COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
April 23, 2026

RED CAP CREEK FLOODPLAIN RESTORATION PROJECT: IMPLEMENTATION

Project No. 19-025-02
Project Manager: Michael Bowen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to $997,900 to the Mid Klamath Watershed Council to undertake the Red Cap Creek Floodplain Restoration Project, consisting of construction of off-channel ponds, reconnection of historic floodplain channels, addition of large wood structures, and restoration of riparian floodplain forest to a 1.5 mile segment of Red Cap Creek, in Humboldt County.

LOCATION: Red Cap Creek, near Orleans, Humboldt County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location

Exhibit 2: Project Photos and 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 nine hundred ninety seven thousand nine hundred dollars ($997,900) to the Mid Klamath Watershed Council ("the grantee") to undertake the Red Cap Creek Floodplain Restoration Project, consisting of construction of off-channel ponds, reconnection of historic floodplain channels, addition of large wood structures, and restoration of riparian floodplain forest to a 1.5 mile segment of Red Cap Creek, in Humboldt 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.
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.

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 $997,900 to the Mid Klamath Watershed Council (MKWC) to undertake the Red Cap Creek Floodplain Restoration Project, consisting of construction of off-channel ponds, reconnection of historic floodplain channels, addition of large wood structures, and restoration of riparian floodplain forest to a 1.5 mile segment of Red Cap Creek, in Humboldt County. (Exhibit 1).

The proposed project has two independent sites referred to as OR-8 and OR-9, both near the town of Orleans, Humboldt County.

Site OR 8: Project activities at OR 8 will reverse the 1964 disconnection of this section of the creek caused by the construction of a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) road. The project involves constructing two-tiered ponds and installing large wood habitat structures in the historic, now dry channel of Red Cap Creek. The ponds will be reconnected to Red Cap Creek on the downstream end, below the USFS road, and will tap into shallow groundwater which MKWC has been monitoring for two years. The ponds will be connected to each other via a 250-foot low sloped channel that, during winter months, will provide a sheltered spawning channel for salmonids, along with a 100-foot-long outlet channel that connects the lowest pond back to Red Cap creek. The footprint of the pond will be approximately 30,000 square feet and will provide year-round off-channel rearing habitat for juvenile Coho and other salmonids.

A series of six large wood structures will be placed in the main channel to help restore suitable instream conditions at the site. These large structures will allow the creek to store and sort gravel at the site more naturally which will improve mainstem spawning conditions. A series of smaller wood structures will be placed in the pond connection channel. A 340-foot-long side channel will be excavated downstream of the pond complex on a low-lying floodplain. This channel will be connected at winter base flows and provide off-channel spawning for salmonids. This type of habitat is very important during high winter flows as it allows fish to spawn in lower gradient habitat out of the main channel, thereby lowering the potential for redd scouring during flooding events.

MKWC, in partnership with the Karuk Tribe, USFS and contracted engineer Stillwater Sciences have completed design plans for the OR-8 site and will begin working with the USFS on permitting with completion expected by summer 2026.

Site OR-9: The OR-9 project component, and a preceding project at the site in 2024, are the outcome of a 2019 Conservancy planning grant intended to address the disconnection of the historic floodplain along Red Cap Creek.

The 2024 phase of this project component created two off-channel rearing ponds, installed a series of 17 large wood structures in the main channel, added 800 cubic yards of sorted spawning gravel to the main channel to increase spawning areas, and constructed a new perched side channel for the South Fork Red Cap Creek.

The proposed phase of the project component at OR-9 will reconnect historic channels at the site to increase the amount of available side channel habitat throughout this one-mile reach, while also reducing dangerously high velocities that reduce spawning success. The project at OR-9 includes:

- Reconnecting a 1,200-foot historic creek channel,
- Constructing a new 360-foot channel across a floodplain bar and rerouting a small tributary through the new channel,
- Grading the top of another floodplain bar to allow for more frequent connection during winter flows,
- Removing levees/berms along floodplain terraces to increase floodplain connectivity during high flows,
- Installing large wood structures in the main channel and side channels, and
- Replanting riparian forest along newly expanded floodplain.

The OR-9 project component will create up to 2,500-feet of new side channel habitat and restore up to three acres of riparian forest along floodplain terraces impacted by historic mining. Riparian replanting efforts will be guided by the Karuk Tribes Pirish Plants Program to include many plant species that are important for tribal gathering practices and suitable for pollinator and avian habitat.

Both sites will benefit fish and other aquatic and terrestrial species. The overall 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 adult fish can rest, and where juvenile 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.

Site Description: Red Cap Creek is near the town of Orleans along Highway 96. Orleans is in the northeastern corner of Humboldt County, approximately 15 miles northeast of the town of Weitchpec. The community is surrounded by the Six Rivers National Forest. Red Cap is a major tributary to the mid-Klamath watershed and is very important spawning and rearing habitat for Pacific salmon.

