

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
April 23, 2026

HEALDSBURG ARUNDO REMOVAL PROJECT: AUGMENT

Project No. 23-014-01
Project Manager: Morgan Wright

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Consideration and possible authorization to disburse up to \$459,500 to Russian Riverkeeper to augment the Conservancy grant authorized on June 1, 2023, to implement the Healdsburg Arundo Removal Project, which consists of removing invasive *Arundo donax* along 5 miles of the Russian River to reduce fire risk to Fitch Mountain and Healdsburg in Sonoma County.

LOCATION: Healdsburg, Sonoma County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [June 1, 2023, Staff Recommendation](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

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

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to four hundred sixty nine thousand five hundred dollars (\$469,500) to Russian Riverkeeper (the “grantee”) to augment the Conservancy grant authorized on June 1, 2023 to implement the Healdsburg Arundo Removal Project, which consists of removing invasive *Arundo donax* along 5 miles of the Russian River to reduce fire risk to Fitch Mountain and Healdsburg in Sonoma County, subject to the same conditions as set forth in the June 1, 2023 authorization.

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.
 3. The Russian Riverkeeper is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.
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STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$459,500 to Russian Riverkeeper (RRK) to augment the grant authorized on June 1, 2023, to implement the Healdsburg Arundo Removal Project, which consists of removing invasive *Arundo donax* along 5 miles of the Russian River to reduce fire risk to Fitch Mountain and Healdsburg in Sonoma County (the “project”).

The project as initially authorized for a Conservancy grant is described in the attached June 1, 2023, staff recommendation (Exhibit 2). Russian Riverkeeper (RRK) has successfully implemented 75% of the Healdsburg Arundo Removal Project to date using manual and mechanical methods followed by herbicide. Arundo was treated and removed from 113 acres within an overall 201-acre treatment area along the Russian River; completing initial treatments on 3.25 miles along the river. The remaining 25% of Arundo consists of isolated stands in very difficult terrain and treatment of regrowth in areas where initial treatments have been completed. During implementation, crews faced ticks, fleas, and a combination of steep slopes, and difficulty hauling Arundo and gaining chipper access. RRK underestimated the difficult terrain and thus requires an augment to complete this high priority project to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire.

RRK utilizes a cut-and-paint method to apply herbicide to reduce environmental impacts on non-target plants. Arundo stands are cut and stumps are painted with herbicide using a paintbrush or foam brush within 60 seconds to reduce regrowth. While utilizing this fast-paced method, RRK saw 5-10% regrowth rates. In other areas, with greater times between cutting and painting, RRK has seen 50-75% regrowth. RRK is continually working to improve practices and to improve overall efficacy of the project. For example, RRK now utilizes a foliar herbicide application as well, where staff use a backpack sprayer to spot treat leaves at regrowth sites. Sites are initially cut and treated with herbicides and then treated for regrowth two or more times afterwards. Herbicide is be reapplied until roots are killed as evidenced by no regrowth for over at least six months.

RRK continues to check sites for re-growth and has committed to 10 years of post-implementation monitoring. With the recommended augmentation, RRK is confident that it will be able to complete the project. The remaining project work consists of completing eradication at Rio Lindo Academy, 23 residential properties, 3 parcels owned by California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Healdsburg Veteran’s Beach, and 3 Syar Industries parcels, all described in detail in Exhibit 2.

Site Description: See Exhibit 2.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: See Exhibit 2.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project remains 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.

See Exhibit 2.

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.

See Exhibit 2. In addition, for the remaining 25% of work, RRK plans to hire Hybrid Indigenous Stewardship, a tribally led organization whose field crew is made up of formerly incarcerated tribal members.

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

See Exhibit 2.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

Reducing fire risk from invasive plants helps improve local climate resilience. In reducing fire risk, the project will also reduce impacts to river water quality from fire suppression, such as the use of firefighting foam, and from post fire impacts to water quality and native riparian plants. Removing Arundo from this reach of the river will benefit the ecosystem by reducing enormous water losses compared to the significantly smaller water use by native vegetation. The project will also improve the hydrogeomorphology of the Russian River by removing a constraint to sediment transport that leads to channel entrenchment, unnatural aggradation rates on gravel bars and increased bank erosion. The restoration of more natural geomorphic processes will also produce more habitat complexity and benefit listed salmonids. Removing Arundo from the project area will greatly benefit the riparian plant community by reducing competition for water, especially for tree species such as cottonwoods, willows and walnuts. As the Russian River is one of the most critical natural resources in the region, improving its health will benefit everyone- local community and visitors- as well as improve habitat for the species that rely on it.

The training and use of volunteers and property owners on portions of the project will build local capacity and stewardship. RRK has already engaged over 140 volunteers and expects to engage over 350 through the life of the project.

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

See Exhibit 2.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy (<i>this authorization</i>)	\$459,500
Coastal Conservancy (<i>previous authorization</i>)	\$989,300
Others	\$757,500
Project Total	\$2,206,300

The anticipated source of funding is an appropriation to the Conservancy from Chapter 3 of the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 codified at Public Resources Code section 90000, et seq. and referred to as the 2024 Climate Bond or Proposition 4. Chapter 3 of the 2024 Climate Bond authorizes the Conservancy to use the funds for “watershed improvement, wildfire resilience, chaparral and forest restoration, and workforce development that addresses needs related to this subdivision and is designed to create career pathways for individuals from disadvantaged communities, severely disadvantaged communities, or vulnerable populations.” (Public Resources Code section 91520(k).) The project proposed for funding in this staff recommendation is consistent with the funding source because it will increase wildfire resilience of lands and communities and will protect watershed resources by: 1) reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire; 2) improving water supply by removing invasive *Arundo donax*, which consumes large volumes of water compared to native riparian habitat; 3) improving water quality by reducing impacts to the river water quality from fire suppression, like firefighting foam; 4) improving natural sediment transport in the river because *Arundo* interrupts sediment transport, resulting in permanently entrenched narrow low flow channels and habitat simplification; and 5) restoring natural geomorphic processes that will produce more habitat complexity and benefit listed salmonids.

Other funding sources consist of the previous \$177,500 that RRK contributed to the project, \$360,000 from the Sonoma County settlement with PG&E for Kincaide Fire losses, and \$20,000 from Sonoma County tribal mitigation fund. Included on the table above, is RRK’s planned contribution of an additional \$200,000 over the next ten years to fund annual maintenance.

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 project remains consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31113(a-c) as described in Exhibit 2.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#):

See Exhibit 2.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

In its June 1, 2023 authorization to grant funds for the project, the Conservancy adopted findings pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for this project. See Exhibit 2. The project has not changed since the June 1, 2023 authorization, and there have been no changed circumstances or new information that triggers the requirement for additional documentation under CEQA. Therefore, no further review pursuant to CEQA is necessary.