

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

October 23, 2003

WATERSHED AND HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS SIGNS: SONOMA COUNTY

File No. 03-132

Project Manager: Richard Retecki

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$60,000 to the Southern Sonoma County Resource Conservation District (SSCRCD) for the design, production, and placement of watershed signs and hazardous river condition signs for the Russian River watershed and the Sonoma Creek watershed.

LOCATION: Russian River and Sonoma Creek watersheds (Exhibits 1 and 2)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Sonoma County in the San Francisco Bay Area

Exhibit 2: Russian River Watershed

Exhibit 3: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following Resolution pursuant to Sections 31400-31409 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed sixty thousand dollars (\$60,000) to the Southern Sonoma County Resource Conservation District (SSCRD) for the design, production, and placement of watershed signs and public safety signs related to hazardous river conditions, for the Russian River and Sonoma Creek watersheds, subject to the condition that prior to the disbursement of any funds, the SSCRCDD shall submit for the review and approval of the Conservancy’s Executive Officer a work program, a budget and production schedule, a placement plan, and contractors and subcontractors to be employed.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resource Code, Sections 31400 *et seq.*
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
 3. The proposed project will serve more than local needs.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

This authorization will enable the Southern Sonoma County Resource Conservation District (SSCRCD) to design, produce and place watershed and hazardous river condition signs for the Russian River and Sonoma Creek watersheds.

The **hazardous river conditions signs** are needed for the Russian River and its major tributaries. The Russian River has areas that are not safe for those who cannot swim or are poor swimmers. Some of the hazardous conditions are: deep holes, eddies, quick sharp drop-offs, hidden debris, and steep river-banks. Over the past three years, of the fifteen (15) people who have drowned in the Russian River, twelve were Hispanic. These signs would be produced in English and also Spanish to address this disproportionate number of Hispanic drownings. The SSCRCDC will place the hazardous river conditions signs throughout the Russian River watershed.

The **watershed signs** will be designed by SSCRCDC and serve as educational resources with information regarding the Russian River and its tributary watersheds. The signs would identify entrances to the individual watersheds, provide the square miles, provide information on endangered species, and list pertinent emergency phone numbers. The SSCRCDC will select demonstration streams for the initial placement of signs.

Site Description: The Russian River watershed extends from north of Ukiah in Mendocino county to Jenner in Sonoma county where it enters the Pacific Ocean (see Exhibit 2). The watershed area is 1,500 square miles with the length of the main stem river being approximately 110 miles. The river serves as a major source of water for agriculture and urban development, but it is also a major regional recreational resource. The number of recreational users of the river has steadily increased over the past twenty years as has the number of water related accidents and deaths.

The Sonoma Creek watershed extends from San Pablo Bay north to Calistoga Road to the southeast of Santa Rosa. The watershed is bordered by the Sonoma Mountains to the west, and the Napa-Sonoma Mountains on the east. The valley gradually declines in elevation to the Bay where some lands are below sea level. The Sonoma Valley is a major wine producing area of the state, as well as a major tourist and recreation destination. Lands near the Bay have been diked and are used mainly for the production of forage crops.

Project History: The Conservancy has addressed the hazardous river conditions signs before within the Russian River Public Information project. Through the Russian River Public Information project, a Russian River Guide (brochure) was developed and underwent two printings. The Guide was printed in both Spanish and English and was distributed throughout the watershed. The Guide included information on water safety, river rules, private property, winter conditions, and public safety and emergency information. In the past five to ten years there has been a con-

version of the Hispanic agricultural community, from a mostly transient character, to one of permanent residency. The number of Hispanic river users has increased dramatically along certain stretches of the river, and the number of water related accidents and drownings has also increased. There is a definite need for public safety information to alert river users of potential hazards that exist while in and along the river. The addition of the hazardous river conditions signs along with the River Guide will highlight the rivers' conditions and provide information for safe river use.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$60,000
Southern Sonoma County RCD	20,000
Sonoma County Regional Park Department	<u>5,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$85,000

Conservancy funds for this authorization are expected to be utilized in the following manner: the Watershed Signs: \$50,000; the Hazardous River Conditions Signs: \$10,000.

Staff expects to use funds appropriated to the Conservancy in FY 02/03 from the "California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Fund" (Proposition 40). This funding source may be used for the development and appropriate utilization of land and water resources in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. As discussed below, the project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 and will serve to develop safe public accessways and provide educational information. Proposition 40 also requires the Conservancy to give priority to grant projects with matching funding. The SSCRCD will contribute \$20,000 towards the project, while the Sonoma County Regional Park Department has committed to providing substantial in-kind services.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-409) authorizes the Conservancy to participate in public access projects. Section 31400 states the intent of the Legislature that the Conservancy have a major role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The Russian River is a prime example of those accessways. Pursuant to §31400.1, the Conservancy may award grants to any public agency for the development and management of lands for public access. In appropriately managing public access it is necessary to ensure the safe use of those accessways by the public. The informative "hazardous conditions" signs will alert river users to the dangers that exist in these popular recreation locations.

The Conservancy is also authorized under §31440.3 to "provide assistance as required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division." The watershed signs will serve as a vital tool for public education and information related to particular watersheds and their surrounding environs.

Finally, the proposed project will serve more than local needs, as required by §31400.1, by providing information and education to visitors to the watersheds and rivers, who come from throughout the region and beyond.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) AND OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective D**, the project will provide visitors and river users information about unsafe or hazardous conditions at coastal and river public access points.

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective D**, the proposed project will provide educational opportunities to the Bay Area urban population regarding the public accessways associated with the Russian River and Sonoma Creek watersheds.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The project is supported by State Senator Wes Chesbro, Assemblywoman Patti Berg, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Sonoma County Regional Parks, and the United States Lifeguard Association. Letters of Support may be found in Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** Placement of the signs will be within watershed areas located in the nine-county San Francisco Bay area and within the Conservancy's jurisdiction.
5. **Need:** Sonoma County and the SSCRCD are unable to provide the necessary funds for the proposed signs without additional Conservancy funding.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Russian River is a major regional and statewide recreation destination. The Conservancy, the SSCRCD, and the SCRPD will work together to inform the public of dangers related to use of recreational resources to ensure the safe of these areas.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** There is an urgent need to produce the hazardous conditions signs and place them in appropriate areas. Making the signs available as quickly as possible is good common sense.
12. **Readiness:** The Conservancy and its partners are ready to begin the project in immediately.

15. **Cooperation:** The project partners have worked together on previous projects and will enlist the assistance of public agencies, nonprofit organizations, recreation business owners, and community organizations to implement the project.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The design, preparation, and distribution of signs is not a “project” for the purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it does not have a potential to result in physical change of any significance in the environment; and is therefore exempt from CEQA review pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15378. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval.