COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
February 19, 2026

JACOBY CREEK RESTORATION PLANNING

Project No. 19-024-02
Project Manager: Amanda Townsel

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to $1,066,000 to Humboldt County Resource Conservation District to undertake the Jacoby Creek Restoration Planning Project, consisting of conducting studies, developing approximately three conceptual designs, collaborating with the community and tribes to select one design for advancement to a 30% project design, and preparing environmental compliance documents to enhance creek habitat and reduce flood risk in the Jacoby Creek watershed in the community of Bayside and the City of Arcata, Humboldt County.

LOCATION: Jacoby Creek Watershed, Bayside and City of Arcata, Humboldt County

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Maps

Exhibit 2: Project Photos

Exhibit 3: Project Letters

Exhibit 4: Jacoby Creek Feasibility Study Documents

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 one million sixty-six thousand dollars ($1,066,000) to the Humboldt County Resource Conservation District (the "grantee") to undertake the Jacoby Creek Restoration Planning Project, consisting of conducting studies, developing approximately three conceptual designs, collaborating with the community and tribes to select one design for advancement to a 30% project design, and

preparing environmental compliance documents to enhance creek habitat and reduce flood risk in the Jacoby Creek watershed in the community of Bayside and the City of Arcata, Humboldt 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. To the extent appropriate, the grantee shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's Coastal Access Project Standards into the designs.
4. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding and, to the extent practicable, signage informing the public that the project received funding from the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024.

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 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Climate Ready Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a $1,066,000 grant to Humboldt County Resource Conservation District (HCRCD) to undertake the Jacoby Creek Restoration Planning Project, consisting of conducting studies, developing approximately three conceptual designs, collaborating with the community and tribes to select one design for advancement to a 30% project design, and preparing environmental compliance documents to enhance creek habitat and reduce flood risk in the Jacoby Creek watershed in the community of Bayside and the City of Arcata, Humboldt County (the "project").

Development has altered the physical and ecological processes of the Jacoby Creek watershed, degrading aquatic habitats and increasing flooding impacts in the lower watershed. Historical diking of former tidal marshes and high sediment loads from the upper watershed have led to sediment aggradation in the Jacoby Creek channel, raising the streambed, reducing channel capacity and causing the channel to be perched higher than the adjacent floodplain. The riparian corridor has narrowed, and backwater, side-channel, and floodplain habitats have been altered and disconnected from the main channel.

The reduction of channel capacity causes repeated overbank flooding across residential, agricultural, and conservation areas as well as over public roads. Rather than reentering the channel, floodwater creates significant flood safety hazards, including regular road closures that prevent ingress and egress of residents and emergency vehicles, and property damage. Additionally, the overbank flood water is unable to return to the perched Jacoby Creek channel, preventing fish that have been swept out of the channel from re-entering and causing fish strandings.

Due to the frequency of such flooding events, some landowners have implemented localized flood protection measures. The lack of an organizing framework for stream corridor management and communication gaps between landowners and permitting agencies have resulted in individual actions that adversely impact the riparian corridor. Community engagement and support is needed to advance from parcel-based restoration approaches to an integrated, landscape-scale approach.

The Conservancy has supported resource protection and enhancement projects in the Jacoby Creek watershed since 2004. The most recent Conservancy-funded project, the Jacoby Creek Flood Reduction & Anadromous Fish Habitat Enhancement Feasibility Study was completed in 2024 and produced a feasibility study (Exhibit 4) that included initial studies and hydrologic modeling to support the future development of 10% design plan alternatives.

This project will continue the planning process and develop a community-based approach for planning and implementing landscape-scale restoration and enhancement in Jacoby Creek with multiple benefits that include habitat enhancement, alleviation of flood impacts, increased floodplain connectivity, and the maintenance of working landscapes. This project will be conducted in close partnership with private landowners and agricultural land managers, the City of Arcata, the County of Humboldt, the Jacoby Creek Land Trust, and a Technical Advisory Committee.

This project will begin with baseline resource studies and assessments including upland delineations, vegetation mapping, biological resources assessment, cultural resources assessment, and a traditional ecological knowledge study. To complete approximately three conceptual design alternatives up to 10% design level, the project will conduct additional

analyses, assessments, and modeling including a topographic survey, hydraulic analysis and sea level rise assessment, geomorphic assessment, and a habitat and agricultural conversion assessment. For each alternative, the project will develop anticipated construction quantities (earthwork volumes, revegetation, habitat structures, etc.) to determine an order of magnitude opinion of probable construction cost. The information from these studies will be used to compare the design alternatives that will be produced in the following task.

