

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

June 18, 2026

**JOLLY GIANT CREEK AND BUTCHER SLOUGH COASTAL RESILIENCE AND RESTORATION
PLANNING PROJECT**

Project No. 26-019-01

Project Manager: Peter Jaraus

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$597,000 to the City of Arcata to undertake the Jolly Giant Creek and Butcher Slough Coastal Resilience and Restoration Planning Project, consisting of developing a coastal resilience and habitat restoration plan for the lower two miles of Jolly Giant Creek and completing 30% designs and environmental review for Butcher Slough on the Little Lakes property owned by the City of Arcata in Humboldt County.

LOCATION: Jolly Giant Creek, City of Arcata

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location](#)

Exhibit 2: [Site Photos](#)

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 an amount not to exceed five hundred ninety seven thousand dollars (\$597,000) to the City of Arcata (the “grantee”) to undertake the Jolly Giant Creek and Butcher Slough Coastal Resilience and Restoration Planning Project, consisting of developing a coastal resilience and habitat restoration plan for the lower two miles of Jolly Giant Creek and completing 30% designs and environmental review for Butcher Slough on the Little Lakes property owned by the City of Arcata in 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.

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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 coastal resilience.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a grant of \$597,000 to the City of Arcata to undertake the Jolly Giant Creek and Butcher Slough Coastal Resilience and Restoration Planning Project, consisting of developing a coastal resilience and habitat restoration plan for the lower two miles of Jolly Giant Creek and completing 30% designs and environmental review for a climate resilience and restoration project in Butcher Slough on the Little Lakes property owned by the City of Arcata (City) in Humboldt County (the project), as shown in Exhibit 1.

During winter storm events, sections of Arcata adjacent to the tidally influenced Butcher Slough experience flooding. This is especially pronounced when a king tide coincides with a winter storm. King tides can occur 3-4 times a year with the highest tides typically occurring near the start of January. This is also the time of year when some of the largest rainfall events take place. Jolly Giant Creek, which acts as a drain for a significant part of downtown Arcata's impervious surfaces, doesn't have sufficient room to drain during a spring tide and overtops its banks. Businesses and residents are negatively affected by the flooding as sections of South H and G streets become impassable. These neighborhoods include numerous businesses as well as low-income and affordable housing.

Local and global climate models indicate that the shoreline and lower elevation neighborhoods of Arcata, particularly along the banks of Butcher Slough, are susceptible to increased inundation and flooding from sea level rise and storm events. For the Humboldt Bay Region, one of the most significant factors is vertical land motion, which is not uniform around the bay but varies by location. Arcata is located on the northern shore of Humboldt Bay and is currently experiencing one of the highest rates of subsidence in California. The land is subsiding more than 0.3 inches per year which exacerbates the relative rate of sea level rise in these vulnerable neighborhoods.

The project builds on the recently completed Arcata Sea Level Rise Adaptation Concept Plan (Arcata SLR Concept Plan) funded by the California Coastal Commission and the ongoing Ocean Protection Council-funded SB1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Pathways Plan (Pathways Plan). The Arcata SLR Concept Plan fed into the City's Local Coastal Program (LCP) update that was completed this spring. The City's adaptation strategy to sea level rise, outlined in the Arcata SLR Concept Plan and the LCP, relies on three approaches. First, accommodate sea level rise where possible. Second, use grey/green infrastructure to protect parts of the City that are feasible to

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defend. Third, retreat when it is no longer feasible to adapt. The Butcher Slough reach of Jolly Giant Creek was identified as a high priority location for adaptation both in the LCP and Arcata SLR Concept Plan. The project will fit within the second strategy and use both grey and green infrastructure to make neighborhoods near Jolly Giant Creek more resilient to climate change.

The project will focus on identifying and prioritizing sea level rise adaptation and habitat restoration opportunities within the full two miles of Jolly Giant Creek. Conceptual designs for habitat improvements will focus on benefiting salmonids while conceptual designs for climate adaptations will focus on reducing flooding. Flooding can be reduced by giving the stream more room through daylighting, reducing peak flows, or moving the stream away from homes.

Options for how to reduce flooding in the lower section of Jolly Giant Creek, known as Butcher Slough, were examined during previous planning efforts mentioned above. The project will build off those efforts and prepare 30% design plans and complete environmental review for climate resilience and salmonid restoration in Butcher Slough. The stream channel is currently a straight engineered channel adjacent to homes along south H Street. The existing conceptual designs recommend moving the stream out into the Little Lakes property, introducing more natural sinuosity, and connecting it to its former floodplain. Once the stream has been relocated away from the homes, the City is planning to construct an eco-berm behind the homes to protect them from flooding. Recent flooding events have impacted South H and G streets, affecting local businesses and residences, including a large portion of the City's multifamily and affordable housing stock. Relocating this section of the stream will also benefit salmonids by providing more natural habitat and reducing the velocity of the water during storm events.

The Arcata SLR Concept Plan and Pathways Plan involved public outreach, and the project will continue this conducting public outreach by engaging the community (the majority of which has been designated as a disadvantaged community) and affiliated Tribes, and convening a technical advisory committee (TAC). Tribes will be invited to join the TAC, and the City will host community meetings and conduct one-on-one meetings with residents adjacent to Butcher Slough.

