately 900 additional parcels have remained undeveloped, yet face increasing pressure as previous obstacles to development such as the inability to use traditional septic systems have been erased by new technology such as "mound" septic systems. Furthermore, new landowners are building new larger houses to replace existing houses, many of which were originally built as part-time summer cabins. This ongoing development threatens habitat values for coho, steelhead, and other species, as discussed above. Lagunitas Creek has been declared impaired due to excessive sediment, pathogens and nutrients under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act by the San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board ("RWQCB"). The San Geronimo Valley is a major source of this sediment, threatening the Lagunitas Creek Watershed salmonid population, as well as the Lagunitas Creek population of the federally endangered California freshwater shrimp. Lagunitas Creek flows into Tomales Bay, which has also been declared impaired under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act by the RWQCB for excessive sediment, nutrients, pathogens, and mercury. Implementation of the Plan will contribute to the health of Lagunitas Creek and Tomales Bay by improving downstream water quality.

**Project History:** The Coastal Conservancy has made substantial commitments over the years to protecting and enhancing Tomales Bay and its 232-square-mile watershed. The Bay and its watershed are remarkable for their beauty and diversity of wildlife. Tomales Bay is recognized in the international Convention on Wetlands ("Ramsar Convention") as a Wetland of International Importance.

Through acquisitions and easements, the Conservancy, largely in partnership with the Marin Agricultural Land Trust, has helped protect from development thousands of acres of agricultural land in West Marin. The Conservancy has also funded the expansion of public access in the area, including grants for the Tomales Bay trailhead in 1989 and for the Point Reyes Barrier-Free Access Project in 1990. The Conservancy has also consistently supported improved watershed management through the funding of numerous projects on ranch lands throughout West Marin.

A Conservancy authorization to the Marin Resource Conservation District ("RCD") in 2001 enabled the RCD and the Tomales Bay Watershed Council to complete a watershed assessment for Tomales Bay. The Conservancy also granted \$660,000 in 2001 to the RCD to streamline

watershed permitting and implement the Tomales Bay Watershed Enhancement Program, guided by 16 restoration practices outlined by the Marin Coastal Watersheds Permit Coordination Program.

The Conservancy has supported a number of projects to restore coho salmon and steelhead in the Lagunitas Creek watershed, including a number of fish passage improvement projects. The Conservancy granted \$35,000 to the Urban Creeks Council on August 2, 2001 to design a fish passage improvement project at the Woodacre Creek Improvement Club. With assistance from the County, that project has now been built. The Conservancy granted \$65,000 to the County of Marin in March 2002 to conduct an assessment of barriers obstructing passage of anadromous fish within the coastal watersheds of Marin County. In June 2005, the Conservancy disbursed \$196,500 to the County of Marin to fund a Marin Fish Passage Improvement Program for engineering and design of seven high priority fish passage improvement projects in the Woodacre and Redwood creek watersheds. At its May 18, 2005 meeting, the Conservancy authorized \$225,000 to the Point Reyes National Seashore Association to conduct a similar fish passage improvement program for nearby Bear Valley Creek, also a tributary of Lagunitas Creek. Two of seven barriers in that watershed have been repaired, plans for five are complete, and the County is now examining their role in ameliorating a county barrier at the downstream end of this watershed.

At its September 20, 2007 meeting, the Conservancy authorized \$1,500,000 to the Point Reyes National Seashore Association to restore 550 acres of tidal wetlands at the mouth of Lagunitas Creek. These restored Giacomini wetlands will provide important overwintering refugia and outmigration feeding habitat for salmon.

County staff initially contacted Conservancy staff in March 2008 regarding the proposed project. Despite this short notice, Conservancy staff has worked swiftly with the County and other co-funders to assess the project and determine its suitability for Conservancy funding.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	\$100,000
Marin County	<u>200,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>

The Conservancy funds for this project are expected to derive from the 05/06 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002 (“Proposition 50”). Proposition 50 funds are appropriated to the Conservancy to restore and protect coastal watersheds through projects undertaken pursuant to the Conservancy’s enabling legislation (Division 21 of the Public Resources Code) to restore water and land resources. (Water Code § 79570). Proposition 50 funds may be used as proposed here for the purpose of protecting coastal watersheds, including, but not limited to, “associated planning, permitting, and administrative costs.” (Water Code §79570). The project is consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation as described below. Finally, as required by

Proposition 50, the proposed project is consistent with local and regional watershed plans, as discussed below (Water Code §79507).

