COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 18, 2025

UPPER HORSE CREEK CHANNEL RESTORATION PROJECT

Project No. 25-020-01
Project Manager: Michael Bowen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to $500,000 to the Mid Klamath Watershed Council to undertake the Upper Horse Creek Channel Restoration Project, consisting of the creation of side channels and off-channel ponds, the addition of wood structures, installation of beaver dam analogues, and the expansion of creek sinuosity to a segment of Horse Creek, in Siskiyou County.

LOCATION: Upper Horse Creek, near Hamburg, Siskiyou County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location Map and Photos

Exhibit 2: Project Plans

Exhibit 3: Project Letters

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of up to five hundred thousand dollars ($500,000) to the Mid Klamath Watershed Council ("the grantee") to undertake the Upper Horse Creek Channel Restoration Project, consisting of the creation of side channels and off-channel ponds, the addition of wood structures, installation of beaver dam analogues and the expansion of creek sinuosity to a segment of Horse Creek, in Siskiyou County.

Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.

3. A plan for the acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
5. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement, operate, and maintain the project.

Findings:

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

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the restoration of fish and wildlife habitat within coastal watersheds.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Mid Klamath Watershed Council is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code and has purposes consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a grant of up to $500,000 to the Mid Klamath Watershed Council (MKWC) to undertake the Upper Horse Creek Channel Restoration Project, consisting of the creation of side channels and off-channel ponds, the addition of wood structures, installation of beaver dam analogues, and the expansion of creek sinuosity to a nearly one-half mile segment of Horse Creek, in Siskiyou County (Exhibit 1).

The proposed project is a fishery restoration project intended to benefit fish and other aquatic and terrestrial species. The project will expand spawning and rearing habitat so necessary to the survival and growth of Chinook and Coho salmon, steelhead, and Pacific lamprey. The project will improve over-summering habitat for juvenile salmonids by providing suitable habitat for the growth of riparian vegetation, which in turn shades and cools water below. Over-wintering habitat will also be improved by providing side channels, ponds and low-velocity areas of the river where juvenile and adult fish can rest and grow during large storm events.

Both habitat types are severely limited in the project area due to the historic mining practices that channelized and straightened the creek and disconnected it from the floodplain, leaving extensive mine-tailing deposits in the place of healthy riparian forests. By advancing this project, MKWC will help establish long-term resiliency from anticipated global warming impacts, notably increased summer water temperatures and winter flooding.

Using heavy equipment to excavate approximately 31,000 cubic yards from a 4.9 acres area, MKWC will create approximately 2.4 acres of new floodplain habitat (Exhibit 2). The 2.4 acres of

new floodplain habitat is designed to be engaged with flow at the 2-year flood event, or 307 cubic feet per second. The approximate 31,000 cubic yards of material will be hauled to a local quarry. Wood structures will be added both to the 0.4 miles of the mainstem of Horse Creek and throughout the new floodplain. Approximately 1,260 cubic yards of spawning size gravel (that will be procured from the quarry) will be added to the banks of the mainstem Horse Creek at two strategic locations. A bridge will be used to access the River Right (looking downstream) portion of the project. Construction will last two seasons.

Site Description: The 4.9 acre project site is located on Horse Creek, a tributary to the Klamath River, in Siskiyou County, California. The project will occur on two privately owned parcels (parcel #s 007-130-190 and 007-130-010). The project is located approximately 2.8 miles from Horse Creek's confluence with the Klamath River, and the downstream end of the project is within one tenth of a mile of the 46N60 U.S. Forest Service bridge. Coho and Chinook Salmon, steelhead, and Pacific Lamprey spawn and rear within the project area.

The 0.4 mile project reach is currently very confined because the stream was pushed to the side of the valley and bermed in the early to mid-1900s. Twelve wood structures were added to this reach in 2019. Horse Creek hosts the highest density of spawning coho salmon in the entire Klamath Basin, and the 0.4 project reach has had up to 30% of the Coho spawning in the entire Horse Creek watershed. In the 2021/2022 season, there were 49 redds (salmon nests) in the project reach, of 194 in the entire Horse Creek watershed. Unfortunately, in normal water years, the velocities through the project reach are very high, and many of the redds get flushed out. This project addresses that problem.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: MKWC is a nonprofit organization that has been actively planning, coordinating, and implementing restoration projects in the Mid Klamath subbasin since 2001. MKWC has managed several grants from the Coastal Conservancy including the Mid-Klamath Floodplain Enhancement Plan (2017) and Red Cap Creek Restoration Design Project (2019).

MKWC has a strong track record of completing planning and restoration projects. This includes a 2017 grant from the Conservancy which helped fund the initial planning for floodplain restoration along this stretch of the Klamath River. And, with help from another 2017 grant from the Conservancy MKWC worked with the Six Rivers National Forest on the Six Rivers Aquatic Restoration Project to complete a forest-wide environmental document which will streamline implementation of many fish habitat restoration projects.

Since 2001, MKWC has been actively planning, coordinating, and implementing restoration projects throughout the Mid Klamath subbasin. The MKWC Fisheries Program has constructed 31 off-channel ponds and constructed eight reach scale stream restoration projects that involve both installing wood structures, connecting floodplains and creating side channels. Since its inception, MKWC has successfully implemented over $25 million in instream and upslope restoration projects and has maintained effective working relationships with funding and permitting agencies, as well as partners, contractors, and landowners. Collectively, MKWC's fisheries program staff has over 90 years of experience working on the Klamath River.

Focusing on projects that directly benefit anadromous fisheries resource, MKWC utilizes grant funding combined with community and stakeholder volunteers to implement practical, hands-on restoration projects while educating participants on restoration techniques and stewardship principles. MKWC is uniquely qualified to assess and restore habitat in this region.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

Selection Criteria

1. **Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.**

See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Strategic Plan" section below.