Specific project actions not mentioned above include:

- Water level monitoring and flow measurements
- Culvert and stream infrastructure assessment
- Topographic survey
- Hydrologic and Hydraulic Modeling and geomorphic assessment.
- Environmental Studies for Butcher Slough
 - Biological Resources
 - Wetlands delineation
 - Cultural Resources Assessment
- Alternatives Analysis
- Final Restoration and Climate Planning Document

Site Description: Jolly Giant Creek is a tributary to Humboldt Bay that flows through downtown Arcata and enters Humboldt Bay as Butcher Slough in the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary. The stream originates in the Arcata Community Forest above Cal Poly Humboldt and flows through the campus, under Highway 101, and through the urban downtown. Extensive sections of the stream have been channelized and routed through culverts, which reduces fish habitat and increases flooding risk for local businesses and residents. Nevertheless, the stream still supports juvenile Coho salmon as well as other aquatic species, such as brook lamprey, coastal cutthroat trout, and tidewater goby. Lower Jolly Giant Creek provides important non-natal rearing habitat for Coho Salmon on Humboldt Bay.

The project site includes approximately two continuous miles of Jolly Giant Creek. The lower reach is a 0.8 mile long section of creek from the mouth at Humboldt Bay to Samoa Boulevard. This section is referred to as Butcher Slough and is primarily on property owned by the City, including the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary and the Little Lakes Property. The Little Lakes Property is a former mill site which the City completed remediation of in 2025. The upper reach is approximately 1.2 miles long from Samoa Boulevard to Shay Park. This stretch is more urbanized and has many culverted sections as it passes through downtown Arcata. Tidal influence extends up to 8th street in Arcata.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The City is qualified to undertake the project, as evidenced by its successes managing past and ongoing restoration projects and restored lands, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/Conservancy funded restoration projects at McDaniel Slough and nearby Arcata Baylands, the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary, the Arcata Community Forest, and the City’s many riparian areas, wetlands, and designated open spaces.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA

The 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 because it will develop plans to reduce flooding to lower income and multi-family housing. If implemented, the project will provide long term savings to the City and State by reducing the need for emergency funding. The project will also develop restoration plans to improve important non-natal rearing habitat for salmonids.

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

This plan will develop conceptual designs that reduce flooding and protect homes in Arcata. This effort will be guided by long range community planning guidelines that emphasize the need to evaluate whether it is appropriate to construct infrastructure, accommodate, or retreat

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from sea level rise. Designs developed during this feasibility study will follow these guidelines and focus on efforts that will provide long term benefit to the community.

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The project focuses on both coastal resilience and habitat restoration. The plan will develop conceptual designs that improve salmonid habitat and prevent low elevation neighborhoods from flooding. Butcher Slough provides important non-natal rearing habitat for salmonids, and restoring the creek through the Little Lakes Property will greatly improve this habitat. Additional habitat improvements will be designed upstream. Climate resilience will be improved by reducing the chances of flooding. This will protect existing multi-family and affordable housing in Arcata.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$597,000
Ocean Protection Council	\$35,000
City of Arcata	\$15,000
Project Total	\$647,000

The anticipated source of funding is a fiscal year 2025-26 appropriation from Chapter 4 of the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (2024 Climate Bond or Proposition 4), codified at Public Resources Code Sections 90000 to 95015). 2024 Climate Bond provides funding to increase coastal resiliency and protect coastal lands, waters, communities, and natural resources from sea level rise. (Section 92000.) The Conservancy is authorized to award grants for coastal and combined flood management projects and activities for developed shoreline areas, including areas with critical community infrastructure, including . . . transportation . . . at risk of current flooding and flooding due to sea level rise.” (Section 92015.) The project is consistent with this funding source because the site is adjacent to Humboldt Bay and at risk of flooding, and the project will prepare a resilience and restoration plan and designs focused on coastal resilience and flood reduction to the Jolly Giant Creek area in Arcata. The multi-benefit project will improve public safety by preparing a plan and conceptual designs to address flooding and sea level rise while also restoring habitat, providing recreational opportunities, and improving hydrologic function.

OPC will provide \$35,000 from a grant that was previously awarded to the City to support the project. This grant is from OPC’s SB1 Grant Program, which supports preparation of the Pathways Plan.

The City will provide \$15,000 to support the project from its Open Space, Parks & Trails Special Tax (Measure A) funds. \$15,000 of the Measure A funding will serve as a cost share to the project.

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 will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy's jurisdiction (Section 31113(a).) The Conservancy is authorized to award grants to public agencies to undertake projects that address extreme weather events, sea level rise, flooding, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources. (Section 31113(b)-(c).) Section 31113 requires the Conservancy to prioritize projects that maximize public benefits and reduce flood risk. Consistent with this section, the project will prepare plans and develop conceptual designs that address coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources and that will provide multiple public benefits for the local community and its natural resources.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.1, Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the project will advance planning for a project that will reduce flooding in a severely disadvantaged community.

Consistent with **Goal 4.1, Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects**, the project will prepare plans to protect local communities and natural resources in Arcata from the impacts of flooding from coastal storms and sea-level rise.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project is statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR), Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies), which exempts planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted, or funded and that consider environmental factors. The project is consistent with this section because the project includes planning, conceptual designs, and review of environmental effects for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted, or funded.

The project is also categorically exempt from review under CEQA, pursuant to Title 14 of the CCR, Section 15306 (Information Collection), which exempts basic data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The project is consistent with this section because the project includes information collection that doesn't result in serious or major disturbance to environmental resources.

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