

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

February 19, 2026

NAPA RIVER ECOLOGY CENTER, IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

Project No. 25-041-01

Project Manager: Chere Erickson

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$2,769,000 to American Canyon Community and Parks Foundation to undertake the Napa River Ecology Center, Implementation Phase, consisting of retrofitting a defunct corporation yard into an accessible, environmental education center that includes educational and interpretive elements, climate resiliency features, and connector trails in Napa County.

LOCATION: Napa River Wetlands, American Canyon, Napa County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Letters](#)

Exhibit 3: [Site Photos and Project Renderings](#)

Exhibit 4: [City of American Canyon Notice of Exemption](#)

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 an amount not to exceed two million seven hundred and sixty-nine thousand dollars (\$2,769,000) to American Canyon Community and Parks Foundation (the “grantee”) to undertake the Napa River Ecology Center, Implementation Phase, consisting of retrofitting a defunct corporation yard into an accessible, environmental education center that includes educational and interpretive elements, climate resiliency features, and connector trails in Napa County (the “project”).

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 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.
6. Prior to commencing the project, the grantee shall enter into and record an agreement pursuant to Public Resources Code 31116(d) sufficient to protect the public interest in the improvements.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, this Conservancy resolution is effective only if legislation is enacted that exempts program guidelines and selection criteria for the disbursement of funds from the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (“Proposition 4”), Public Resources Code Sections 90000-95015, from the requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act at Government Code sections 11340-11361.

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 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. American Canyon Community and Parks Foundation is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$2,769,000 grant to American Canyon Community and Parks Foundation (ACCPF) to undertake the Napa River Ecology Center, Implementation Phase, consisting of retrofitting a defunct corporation yard into an accessible, environmental education center that includes educational and interpretive elements, climate resiliency features, and connector trails in Napa County (the “project”).

The Napa River Wetlands have been the focus of significant restoration efforts in recent history including a tidal reintroduction and floodplain rehabilitation plan led by the City of American Canyon. The Napa River Ecology Center will build on the momentum of these restoration efforts and expand public access to the Napa River Wetlands by offering conservation programming and hands-on environmental education in an area where shoreline access is otherwise limited.

American Canyon is the fastest growing city in Napa County, yet its public access facilities along the shoreline remain limited. Existing public access is limited to a single trailhead with limited parking and no permanent user facilities. The Napa River Ecology Center will help fill this gap in public access along the Napa River Wetlands by establishing the first wetland education center in Napa County.

In addition to providing much-needed public access, the Napa River Ecology Center will promote climate resiliency. As sea levels rise and storm surges become more severe, this site, located adjacent to the Napa River Wetlands, will become especially susceptible to future inundation. To combat this, project plans include a combination of climate resiliency features such as climate-smart infrastructure (rainwater capture systems, raised cabinetry, elevated structures) and nature-based stormwater management (bioswales, permeable surfaces, and climate resilient landscaping). For more details on the project's climate resiliency features, refer to Project Selection Criteria #4 below.

The plan for the Napa River Ecology Center comes from a robust, multi-year community engagement process consisting of both residents and organizations in the City of American Canyon as well as local tribes. ACCPF offered both virtual and in-person events resulting in over 800 participants engaging in the design process. Community outreach will continue through construction with quarterly public site tours. In addition to community outreach, ACCPF has maintained an active partnership with the Suscol Intertribal Council since 2019. More information on this partnership can be found below under Project Selection Criteria #3.