2. **Project is a good investment of state resources.**

The Karuk Tribe is a partner in this project and has been involved in all stages of the design process. The Karuk Tribe has secured over $400,000 of Bureau of Reclamation funds for this project through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, with approximately $300,000 of that being subcontracted to the Mid Klamath Watershed Council to be used for implementation.

3. **Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area.**

The project is located within the ancestral and current territory of the Karuk Tribe. As described above, the Karuk Tribe is a partner in this project and has been involved in all stages of the design process.

4. **Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.**

The project is designed to last over the project lifespan, which is estimated to be at least 100 years long. This 0.4 miles of Horse Creek will have floodplain capable of absorbing large floods and improving habitat function during higher flows. The redesigned channel area will capture trees transported downriver from the 2016 Gap Fire, providing shade and cover and improving both spawning and rearing conditions for salmonids for the foreseeable future.

5. **Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.**

The project delivers multiple benefits including: improving flood protection, habitat enhancement for birds and plants, creating a fire break through higher soil and vegetation moisture content, being a source for native seeds if a high intensity fire hits the area, serving as an educational site for local elementary, high school, and universities, and carbon sequestration. Cal Poly Humboldt has been using the Upper Lawrence Pond as a study location for at least five years. Carol and Dennis Lawrence, property owners, have always been supportive of their property being open to schools. Carol Lawrence is a retired school teacher from Seiad Valley Elementary and she continues to volunteer her time. The project site will

continue to be a place for the community and local schools to participate in restoration and monitoring.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	**$500,000**
Bureau of Reclamation (Grant to Karuk Tribe)	$400,000
Project Total	**$900,000**

The expected source of Conservancy funds for this project is the fiscal year 2018/19 appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access For All Fund (Prop 68). (Public Resources Code (PRC) section 80000 et. seq.).

Prop 68 funds are available for projects that protect coastal watershed resources consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. (PRC section 80120(c)). Protection includes actions to prevent harm to natural resources and includes restoration. (PRC section 80002(l)). Restoration projects include those to improve instream, riparian, or managed wetland habitat conditions, and other plant and wildlife habitat improvement to increase the natural system value of the property. (PRC section 80002(m)). Division 21 authorizes the Conservancy to enhance a watershed resource that is partly outside the coastal zone. (PRC section 31251.2(a).

Consistent with these sections, this project will restore riparian habitat for salmonids and other fish, and will protect the watershed by increasing its resilience to the impacts of climate change. The project is outside the coastal zone, but would enhance resources within the coastal zone, and is therefore consistent with Division 21 (see Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation section below).

The proposed project will also leverage significant federal funds. The Karuk Tribe secured a $400,000 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law grant from the Bureau of Reclamation for Klamath River habitat restoration activity. Those funds are being dedicated to this project.

Unless specifically identified as "Required Match," the other sources of funding and in-kind contributions described above are estimates. The Conservancy does not typically require matching funds or in-kind services, nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders or of in-kind services. Typical grant conditions require grantees to provide any funds needed to complete a project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed authorization is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, as follows: Pursuant to section 31251, the Conservancy may award grants to local public agencies and nonprofit organizations for enhancement of coastal resources which, because of human-induced events, or incompatible land uses, have suffered the loss of natural and scenic values. Consistent with this section, the proposed authorization provides funds to MKWC for the enhancement of coastal fishery resources disturbed by incompatible land uses,

such as intensive mining, timber harvest and other legacy land uses that have disrupted the channel and floodplain processes in the Klamath River.

Pursuant to section 31251.2(a), to enhance coastal resources within the coastal zone, the Conservancy may award a grant for a project that enhances a watershed resource that is partly outside of the coastal zone. The Klamath River at the Upper Horse Creek site is located outside the coastal zone. However, the site provides habitat for salmon populations known to travel many miles upstream of the coastal zone boundary to fulfill their life history patterns. Indeed, salmon depend on unimpeded access to high-quality habitat both within and outside of the coastal zone to survive. Thus, salmon are watershed resources located both within and outside the coastal zone, and the restoration of this section of the Klamath River will enhance this watershed resource, thereby enhancing a coastal resource.

Pursuant to Section 31253, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of a resource enhancement project. The amount of recommended funding has taken into consideration the total amount of funding available, fiscal resources of the grantee, and the relative urgency of the project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN:

Consistent with **Goal 3.2 Restore or Enhance Habitats**, the grant is to complete implementation for this channel and floodplain restoration project along the middle reach of the Klamath River.

Consistent with **Goal 4.3 Multi-benefit Nature Based Climate Adaptation,** the project will set back development, specifically levees and channelized structure, from the floodplain in an era of increasingly severe storms, expand aquatic and terrestrial habitat, expand groundwater infiltration and reduce flood risk to surrounding areas.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

Small habitat restoration projects are categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act, pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations, Section 15333. This section exempts projects less than five acres in size that restore, enhance, and protect habitat for fish. Projects qualifying for this exemption must a) not have a significant adverse impact on endangered, rare, or threatened species or their habitat, b) must be at a site where there are no hazardous materials that may be disturbed or removed, and c) will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past, current, or probable future projects.

Consistent with these sections, this project is less than five acres in size and will restore, enhance, and protect habitat for fish. Consistent with Section 15333(a), Conservancy staff has consulted with staff from the Department of Fish and Wildlife and has determined that there would be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat. Consistent with Section 15333(b), there are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed. The project will not result in impacts that are

significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past, current or probable future projects, consistent with Section 15333(c).

Staff will file a notice of exemption upon approval of the project.