

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

April 23, 2026

NAVARRO RIVER-FLUME GULCH CONFLUENCE RESTORATION PROJECT

Project No. 26-005-01

Project Manager: Louisa Morris

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$2,247,100 to The Nature Conservancy to undertake the Navarro River-Flume Gulch Confluence Restoration Project, consisting of enhancements to restore overwintering and spring out-migration habitat for juvenile coho salmon within the mainstem Navarro River and Flume Gulch, including installation of five engineered log structures and floodplain alcoves, excavation of floodplain alcoves and banks, and placement of large wood in the Navarro River watershed, in Mendocino County.

LOCATION: Navarro River-Flume Gulch Confluence, Mendocino County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

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 two million two hundred forty-seven thousand one hundred dollars (\$2,247,100) to The Nature Conservancy (the “grantee”) to undertake the Navarro River-Flume Gulch Confluence Restoration Project, consisting of enhancements to restore overwintering and spring out-migration habitat for juvenile coho salmon within both the mainstem Navarro River and Flume Gulch, including installation of five engineered log structures and floodplain alcoves within the mainstem Navarro River; excavation of floodplain alcoves and placement of large wood in Flume Gulch near its confluence with the Navarro River; and excavation of banks at key locations to promote

channel widening and floodplain processes, including inset floodplains, in the Navarro River watershed in Mendocino 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 the acknowledgement of Conservancy funding and, if applicable, California Department of Parks and Recreation 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 or agreements pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 31116(d) sufficient to protect the public interest in the improvements and developments.

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 Nature Conservancy 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 \$1,447,100 to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to undertake the Navarro River-Flume Gulch Confluence Restoration Project, enhancements to restore overwintering and spring out-migration habitat for juvenile coho salmon within both the mainstem Navarro River and Flume Gulch, including installation of five engineered log structures and floodplain alcoves within the mainstem Navarro River; excavation of floodplain alcoves and placement of large wood in Flume Gulch near its confluence with the Navarro River; and excavation of banks at key locations to promote channel widening and floodplain processes, including inset floodplains, in the Navarro River watershed, in Mendocino County (the project), as shown in Exhibit 1.

The Navarro River is the largest coastal watershed in Mendocino County and supports populations of state and federally endangered coho salmon and federally threatened Northern California steelhead. Salmon habitat within the Navarro River watershed has been heavily altered by historic land use practices, including logging, agriculture, and road development. Logging roads are significant sources of fine sediment input into the river, and stream channels were channelized, cleared of wood, and dammed to transport logs downstream. Legacy logging impacts to estuary and riverine habitat include filled wetlands, decreased floodplain function, and channel simplification. The lower mainstem Navarro River is characterized by a confined channel with steep banks, a lack of instream structure, very few defined pools or riffles, and little to no floodplain connectivity. During high river flows in the lower Navarro, there are very few locations that provide shelter and slow water habitat that juvenile coho salmon need to grow and survive; this has been identified as one of the primary limiting factors for coho salmon survival and production in North Coast streams by the National Marine Fisheries Service of the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). In 2023, NOAA allocated federal funding to support assessment and design for improved coho habitat in this reach of the Navarro, leading to the project.

The project includes salmonid habitat enhancements within both the mainstem Navarro River and Flume Gulch. Within the mainstream Navarro River, the project will construct five large Engineered Log Structures on both sides of the river. The project will also excavate a floodplain alcove adjacent to each structure, which will create instream shelter and slow-water refugia areas for salmonids, increase hydraulic complexity, and promote juvenile coho habitat formation. Within Flume Gulch, the project will place large wood near its confluence with the mainstream Navarro River and will excavate banks at key locations to promote channel widening and floodplain processes, including inset floodplains, which are narrow floodplain benches. The large wood material will provide cover and shade, increase in-channel structural and hydraulic complexity, influence bed material sorting and scour pool formation, and generally contribute to improved juvenile salmonid habitat within Flume Gulch. The project design will provide vital slow water refugia and rich feeding opportunities for juvenile salmon across a wide range of river flows.