The project will create a permanent community education and recreation center in support of river restoration, watershed access, and habitat protection. The project will provide multiple benefits to the public and the land through the following actions:

1. Clean and improve three acres of unused industrial area in the uplands of the Napa River. Site activation activities include removing old paving, gravel, fencing, concrete bricks, and miscellaneous debris. Construction activities include installing garden beds, planting bioswale and retention areas, planting new landscape areas, planting trees, and installing irrigation.
2. Repurpose and retrofit an existing 5,000 square foot building into an accessible community education and conservation center. Site activation activities include removing temporary walls, dismantling old electrical panels, removing old bathrooms that are not to code, and preparing for a new elevator. Construction activities include installing new plumbing and electrical, upgrading HVAC, installing electrical systems, and fire sprinkler code upgrades.
3. Allow public access to a .75 mile connector trail and various wildlife viewing areas. This trail already exists but was inaccessible to the public when the site was used by the City of American Canyon. The project will open this trail for public use. Additionally, ACCPF will construct a deck to serve as a wildlife viewing area.
4. Install educational and recreational elements designed to inspire hands-on learning about coastal wetlands. Signage designs will be implemented in 2026. Additionally, the

project includes installation of a five-piece nature themed play area with accessible surfacing, a covered outdoor gathering area, and various outdoor classrooms.

5. Implement climate resiliency features. The project site will undergo targeted adaptation with the goal of increasing climate resiliency and flood protection. These adaptations include elevating utility systems, raising cabinetry, installing floodproof doors, and constructing an enclosure around the generator. Additionally, the site will be designed to manage stormwater runoff. Stormwater designs include amended bioswales, landscaping guided by Point Blue, and the use of permeable surfaces to allow for natural water infiltration.
6. Expand youth workforce development. The project will expand ACCPF's Teen WILD leadership which exposes teens to environmental science careers. Volunteers will participate in construction by assisting with landscaping, garden installation, and other similar projects. After construction, volunteers will continue to assist with public conservation education and lead conservation-based projects.

Site Description:

The Napa River Ecology Center sits on a three-acre, unimproved gravel lot that has been used as a maintenance yard since the 1960s. The site contains a 5,000 square foot building, various carports, a pump station, and heavy-duty vehicles. The City of American Canyon owns the site and has entered a long-term lease with ACCPF to develop the Napa River Ecology Center.

The Napa River Ecology Center is located along the Napa River Wetlands which are a vital part of the 55-mile Napa River watershed. This habitat supports a rich array of wildlife, including rare and sensitive species such as the California black rail and salt marsh harvest mouse. These wetlands are an important stop along the Pacific Flyway, providing habitat for resident and migratory birds. The wetlands provide habitat for fish and aquatic animals. The lower Napa River wetlands have been the focus of significant land acquisition and restoration efforts supported by funding from the Coastal Conservancy and others.

The project site sits just North of the Napa-Solano County line. The site is adjacent to residential neighborhoods and community facilities. It is within walking distance of three Napa Valley Unified School District schools, two of which are Title-One designated schools. The site is $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the American Canyon Wetlands Trailhead and the Bay Trail passes directly in front of the property. The site is centrally located near major regional transportation routes, including Interstate 80 and State Routes 29 and 37.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: ACCPF staff are experienced project managers who have grown the organization into South Napa County's leading provider of community and school-based outdoor science education. Since its launch in 2015, ACCPF has completed two capital trail projects and has secured state funding for a playground replacement project. In 2021, ACCPF successfully completed the Wetlands Outdoor Fitness Center at Wetlands Edge Park, for which ACCPF raised private funds, coordinated with the City of American Canyon, managed site planning and installation, and led community outreach. In addition to its staff, ACCPF has a 12-member Board of Directors, structured volunteer and community groups, and a project oversight committee consisting of board and community members.

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 project is a good investment of state resources as it provides access to outdoor education and recreation in the Napa River Wetlands, an area that currently lacks these facilities. The Napa River Wetlands attract over 7,000 monthly visitors, yet the City of American Canyon lacks permanent infrastructure to support public access and education. The Napa River Ecology Center will be Napa County's first wetland focused outdoor education center. Additionally, the facility will provide much needed parking for nearby trailheads. Currently, parking areas regularly overflow, causing visitors to park in nearby residential areas.