The project includes ongoing engagement with community landowners, tribes, and stakeholders throughout the project term. A stakeholder meeting will be held to present a draft Alternatives Analysis Report. Comments provided by stakeholders at the meetings will be addressed in the finalized report. The project includes: (1) two community meetings that will be held to select a design alternative and present interim planning designs; (2) at least two technical advisory committee (TAC) meetings; (3) at least two meetings with local tribes to inform and invite input on planning; and (4) up to 20 meetings with individual landowners and stakeholders.

The existing hydraulic modeling as well as the geomorphic/habitat restoration design of the selected alternative will be advanced to 30% design level, and an opinion of probable construction costs will be revised. Next, the project will establish the environmental compliance pathway, notably whether the proposed project is suitable for a CEQA exemption.

Site Description:

Jacoby Creek is a major tributary to Humboldt Bay and flows through the community of Bayside and along the southern city limits of Arcata. Jacoby Creek provides habitat for Coho Salmon, Chinook Salmon and Steelhead – all species listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) with Coho Salmon additionally listed under the California ESA. The stream also supports native Coastal Cutthroat Trout, Pacific and Brook Lamprey, and freshwater mussels, among many other native aquatic organisms.

The project area includes the lower two miles of Jacoby Creek and its floodplain, spanning approximately 900 acres from US Highway 101 along Humboldt Bay to the Brookwood Drive bridge crossing. The project area is divided into two main areas: 1) the Arcata Baylands, consisting of 0.9 miles of creek in the lower elevational trans delta region adjacent to Humboldt Bay, also known as the Jacoby Creek/Gannon Slough Wildlife Area, and 2) a 1.3-mile reach of Jacoby Creek, upstream of Old Arcata Road, composed primarily of private residences and agricultural operations. The project is situated in both unincorporated areas and areas within the City of Arcata limits. In total, the project area includes more than 40 private residences, over 150 acres of private agricultural lands, approximately 500 acres of City owned agricultural lands, and six fee/title parcels and conservation easements held by the Jacoby Creek Land Trust.

The relatively large amount of open space within the project area presents strong opportunities for enhancing the stream corridor, floodplain flow network, and coastal wetlands. The project area consists of a low-gradient, alluvial channel with narrow riparian canopy transitioning to tidally influenced fresh, brackish, and saltwater slough channels between Old Arcata Road and Highway 101. The lower reach (Humboldt Bay to Old Arcata Road) contains the Jacoby Creek stream-estuary ecotone and agricultural grasslands. The stream-estuary ecotone is very limited because of historical diking of former tidelands. The middle reach (Old Arcata Road to Brookwood Bridge) contains most of the lower Jacoby Creek valley, including terraces and floodplains bounding the creek. The fill prism of Old Arcata Road is a significant feature affecting floodplain connectivity.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: HCRCD has developed planning and executed implementation for multiple habitat restoration projects on private and public lands with grants from federal and state funding sources. HCRCD is, and has been, the lead agency for projects that include the Salt River Ecosystem Restoration Project, Williams Creek Restoration Project, White Slough Wetland Enhancement Project, Wadulh Lagoon Tidal Wetland Enhancement Project, Russ Creek and Centerville Slough Restoration Project, North Coast Carbon Farm Plans, and various sediment reduction projects.

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.**

This project advances the State's investment in the region and is multi-benefit, with outcomes including flood reduction planning, increase of tidal wetland habitat planning, stream corridor restoration, and enhancement for fish habitat and passage planning, and sea level rise resiliency planning. The Conservancy has supported resource protection and enhancement projects in the Jacoby Creek watershed for over two decades. In December 2004, the Conservancy contributed funds towards acquiring the Arcata Baylands property, which lies within the proposed project area. In 2006, the Conservancy passed through National Coastal Wetland Conservation funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for further acquisition, restoration, and enhancement of the Arcata Baylands, including 30 acres of restoration in the Jacoby Creek estuary. In 2016, the Conservancy contributed funds for the South Jacoby Creek

Restoration Project, also within the proposed project area. Most recently, the Conservancy provided a grant to the Jacoby Creek Land Trust to conduct a feasibility study to support development of science-based, community-supported multi-benefit projects that operate at the landscape scale. This project continues this work by developing at approximately three projects design plan alternatives up to 10% design levels and advancing one of the alternatives up to 30% design level.

