



North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

May 24, 2023

California State Coastal Conservancy
1515 Clay Street, 10th Floor
Oakland, CA 94612-1401

Amy Hutzel, Executive Director

Dear Ms. Hutzel,

On behalf of the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board), I am writing in strong support of the California Trout (CalTrout) grant proposal for the Elk River Estuary Restoration: Acquisition, Engineering and Design Phase I (Project). The purpose of the Project is to acquire and conserve ecologically valuable lands under the management of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the Wiyot Tribe, and to develop engineering designs and regulatory authorizations that restore tidal and estuarine habitat and floodplain connectivity and protect productive agricultural lands from the impacts of sea level rise. The Project complements the Regional Water Board's regulatory and watershed stewardship programs and builds on years of collaborative efforts between the Regional Water Board, residents, and landowners in the Elk River.

The Elk River estuary historically consisted of over 400 acres of salt marsh and brackish water habitats that supported a diversity of wildlife including avian species, marine life, and endangered salmonid species. Much of this habitat was lost when the area was diked and drained starting in the late 1800's. Restoration of the Elk River estuary is essential to support the recovery of Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed salmonid species, federally endangered tidewater goby and other marine species. Not only is restoration of the Elk River estuary essential to support recovery of ESA listed species, but it will also assist in restoring sediment transport function—a key component to restoring water quality and beneficial uses.

The Project will also augment two other major restoration projects in the Elk River estuary: 1) the Martin Slough Enhancement Project on the north side of Elk River Road, and 2) the City of Eureka's Elk River Estuary and Intertidal Wetlands Enhancement and Coastal Access Project— a 114-acre project on the west side of US 101 completed in 2022. Both the Martin Slough and Elk River Estuary projects will enhance the ecosystem benefits from CalTrout's Project.


In 2016, the Regional Water Board amended the Water Quality Control Plan for the North Coast Region (Basin Plan) to incorporate an Action Plan to implement the Upper

HECTOR BEDOLLA, CHAIR | VALERIE QUINTO, EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Elk River Sediment Total Maximum Daily Load (Upper Elk TMDL). The Upper Elk TMDL Action Plan identifies sediment source control need in the upper watershed, as well as restoration and remediation needs throughout the watershed. CalTrout has completed and Elk River Sediment Remediation and Habitat Rehabilitation Plan (Recovery Plan) under contract with the Regional Water Board, which describes recovery actions in four planning areas of the Elk River watershed-including the estuary. The Project is consistent with actions described in the Recovery Plan and has the support of the Regional Water Board. The Project is integral to the larger vision of watershed restoration and recovery and when completed, will complement previous restoration activities to effectively increase biodiversity, promote improved water quality, and sustain coastal resilience in the Elk River watershed.

The Regional Water Board appreciates the opportunity to advocate for CalTrout's Project. It is with full and robust support that we encourage your selection of this Project.

Sincerely,

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Valerie Quinto
Date: 2023.05.24
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Valerie Quinto
Executive Officer