OR-8: This project site is a six-acre disconnected floodplain terrace partially on private land (Assessor Parcel Number 528-024-003) and partially on USFS land. It is located seven miles from the town of Orleans. The main channel of Red Cap Creek used to flow through this site prior to the 1964 flood. After the flood, the USFS constructed a raised road prism at the top of the floodplain bar and moved the channel to the river left toe of the valley. This disconnected the historic channel and the entire six-acre floodplain. Large levees were also constructed along portions of the creek to keep it confined against the toe of the slope which has turned the creek habitat into a single thread high velocity channel unsuitable for aquatic life.

OR-9: This site, entirely on USFS land, is located 3.5 miles upstream from site OR-8 and 13 miles from the town of Orleans. This floodplain valley was heavily placer mined from the late 1800's to the 1970's. This mining activity, along with a century of fire suppression within the watershed have severely impacted the quality of habitat along this one-mile reach of the creek, creating a mostly single thread, highly incised stream channel. Levees/berms and large areas of rip rap along the old road base have confined the main channel and disconnected much of the floodplain This large 32-acre floodplain valley had two phases of restoration implementation completed in the summer of 2024 that focused on creating off-channel rearing habitat, installing large wood structures in the main creek channel, and reconnecting historic floodplain channels.

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 Conservancy including the Mid-Klamath Floodplain Enhancement Plan (2017) and Red Cap Creek Restoration Design Project (2019), and Upper Horse Creek Channel Restoration Project (2025).

MKWC has a strong track record of conducting planning efforts and completing restoration projects. A 2017 grant from the Conservancy funded MKWC to work with the Six Rivers National Forest on the Six Rivers Aquatic Restoration Project to complete a forest-wide environmental

document which streamlined implementation of many fish habitat restoration projects. A 2019 grant to MKWC from the Conservancy helped fund the initial planning for floodplain restoration along this tributary to the Klamath River. In 2025, and despite the termination of two federal grants the day before project construction, MKWC utilized the Conservancy's Upper Horse Creek Channel Restoration grant to launch a major restoration of that Klamath River Tributary, successfully completing the project just before the Fall migration of salmon began.

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 Conservancy funded an earlier design grant for a portion of this project, and has recently funded similar work at Upper Horse Creek, fostering a partnership with MKWC that has resulted in extensive habitat restoration, fishery enhancement and public education in the mid Klamath watershed. This advances numerous state and federal goals for improvement of habitat and protection and improvement of coastal salmon populations. The project aligns with the State of California's Salmon Strategy currently in effect and delivers a cost-effective and successful template for increasing imperiled coastal salmon populations.

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. The Karuk Tribe, as often is the case with MKWC project in this region, is a partner in this project and has

been involved in all stages of the design process. The Karuk are also a lead partner in revegetation efforts.

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. This section of Red Cap Creek will have floodplain capable of absorbing large floods and improving habitat function during higher flows. The redesigned channel area will incorporate many wood structures, side channels and other features that will improve 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 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	**$997,900**
Project Total	**$997,900**

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2023/24 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of climate resilience (Budget Act of 2023, Chapter 12, Statutes of 2023 (SB 101) as amended by Chapter 38, Statutes of 2023 (AB 102). These funds are available as described in Section 52 of Chapter 258 of the Statutes of 2021, which appropriates funds to the Conservancy for projects that protect and restore coastal and ocean resources from the impacts of sea level rise and other impacts of climate change. Eligible projects include projects in coastal watersheds and fisheries that build coastal resilience. The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it will enhance the ecosystem function and habitat quality of a coastal watershed to increase climate resilience for the recovery of listed salmonids and other special-status species.

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 Red Cap 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:

Sites OR-8 and OR-9 have been evaluated separately as independent projects for the purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Neither project is a reasonably foreseeable consequence of the other, nor do either increase the scope or impact of the other, and both projects have independent merit.

Both Sites OR-8 and OR-9 are eligible for categorical exemption under CEQA 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, project implementation at Site OR-8 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 California 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 for Site OR-8 upon approval of the project.

Consistent with these sections, project implementation at Site OR-9 would impact an area less than five acres in size and will restore, enhance, and protect fish habitat. Site OR-9 submitted to the Northcoast Regional Water Quality Control Board for consideration under the State Restoration General Order and received a Notice of Applicability approval on June 27, 2025. In its review of the project, the Regional Water Board determined that the OR-9 site, despite being larger in total than five acres, was nonetheless eligible for categorical exemption section 15333, "Small Habitat Restoration Projects" under California Code of Regulations title 14 and filed a Notice of Exemption with the State Clearinghouse concurrent with issuance of their Notice of Applicability, pursuant to CEQA guidelines. The Regional Board's rationale for this finding was that while the project site was approximately 6.5 acres in size, temporary impacts totaled approximately 3.45 acres, reducing the area of impact to less than five acres. Conservancy staff concurs with this finding. Consistent with Section 15333(a), there will be no significant adverse impact on threatened species or their habitat. Consistent with Section 15333(b), there are no hazardous materials around the project site. Consistent with Section 15333(c), the project will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of other projects.

Staff will file a notice of exemption for Site OR-9 upon approval of the project.