The project will help support regional restoration work by developing plans that, when implemented will restore and enhance significant natural resources, which will advance regional and statewide plans including Pathways to 30X30: Accelerating Conservation of California's Nature, California Water Action Plan, California Salmon Strategy for a Hotter, Drier Future: Restoring Aquatic Ecosystems in the Age of Climate Change, Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon, and Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy.

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.

HCRCD will reach out to local California Native American tribes with ancestral ties to the project area to request opportunities to present the project to tribal councils, staff, and community members, and to invite early and meaningful consultation. HCRCD will also invite tribes to collaborate on a Traditional Ecological Knowledge study and will synthesize input from participating tribes to produce a Traditional Ecological Knowledge Report containing tribal knowledge of important ecosystems, historic and current practices, and natural and cultural resources. To ensure culturally appropriate and effective engagement in its efforts, HCRCD has retained a consulting firm with expertise in tribal relations and tribal cultural resource analysis.

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

The project will improve the understanding of the geomorphic context of Jacoby Creek, channel floodplain connectivity, sedimentation inputs and deposition, ecological function, value of aquatic habitat elements, the sensitivity of Jacoby Creek to human-caused disturbance, and sea level rise vulnerabilities to support effective and sustainable restoration measures.

The project will maximize the likelihood of sustainable outcomes by emphasizing stakeholder engagement and input as well as fully understanding the physical landscape and processes through baseline studies and analyses. This approach reduces the risk of conflicts between the watershed's natural systems and the community's infrastructure and land use.

The project will facilitate floodplain restoration that reduces flooding of agricultural land in the project vicinity from storm events, which are expected to increase in frequency and intensity with climate change. The project's efforts to alleviate existing flooding impacts will reduce

economic damages currently incurred from flooding events, and further resilience to projected climate change impacts.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

This project will develop plans that restore self-sustaining tidal and fluvial processes within the Jacoby Creek corridor that promote recovery of habitat for native fish, invertebrates, wildlife, and plant species while reducing flood impacts to public roads, residences, and agricultural operations.

According to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the distribution and abundance of Coho Salmon populations in California have been considerably reduced over recent years. Although Coho Salmon are still found in most major river systems in the North Coast, many spawning runs have declined substantially in size and were eliminated from many tributaries. Overall, from Humboldt County north to the Oregon border, Coho Salmon are now found in approximately two-thirds of the streams identified as historical habitat.

Jacoby Creek is one of four major tributaries to Humboldt Bay. The project area contains the stream-estuary ecotone for Jacoby Creek which is highly important for natal and non-natal rearing of salmonids. Spawning by coho salmon, steelhead, and coastal cutthroat trout occurs just upstream of the project area. Multiple plans and studies have identified the lack of rearing habitat as a limiting factor for salmon productivity in Jacoby Creek. The City of Arcata and Jacoby Creek Land Trust have implemented restoration projects over the last several years to improve off-channel habitat, but additional work is needed at a coordinated larger scale.

The western portion of the project area is vulnerable to impacts from flooding hazards and sea level rise, including two regionally significant multi-modal transportation corridors, Highway 101/Humboldt Bay Trail and Old Arcata Road. The project will advance understanding of these vulnerabilities and support adaptation planning.

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

During the development of the 2024 feasibility study, the Jacoby Creek Land Trust held three community meetings and twelve individual one-on-one landowner meetings. A landowner survey was also conducted across the larger project area to determine landowner's priority concerns and their understanding of impacts to the watershed.