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

The proposed project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (§§ 31251-31270), as follows:

Pursuant to Section 31251, the Conservancy may award grants to public agencies for the purpose of enhancement of coastal resources that have suffered loss of natural values because of human-induced events. Consistent with this section, the proposed authorization provides funds to the County to plan for the enhancement of natural values in the project area that have suffered because of development activities, particularly residential development, in the San Geronimo Creek watershed.

Under Section 31251.2(a), "In order to enhance the natural or scenic character of coastal resources within the coastal zone, the Conservancy may undertake a project or award a grant...to enhance a watershed resource that is partly outside of the coastal zone" at the request of a local agency with jurisdiction over the project area. Consistent with this section, the County requested Conservancy assistance with this project located outside the coastal zone. This assistance was sought in order to benefit salmon populations known to travel many miles upstream of the coastal zone boundary in order to fulfill their life history patterns. Indeed, salmon depend on high quality habitat both within and outside of the coastal zone in order to survive. If salmon and other highly prized aquatic resources are to be maintained and restored to historic levels, funding must be provided to enhance salmonid habitat both inside and outside the coastal zone.

Pursuant to Section 31252, all areas proposed for resource enhancement should be identified in a certified local coastal plan or program as requiring public action to resolve existing or potential resource problems. San Geronimo Creek is a tributary of Lagunitas creek, a coastal stream identified in Unit II of the Marin County Local Coastal Program ("LCP") and is therefore subject to the protections, goals, and objectives afforded by the LCP, as discussed in the "Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies" section below. In particular, the LCP cites Section 30231 of the Coastal Act which establishes that "the biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters...shall be maintained and, where feasible, restored..." (Marin County, Local Coastal Plan, Unit II (December 9, 1980) at p. 73).

Pursuant to Section 31253, "[the] Conservancy may provide up to the total of the cost of any coastal resource enhancement project, including the state or local share of federally supported projects..." after an assessment of funding generally available for coastal resource enhancement projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant and the urgency of the project relative to other eligible coastal resource enhancement projects and other factors prescribed by the Conservancy. The proposed contribution by the Conservancy was determined based on application of priority criteria, as discussed below, and after taking into account other available resources and the matching contributions to the project by other funding sources.

Pursuant to Section 31257, "the Conservancy may fund up to three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) of the cost of preparing coastal resource enhancement plans." The proposed

contribution by the Conservancy is not to exceed one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000).

**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 result in a plan to enhance a coastal stream corridor.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective E** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in a plan to improve water quality to benefit coastal ocean resources.

**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 enjoys broad public support. Supporters include NOAA Fisheries, SPAWN, Marin County supervisor Steve Kinsey, the RWQCB, and the DFG. Support letters are included in Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The San Geronimo Creek Watershed is located outside the coastal zone, but it provides critical habitat to maintain and restore salmon and steelhead populations.
5. **Need:** The proposed authorization would provide a much-needed addition to County funds, and is necessary to allow the enhancement planning process to go forward.

**Greater-than-local interest:** Lagunitas Creek, to which San Geronimo Creek is a tributary, is identified as a rank 5 (highest priority) recovery site in the 2004 Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon. Lagunitas Creek is also identified as an important watershed for steelhead in DFG's 1996 "Steelhead Restoration and Management Plan for California." Consistency of the project with these plans is described in the "Project Summary" section above.

**Additional Criteria**

6. **Urgency:** Coho salmon are currently at 6 to 15% of their abundance during the 1940s. Given this decline, and in light of the State Recovery Strategy's primary objective of returning coho salmon to a level of sustained viability, while protecting their genetic integrity, enhancement projects with a high potential for recovering local populations of coho salmon are a high priority for the State. The urgent need for this project in particular is underscored by the

County Board of Supervisors' unanimous adoption of an urgency ordinance enacting a building permit moratorium on currently unapproved new construction inside the County's mandated Stream Conservation Area within the San Geronimo Valley.

7. **Resolution of more than one issue:** In addition to planning for the enhancement of riparian habitat for salmon, steelhead, and other native species, the Plan will address public health concerns related to failed septic systems in the San Geronimo Valley.
8. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
9. **Conflict resolution:** The building permit moratorium in San Geronimo Valley has resulted in conflict between private landowners, the County, and environmental groups. The Plan would further the resolution of this conflict.
10. **Readiness:** The County issued a Request for Proposals for preparation of the Plan in March 2008, and plans to select a consultant and begin preparation of the Plan in April 2008.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See "Project History" above. The project is an important step towards protecting and restoring coho salmon, steelhead, and other native species in the Tomales Bay watershed.
12. **Cooperation:** The County will involve a diverse group of stakeholders in planning, including local residents, representatives of state and federal agencies, MMWD, and SPAWN.