The project supports climate change resiliency for coho salmon and other aquatic species. High-quality habitat in lower watersheds, such as the Navarro River-Flume Gulch confluence, will provide critical refugia for salmon during future climate extremes, including drought, increasingly intense winter storms, and rising sea levels, when salmonids require a greater geographic range of rearing habitat.

The California Conservation Corps will assist with post-project implementation, including vegetation maintenance, monitoring, and adaptive management.

Site Description: The approximately 2.32-acre project site is located near the confluence of the Navarro River and Flume Gulch. Flume Gulch is a tributary to the Navarro River in Mendocino County, located six miles from the Pacific Ocean at the upper extent of tidal influence, and it offers refugia to coho salmon during summer months, as well as during winter storm events when the mouth of the Navarro River is blocked. Juvenile coho salmon and steelhead rear and prepare for outmigration from within the project area.

The north bank of the project site is owned and managed by California Department of Parks and Recreation as part of the Navarro River Redwoods State Park, while the south bank is owned by Mendocino Redwood Company and is encumbered by a Save the Redwoods League conservation easement. Both landowners are supportive of the project and have been key partners throughout the planning process.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: TNC is a global conservation organization that was established in 1951, with more than 3,700 staff. TNC leads biodiversity and aquatic habitat conservation and restoration projects throughout the United States. In California, TNC has completed many river and stream protection and restoration projects, including seven salmon restoration projects along the Mendocino Coast over the last eight years. These projects are similar to and generally larger than the project. TNC has significant experience administering conservation and restoration grant funds, including Conservancy grants.

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.

Habitat within the Navarro River watershed has been altered by historic land use practices including logging, agriculture, and road development. Human activities have degraded much of the watershed, and restoration investments over the last several decades have primarily focused on tributaries in the upper watershed. The lack of coho salmon rearing habitat has been identified by NOAA as a primary limiting factor to coho survival and production in North Coast streams. Mainstem rivers in coastal Mendocino County can be challenging environments for out-migrating juvenile coho, who experience significant mortality as they travel downstream; recent research has identified a critical need for mainstem river restoration in California. The project will help address these needs by installing instream structures that create habitat complexity and offer refugia for young coho salmon.

Project design follows the NOAA Fisheries Central California Coho Recovery Plan (2012), which prioritizes projects "designed to create or restore complex habitat features that provide for localized pool scour, velocity refuge, and cover" within priority areas of the Navarro watershed. The project also addresses coho priorities identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan (California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) 2025), California's 30x30 Initiative (State of California 2022) and the California Salmon Strategy for a Hotter, Drier Future (CDFW 2024).

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.

TNC has engaged with the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians during development of this project. As a result, the Sherwood Valley Tribe will provide cultural resource monitoring services during project construction.

The Mendocino County Resource Conservation District (MCRCD) is working with TNC to complete a cultural resources survey and report, which includes outreach to all tribal entities identified by the Native American Heritage Commission. TNC will continue to coordinate with tribes and incorporate any feedback received throughout project implementation.

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

The project is designed to be self-maintaining. The Engineered Log Structures are designed to withstand a 100-year flood event and should persist until the logs decay in 25-30 years. The structures will also recruit additional large wood, so the jams will likely last longer than 25-30 years. Past this timeframe, TNC will continue to monitor project performance and will adaptively manage the project to increase its resilience and functionality.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The project will provide ecological benefits well beyond its primary purpose of restoring coho salmon winter and out-migration habitat. Other species expected to benefit from project implementation include Pacific lamprey, Navarro roach, northern red-legged frog, foothill yellow-legged frog, otters, piscivorous birds, and other species that rely on healthy fish populations as a food source. The creation of high-quality habitat in the lower Navarro watershed will provide refuge for aquatic species across climactic extremes, from drought to high intensity winter storms. As rising sea levels push saline water further inland, salmonid smolts and other estuarine-dependent species will require a greater range of rearing habitat.

The project will also benefit the local economy, which is designated as a severely disadvantaged community. TNC will endeavor to employ local contractors for labor as well as source structural materials for the project from nearby. TNC staff and contractors will support local businesses during the project.