HCRCD will build on these past community engagement efforts to continue meaningful conversations during the next steps of by continuing to hold community engagement meetings at significant junctures of the planning process, as well as having one-on-one meetings with key property owners and managers. Contact with participating landowners will be ongoing during the term of the grant. The project will also resume the Technical Advisory Committee

(TAC)/working group to discuss planning updates and CEQA preparation. This multi-benefit project will be developed in close partnership with private landowners and agricultural land managers, the City of Arcata, the County of Humboldt, the Jacoby Creek Land Trust, and the TAC.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	**$1,066,000**
Project Total	**$1,066,000**

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 92015 of the Public Resource Code, which sets forth a detailed description of the purposes of Proposition 4 for coastal and combined flood management projects and activities for developed shoreline areas at risk of current flooding. Consistent with this section, the proposed project is multi-benefit and will improve public safety by developing plans to alleviate existing flooding impacts, which will reduce economic damages currently incurred from flooding events and further resilience to projected climate change impacts. In accordance with Section 90050, which requires agencies to prioritize "projects that leverage private, federal, or local funding or produce the greatest public benefit," this project advances the State's investment in past and current work in the project area by integrating them into a larger, landscape-scale restoration planning effort. Restoration of the project area is needed to assist in the recovery of threatened and endangered salmonids. Recovery actions for these species must be pursued in a timely manner to avert the danger of further population declines. Section 90050(c) states that projects may include necessary planning activities. The project is also consistent with this funding source because it is authorized under the Conservancy Climate Ready Program as described in the Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation section 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 undertaken pursuant to Chapter 3, Sections 31111 and 31113 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, as follows:

Pursuant to Section 31111, in implementing Division 21, the Conservancy may fund or perform any of the following: (a) prepare plans and feasibility studies; (b) provide technical assistance; or (c) award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for (a) or (b). Consistent with (a) and (c) of this section, this project will fund the preparation of watershed restoration plans and studies which will be undertaken by HCRCD, a public agency.

Pursuant to Section 31113, which provides that the Conservancy may undertake projects and award grants for projects that "reduce greenhouse gas emissions, address extreme weather events, sea level rise, storm surge, beach and bluff erosion, saltwater intrusion, flooding and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure and natural resources." Consistent with this section, this project will develop landscape-scale watershed restoration and enhancement plans designed to restore self-sustaining tidal and fluvial processes within the Jacoby Creek corridor that promote recovery of habitat for native wildlife and plant species while reducing flood impacts to public roads, residences, and agricultural operations. The plans will increase the resilience of natural and built environments to the impacts of sea level rise and climate-exacerbated flooding.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN:

Consistent with **Goal 3.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation**, the project will develop plans that when implemented, will increase the resiliency of the natural and built environments to the impacts of sea level rise and climate-exacerbated flooding through flood reduction, habitat restoration, and protection of coastal and cultural resources, and public access infrastructure.

Consistent with **Goal 3.2 Restore or Enhance Habitats**, the project will develop plans to enhance the Jacoby Creek coastal watershed and floodplain, including plans to improve fish passage, restore and enhance the Jacoby Creek stream corridor, and restore important wildlife habitat in a coastal watershed.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN/STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN:

The project is consistent with, and furthers the goals of, the Humboldt Bay Management Plan (HBMP), prepared in May 2007 by the Harbor District. The project is consistent with Policy CAE-2: "CAE-2: Maintain, restore, and enhance aquatic ecosystem integrity" in that it supports planning for the restoration of riparian areas. The project is consistent with Policy CAS-3: "Maintain and enhance habitat for sensitive species" in that it will lead to the restoration of habitat for Coho salmon. The project is consistent with, and furthers the goals of, the Humboldt Bay Watershed Salmon and Steelhead conservation (HBSSC) Plan, prepared by the Humboldt Bay Watershed Advisory Committee in March 2005. The HBSSC Plan highlights the importance of restoring floodplain connectivity and riparian habitat to the Bay's tributaries in supporting salmon populations, as well as diverse communities of fish and wildlife.

The project is consistent with the Water Quality Control Plan for the North Coast in that it will plan for enhancing habitat for rare, threatened and endangered anadromous fish species and estuarine habitat in Humboldt Bay. The Water Quality Control Plan for the North Coast designates wildlife habitat, rare, threatened, and endangered species habitat, and estuarine habitat as beneficial uses of Humboldt Bay

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project involves feasibility and planning studies and is, therefore, statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to Title 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR), Section 15262. Consistent with Section 15262, the project will consider environmental factors and possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded.

The project is also categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15306, because it involves data collection, research, and preparation of environmental compliance documents, none of which will result in a serious or major disturbance to any environmental resource.

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