The project will not only improve access, but it will also fortify the site against sea level rise and intensified storm events. The site's proximity to the Napa River makes it susceptible to future inundation. The project addresses these concerns by implementing climate resiliency features into the design plan, making the site more resilient to flooding. Climate resiliency features include bioswales, permeable surfaces, rainwater capture systems, and climate resilient landscaping.

In addition to providing important benefits to Californians, the project is timely, reasonable, and leverages non-state resources. The project is shovel-ready and construction can start as soon as funding is secured. The total cost of the project is \$9,354,800. The Conservancy will provide \$2,769,000 and the remaining funds come from a variety of sources including federal, state, local, and private funding sources.

Lastly, this project advances the American Canyon Wetland Restoration Plan. The Napa River Ecology Center is named in the restoration plan as a separate project that will help to achieve the plan's goals of restoring wetlands, increasing public access, and supporting the development of a recreational facility that serves the community and fosters environmental stewardship.

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.

During project development, ACCPF held a meeting with leaders from the Suscol Intertribal Council to review preliminary concepts. Tribal leaders gave feedback to include the following aspects in site design:

- Developing a site land acknowledgment

- Incorporating historical tribal maps and land ownership history
- Highlighting native uses of land through programs
- Collaborating on future programs through tribal seminars and educational programming.

In addition to including these project elements, ACCPF will provide cultural sensitivity training for all staff and contractors prior to the construction of the project. ACCPF will continue to develop its relationship with the Suscol Intertribal Council and continue to conduct outreach to California Native American tribes as the project continues to develop.

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

ACCPF entered into a 50-year lease with the City of American Canyon with the option of two 25-year extensions.

The project's climate resilient design features ensure no permanent closures of the facility due to sea level rise. These design features ensure the Napa River Ecology Center will withstand future climate stressors for the foreseeable future. The site is designed to accommodate infrequent flooding with little to no damage to the buildings and grounds.

Climate and flood resistant features include:

- Floodproofing features: floodproof doors, raised cabinetry, and raised electrical systems.
- Stormwater management features: amended bioswales and bioretention areas, climate-smart landscaping, and permeable ground surfaces in parking lots, gathering areas, and outdoor classrooms.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The Napa River Ecology Center will provide numerous benefits in its role as a nature-based education hub. The project's accessible infrastructure, expanded walking trails, and various wildlife viewing areas will improve public health and recreation accessibility for nearby residents. A 1,500 square foot nature-based playground will encourage youth physical fitness as well as a connection to the natural world. Access to these green spaces may not only improve physical fitness but also reduce stress and support cognitive development.

Additionally, the project will increase climate resiliency and flood protection as well as encourage environmental stewardship. Design elements like bioswales and rain capture systems will help to restore natural stormwater functions and improve on-site draining. The educational components of this project will raise awareness of ecological issues and promote conservation behavior. Educational components consist of a river-themed mosaic wall, topographical maps, and various other education displays.

Upon completion of construction, the Napa River Ecology Center will offer structured volunteer programs, internships, and education initiatives that support green career pathways. Part of

this workforce development includes expanding on ACCPF's already successful Teen WILD environmental leadership program.

Finally, the project will provide direct and meaningful benefits to vulnerable and systemically disadvantaged communities. The project site is within a 10-minute walk of two Title-One elementary schools as well as the city's only middle school. Additionally, the project is less than 5 miles from high-risk, climate vulnerable communities and SB 535 designated disadvantaged communities in Solano County. ACCPF will develop an outreach plan to ensure programming reaches these communities.

6. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

The Board of Directors and Steering Committee include leaders from across American Canyon's diverse population. The board of directors consists of members of the Filipino American Club, local teachers, environmental advocates, women leaders, county service providers, and river protection groups. This inclusive leadership ensures community-driven and culturally responsive efforts.