#### **CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The project will result in the preparation of an enhancement plan for a portion of the Lagunitas Creek watershed. The Plan would facilitate the enhancement of the wildlife habitat values of the watershed. The proposed project is therefore consistent with the Coastal Act, section 30231 which states "(t)he biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes appropriate to maintain optimum populations of marine organisms and for the protection of human health shall be maintained, and, where feasible, restored through, among other means, minimizing adverse effects of waste water discharges and entrainment, controlling runoff, preventing depletion of groundwater supplies and substantial interference with surface water flow, encouraging waste water reclamation, maintaining natural vegetation buffer areas that protect riparian habitats, and minimizing alteration of natural streams." (Pub. Res. Code § 30231). By recommending and designing appropriate land use and restoration practices, the Plan will facilitate the protection and enhancement of the aquatic and riparian habitat of San Geronimo creek for the benefit of federally listed salmonids. The proposed project is therefore consistent with this section.

Units I and II of the Marin County LCP identify Marin's numerous coastal zone streams and creeks as sensitive habitats for many species of birds and fish. Lagunitas Creek, of which San Geronimo is a tributary, contains runs of coho and steelhead specifically highlighted. ( *See* LCP, Unit II at pg. 65).

Freshwater inflows, sedimentation, water pollution, and protection of riparian habitats are identified as the key concerns for protecting the aquatic resources of the Lagunitas Creek watershed, and the Tomales Bay ecosystem into which Lagunitas flows. (LCP. Unit II at pp. 66-68). Because the Plan will facilitate enhancement and restoration of salmonid habitat in a

portion of the Lagunitas Creek watershed, the proposed project is entirely consistent with the LCP policies.

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN AND REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN:**

The project is consistent with, and furthers the goals of, the Tomales Bay Watershed Stewardship Plan (“TBWSP”), prepared by the Tomales Bay Watershed Council in July 2003. The project is consistent with Goal A of the TBWSP, as implementation of the plan would improve water quality in Tomales Bay by reducing sediment influx. (TBWSP at p. 54). The project is also consistent with Goal B of the TBWSP, as implementation of the Plan would improve the integrity of natural habitats and native communities. (*ibid.*).

The project is also consistent with the Tomales Bay Integrated Coastal Watershed Management Plan (“ICWMP”), completed in September 2007. The ICWMP is a cooperative effort by the Tomales Bay Watershed Council, Bolinas Community Public Utilities District, Inverness Public Utility District, Marin Municipal Water District, and North Marin Water District to identify management strategies and regional and projects that meet multiple objectives for the Tomales Bay region. The project is consistent with ICWMP Objective 1, as implementation of the plan would improve water quality in Tomales Bay by reducing sediment influx. (ICWMP at p. 3-9). The project is consistent with ICWMP Objective 5, as implementation of the plan would improve streams and riparian areas for native species. (ICWMP at p. 3-10). The project is consistent with ICWMP Objective 6, as implementation of the plan would improve potential habitats of special status species. (*ibid.*).

The proposed project is also consistent with the Water Quality Control Plan for the San Francisco Bay Basin (adopted by the Regional Water Quality Control Board Central Coast Region in 1995 and reviewed every three years) in that it constitutes an important step towards the enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat in coastal watersheds and wetlands, including potential habitat for federally-listed steelhead and coho salmon, and will thereby protect and improve the following beneficial uses:

- Cold Freshwater Habitat
- Wildlife Habitat

The proposed project would also be an important step towards achieving the water quality objectives identified in the Water Quality Control Plan for nutrients, and suspended sediment loads and discharge rates by reducing inputs of fine sediment and nutrients to Lagunitas Creek and Tomales Bay.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

Preparation of the Plan involves only data gathering, planning, and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been authorized or approved by the Conservancy or another agency and is thus statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262. The Plan will, however, consider environmental factors, as required by Section 15262. In addition, data

collection and resource evaluation activities conducted for this project are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15306. This categorical exemption applies to activities that consist of basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon Conservancy approval.