

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 22, 2011

OJAI VALLEY TRAIL FISH BARRIER REMOVAL PROJECT

File No. 10-061-01
Project Manager: Bob Thiel

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to augment an existing Conservancy grant to fund a fish barrier removal project along the Ojai Valley Trail in Ventura County by supplementing the approved disbursement by an additional \$190,000.

LOCATION: Ventura County, north of the City of Ventura.

PROGRAM CATEGORIES: Resource Enhancement and Integrated Coastal and Marine Resources Protection

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [March 17, 2011 staff recommendation](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31220 and 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the additional disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred ninety thousand dollars (\$190,000) to the County of Ventura to replace a culvert crossing with a bridge along the Ojai Valley Trail at the confluence of San Antonio Creek and the Ventura River in Ventura County. This authorization is subject to all of the conditions specified in the Conservancy’s original authorization for this project on March 17, 2011 (Exhibit 1).”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This project provides additional funds to assist the County of Ventura’s Parks Department in replacing a culvert crossing with a bridge along the Ojai Valley Trail at the confluence of San Antonio Creek and the Ventura River in unincorporated Ventura County. On March 17, 2011, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$215,000 for the project. (Exhibit 1). Staff recommends that the Conservancy augment the amount of Conservancy funding for the project by an

additional \$190,000, increasing the total amount of the grant to \$405,000.

The primary goals of the project are to improve both passage and instream habitat for endangered southern steelhead and public safety along the trail. By removing an existing four - barrel culvert and replacing it with a bridge set well above the water surface elevation of the 100-year floodplain, the project would improve steelhead passage to and from 15 miles of blue line streams within the San Antonio Creek watershed. By re-contouring the channel and restoring both the natural streambed and natural hydrologic conditions at the confluence, the project would also improve habitat conditions for steelhead and other aquatic species. In addition, the new bridge would provide a low maintenance, all-weather crossing over San Antonio Creek, improving user safety on the Ojai Valley Trail during high flows and minimizing storm-related closures of the trail along this segment.

On March 17, 2011, the Conservancy reviewed the project and authorized a grant of up to \$215,000 to the County to help fund the project (Exhibit 1). Except for changes in the funding, this project is identical to the one described and authorized in the March 17 staff recommendation, which analyses the project's components, describes the site and watershed, and reviews the history of the project

Since March, the County has completed the engineering designs for the project and secured all necessary permits needed to initiate construction this fall. But late this summer, the National Marine Fisheries Service notified the County that a grant program upon which the County has been relying to help fund the \$1.8 million project has received no funding at all for fiscal year 2011. As noted in the Project Financing section of the March 17 staff recommendation, the County applied for and was expecting to receive \$190,000 in funding from the Open Rivers Initiative (ORI) program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). But in a letter dated July 26, 2011, the chief of NOAA's Restoration Center advised the County's park director that due to NOAA budgetary constraints, the ORI program was not allocated any funding for this fiscal year and, as a result, NOAA was unable to fund any of the 40 barrier removal projects for which it had received project proposals this year.

The loss of this funding creates a significant problem for the County and, unless substitute monies can be found, the future of the project is in jeopardy. Fortunately there is an alternative source of NOAA funding that has been awarded to the Conservancy and whose objectives are fully consistent with implementation of the Ojai Valley Trail fish passage project. In 2010, the Conservancy received the second of a three-year partnership grant from NOAA's Coastal and Marine Habitat Restoration National and Regional Partnership Grant Program. Restoration projects to be funded with these monies should "contribute to the return of degraded or altered marine, estuarine, coastal and freshwater. . .fish habitats to a close approximation of their condition prior to disturbance" and are expected to have "strong on-the-ground habitat restoration components that provide educational and social benefits for communities, in addition to long-term ecological habitat improvements for NOAA trust resources."

For reasons discussed in detail in the March 17 staff recommendation, the Ojai Valley Trail fish passage project meets each of these criteria. As administered by the Conservancy and NOAA, funds from this Partnership grant are dedicated to implementing qualifying restoration projects listed on the Work Plan of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project, which includes

the Ventura River Parkway program as a priority project.

Augmenting the funding for this project would resolve the shortfall in funding for this project and allow the County to implement and complete the project within the next 12 months. It would also allow the Conservancy to meet a recent internal objective to identify and fund high priority steelhead recovery projects in Southern California. In January 2011, the Conservancy determined that a steelhead restoration project planned for San Mateo and San Onofre creeks in San Diego County could not be completed as originally contemplated by Proposition 12, and it directed staff to seek alternative projects for such funding in other areas of Southern California where restoration of southern steelhead would have a greater chance of success. As noted in the March 17 staff recommendation for this project, the Ojai Valley Trail crossing is a priority migration barrier for NOAA, the Conservancy and the Tri-County FISH Team, and the County is prepared to implement this removal project immediately if all of the requisite funding can be secured. Use of NOAA Partnership funds to augment the existing Conservancy grant will not only allow the County to initiate and complete the project as scheduled, but will also provide the Conservancy with an excellent opportunity to reallocate steelhead recovery monies from the San Mateo Creek effort to another project where restoration of steelhead habitat and passage has a high probability of success.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$405,000
Federal Pacific Coast Salmonid Recovery funds (administered under the CA Department of Fish and Game's fisheries restoration grant program)	\$483,200
County of Ventura Parks Enterprise Fund	496,800
Additional County funds	14,200
Ventura County Transportation Commission	190,000
Channel Islands Bicycle Club	17,000
American Rivers Initiative	75,000
Federal National Fish Passage Program	135,800
Total project cost	\$1,817,000

The source of funds for the original \$215,000 Conservancy grant for this project is Proposition 84---the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Public Resources Code Sections 75001 *et seq*). See Exhibit 1.

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for the proposed \$190,000 augmentation, however, is from a grant awarded to the Conservancy in 2010 from the NOAA Coastal and Marine Habitat Restoration National and Regional Partnership Grant Program. The majority of the funds from this Partnership program are dedicated to implementing qualified restoration projects listed on the Work Plan of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project that specifically protect and enhance NOAA Trust Resources. The Ventura River Parkway program is a priority project on the Recovery Project's Work Plan, and the removal of the fish passage barrier along the Ojai

Valley Trail at the confluence of the Ventura River and San Antonio Creek is identified as priority migration barrier in NOAA's Southern California Steelhead Recovery Plan.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION, STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES, CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY, LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES, LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN/STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN, AND PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES.

The proposed authorization remains consistent with the March 17, 2011 Conservancy authorization (Exhibit 1) regarding the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives, Climate Change Policy, Local Coastal Program policies, and Local Watershed Management Plan/State Water Quality Control Plan.

The project also remains consistent with the Conservancy's March 17, 2011 authorization regarding Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines. In addition, the proposed funding augmentation would also strengthen three of the selection criteria discussed in the earlier staff recommendation:

Required Criteria

- 5. Need:** Without the proposed \$190,000 augmentation from the Conservancy, the County will lack the funds to implement this important project. No other sources are available to fully fund the project and allow it to be constructed this year.

Additional Criteria

- 8. Urgency:** The County has completed all of the engineering designs for the project and secured both the necessary permits and all other necessary funding for this priority barrier removal project. Without the proposed \$190,000 augmentation of Conservancy funding, the County will be unable to initiate and complete the project this year, as originally planned.
- 12. Readiness:** The County has completed the full engineering designs for the project and secured both all necessary permits and the balance of proposed funding for the project.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed authorization is for additional funding. The project has not been changed from the project discussed and analyzed in the Conservancy's March 17, 2011 authorization. As a result, the proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's March 17, 2011 findings regarding compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act.