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

The project was designed and planned with funding from NOAA and in coordination with a Technical Advisory Committee, composed of landowner representatives, restoration and fisheries experts, and federal, state, and local agency staff. The MCRCD is a key partner for the project. The MCRCD has worked closely with the Navarro watershed community for decades to complete successful restoration and water conservation projects. Community engagement will continue throughout project implementation and monitoring.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy

\$1,447,100

California Department of Parks and Recreation

\$800,000

Project Total

\$2,247,100

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2023/2024 appropriation to the Conservancy from the General Fund for the purpose of coastal resilience (Budget Act of 2022, SB 154 (2022)). These funds are available as described in Section 52 of Chapter 258 of the Statutes of 2021, which sets forth a detailed description of the purposes of the coastal resilience funds, including protection and restoration of coastal and ocean resources from the impacts of sea level rise and other impacts of climate change. The project is consistent with this funding source because it will enhance ecosystem function and habitat quality of a coastal watershed, to increase climate resilience for the recovery of listed salmonids and other special-status species.

California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) will provide \$800,000 for project implementation, which will be administered by the Conservancy through an Interagency Agreement. The Conservancy expects to enter into an Interagency Agreement with State Parks in Spring 2026. The Conservancy plans to grant State Parks funds to TNC for implementation of the proposed project in keeping with that Interagency Agreement.

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. Pursuant to Section 31251 of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy may award grants to 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 Section 31251, the proposed authorization provides funds to TNC for the enhancement of coastal fishery resources disturbed by incompatible land uses, such as intensive timber harvest and other legacy land uses that have disrupted the channel and floodplain processes in the Navarro River watershed.

Pursuant to Section 31251.2(a) of the Public Resources Code, to enhance coastal resources within the coastal zone, the Conservancy may award grants for projects that enhance a watershed resource that is partly outside of the coastal zone. The Navarro River-Flume Gulch Confluence site is located outside the coastal zone. However, the project site provides habitat for salmon populations known to travel many miles upstream of the coastal zone boundary to fulfill their life history patterns. 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 Navarro River-Flume Gulch confluence will enhance this watershed resource, thereby enhancing a coastal resource.

Consistent with Section 31253 of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy, when determining the total cost of a resource enhancement project, considered the total amount of funding available, fiscal resources of the grantee, and the relative urgency of the project.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

Pursuant to Section 31252 of the Public Resources Code, all areas proposed for resource enhancement by a state agency, local public agency, or nonprofit organization shall be identified in a certified local coastal plan or program as requiring public action to resolve existing or potential resource protection problems or shall be so identified in other local plans which the Coastal Commission determines to be consistent with the policies and objectives of Division 20 (commencing with Section 30000).

The Mendocino County Local Coastal Plan was adopted in 1985 and is currently being updated, with updates expected later this year. In 2025, MCRCD re-issued the “Navarro River Guide to Watershed Care and Restoration,” which identifies instream habitat enhancements as a priority. The Navarro Watershed Restoration Plan (1998), authored by the Anderson Valley Land Trust and Mendocino County Water Agency and funded by the Conservancy, identifies juvenile salmon over-wintering and spring out-migration habitat as essential components of a healthy Navarro watershed.

Consistent with Section 31252, the MCRCD, a local district, has worked with TNC to identify and develop this priority project. MCRCD supports TNC’s implementation of the project.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.4 Workforce Development**, the California Conservation Corps will assist with post-project implementation vegetation maintenance and monitoring, including adaptive management.

Consistent with **Goal 3.2 Restore or Enhance Habitats**, the project will fund installation of five engineered log structures and excavation of alcoves near the confluence of the Navarro River and Flume Gulch to restore overwintering and spring out-migration habitat for juvenile coho salmon. This will create high quality habitat and provide refugia for aquatic species across climactic extremes, from drought to high intensity winter storms and sea level rise.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act, pursuant to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, Section 15333 (Small Habitat Restoration Projects), which exempts projects that do not exceed five acres in size to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife provided that: (a) there would be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare, or threatened species or their habitat; (b) there are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed; and (c) 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 this Section, the project, at approximately 2.32 acres, does not exceed five acres. The project will maintain, restore, enhance, or protect habitat for fish, and the project is consistent with subsections (a)-(c), above.

Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a notice of exemption.