ACCPF conducted a multi-year community outreach process that resulted in input from diverse cultural and socio-economic groups. ACCPF offered both in-person and virtual feedback events which reached over 800 participants. ACCPF will continue outreach efforts with quarterly public site tours.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$2,769,000
City of American Canyon	\$1,300,000
Federal Community Funded Grants 2024	\$800,000
Wildlife Conservation Board	\$1,614,000
Gasser Foundation	\$100,000
Private Donations	\$670,000
Project Total	\$7,253,000

Conservancy funds are anticipated to come from the fiscal year 2025/2026 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 ("2024 Climate Bond" or "Proposition 4"), codified at Public Resource Code Sections 90000-95015. These funds are available as described in Section 92010 of the Public Resource Code, which sets forth a detailed description of the purposes of the Proposition 4 funds for coastal resilience projects and programs, including, but not limited to, grants and expenditures to protect, restore, and increase the resilience of beaches, bays, coastal dunes, wetlands, coastal forests, watersheds, trails, and public access facilities. In particular, funds for coastal resilience projects and programs may be allocated to projects for purposes of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it creates an outdoor educational institution which

is a public access facility and increases coastal resilience in the San Francisco Bay Area. The proposed project is therefore consistent with the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program described in more detail below.

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 project is consistent with Section 31162 of Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code which authorizes the Conservancy to undertake projects consistent with the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. Specifically, the project is consistent with:

Subsection (a) to “improve public access to, within, and around the bay, coast, ridgetops, and urban open spaces [...].” The proposed project will provide an accessible environmental education center and a .75 mile trail, connecting the Napa River Ecology Center to the San Francisco Bay Trail.

Subsection (c) to “assist in the implementation of the policies and programs of the California Coastal Act of 1976 (Division 20 (commencing with Section 30000)), the San Francisco Bay Plan, and the adopted plans of local governments and special districts.” The proposed project is consistent with the City of American Canyon’s Wetland Restoration Plan.

Subsection (d) to “promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes.” The proposed project will provide a publicly accessible environmental education center consisting of wildlife viewing areas, nature-based playgrounds, educational displays, new trails, and educational programming.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN:

Consistent with **Objective 1.1 Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project is within walking distance of two Title-One schools. Additionally, the project site is less than 5 miles from SB 535 designated disadvantaged communities in Solano County.

Consistent with **Objective 2.5 Recreation Facilities and Amenities**, the proposed project will retrofit a defunct corporation yard into an accessible environmental education center, consisting of educational and interpretive elements, climate resiliency features, and .75 miles of connector trails in Napa County.

Consistent with **Objective 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects**, the proposed project will provide flood protection through a combination of climate-smart infrastructure (rainwater capture systems, raised cabinetry, elevated structures) and nature-based stormwater

management (bioswales, permeable surfaces, and climate resilient landscaping), and strict flood safety/evacuation protocols. Visitors to the project site will observe and interact with educational materials that will inform them of the impacts of sea level rise both locally and globally.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is categorically exempt under the following sections of 14 California Code Regulations (CCR):

Section 15301 (Existing Facilities). The project involves interior and exterior alterations to an existing building, but there would be no expansion in the size of the existing building.

Section 15302 (Reconstruction of Existing Facilities). The project will reuse and retrofit a two-story corporation yard building as offices and multipurpose classrooms.

Section 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land). The project is located on a site with a slope of less than 10% and not located in any waterway or wetland. Project will involve installation of interpretive signage. Outdoor infrastructure will consist of two covered outdoor classrooms, pavilions with seating, teaching gardens, and shaded outdoor learning areas.

Section 15311 (Accessory Structures). The project will include the creation of a formal paved parking lot, drive aisles and internal circulation to support the use, on land that has already been disturbed, graded, and used for more industrial uses. In addition, minor accessory structures would be added to the site, in already developed areas, including an elevated deck, enclosure around the City's existing generator.

The City of American Canyon, the lead agency, filed a Notice of Exemption on January 26, 2024 (See Exhibit 4).

Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.