

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
March 25, 2004

MARSH CREEK STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

File No. 03-146
Project Manager: Mary Small

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse California Bay-Delta Authority grant funds to implement the Marsh Creek public outreach program in Contra Costa County, as follows: \$70,000 to the Contra Costa County Resource Conservation District and \$60,000 to the Delta Science Center.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: December 11, 2003 Staff Recommendation
 - Exhibit 2: Marsh Creek Watershed
 - Exhibit 3: Marsh Creek and Dutch Slough
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31164 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes:

1. Disbursement of an amount not to exceed seventy thousand dollars (\$70,000) to the Contra Costa County Resource Conservation District for implementation of a watershed outreach program in the Marsh Creek watershed in Contra Costa County.
2. Disbursement of an amount not to exceed sixty thousand dollars (\$60,000) to the Delta Science Center for implementation of the educational components of the Marsh Creek Watershed outreach program in Contra Costa County.

Prior to the disbursement of any funds to either grantee, the grantee shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, schedule, budget and any contractors to be employed in implementation of the project.”

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:

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1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Public Resources Code Sections 31160–31164, regarding the Conservancy’s mandate to address the resource and recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay Area.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
 3. The Delta Science Center is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

In December 2003, the Conservancy authorized acceptance of a grant from the California Bay Delta Authority (CBDA) to implement a public outreach program in the Marsh Creek Watershed in Contra Costa County (Exhibit 1) and disbursement of a portion of those grant funds to the Natural Heritage Institute. This action would authorize disbursement of the remainder of the outreach program grant funds. Specifically, staff is recommending disbursement of up to sixty thousand dollars (\$60,000) to the Delta Science Center to implement the educational components of the outreach program and disbursement of up to seventy thousand dollars (\$70,000) to the Contra Costa County Resource Conservation District to implement agency coordination and public outreach components of the watershed outreach program.

In 2001, the Conservancy, in cooperation with the Natural Heritage Institute (NHI), the Contra Costa County Resource Conservation District (RCD), the Delta Science Center (DSC), and others, applied to CBDA for a grant to fund outreach, planning, and restoration projects in the Marsh Creek watershed. On August 31, 2003, the CBDA awarded funding for two elements of the proposal: the public outreach program and restoration planning for lower Marsh Creek. Staff is recommending that the Conservancy authorize one grant to the RCD and one grant to the DSC to implement different elements of the outreach program.

The goal of the outreach program is to educate the public about the watershed, to increase local support for environmental protection, and to create opportunities for the public to participate in watershed stewardship activities. The program will include the following elements:

- water quality monitoring;
- creek stewardship activities such as removing trash from the creek and planting native plants along the trail;
- a public education program, including public workshops, school activities and outings; and
- technical support to city planning staff to help implement the riparian corridor plan in Brentwood.

The CBDA grant creates an opportunity to expand public outreach and community involvement in the Marsh Creek watershed. This project will build on work initiated by NHI, the Delta Science Center, the Resource Conservation District, the County, and others. As restoration projects are implemented along the creek and at its mouth, this program will create opportunities for community involvement in these projects. This program will complement the Dutch Slough Restoration Project and two riparian restoration projects already underway on Marsh Creek.

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The Contra County Resource Conservation District (RCD) is an Independent Special District established in 1941 under Division 9 of the Public Resources Code. Initially, RCD programs concentrated on assisting farmers and ranchers with preventing soil erosion, flood control, and reducing sediment damages. While these efforts continue, the RCD has expanded its role to also include the development of watershed plans through locally-led community groups and assistance to the County and Cities in reviewing land use changes and development plans. The RCD provides conservation education to schools, 4-H clubs, and other community groups. The RCD has been involved in watershed management efforts in a number of local watersheds, including Alhambra Creek and Kirker Creek.

The RCD will lead the coordination with local government agencies including the County, Cities, and the Contra Costa Watershed Forum. The RCD will organize stewardship activities, including trash clean-up, removal of exotic species, and replanting of native riparian vegetation along the creek. The RCD will install watershed signs and will help support development of other public outreach materials.

The Delta Science Center is a nonprofit organization that is a collaborative effort of the Los Medanos Community College District, California State University at Hayward, East Contra Costa County Schools (K-12), Contra Costa County, East Bay Regional Park District, and many others. The mission of the Delta Science Center is to provide science education and research for all grades, from kindergarten through the university level. The Delta Science Center will lead implementation of the educational activities of the watershed outreach program, such as working with local schools, leading outings, and developing Marsh Creek specific educational materials.

Site Description: The Marsh Creek watershed is located in eastern Contra Costa County; it extends from Mount Diablo to the Delta (Exhibit 2). Much of the upper watershed is protected land, including Cowell Ranch State Park and East Bay Regional Park District's (EBRPD) Morgan Territory Preserve. A flood control reservoir, owned by Contra Costa County Flood Control District, is located upstream from the city of Brentwood and the lower section of the creek is a levied flood control channel. Marsh Creek enters the Delta between the East Bay Regional Park District's Big Break Regional Shoreline and the Department of Water Resources' Dutch Slough property (Exhibit 3).

As with most watersheds in the San Francisco Bay Area, Marsh Creek has been modified extensively during the past 200 years. The volume and the timing of water flowing down the creek have been altered and the quality of that water degraded. The shape and position of the creek have also been changed. Today, the creek is confined to a linear flood control channel in its lower section. However, compared to other urban creeks, Marsh Creek still provides habitat for a number of native species, including: river otters, western pond turtles, and Chinook salmon. Recent studies by NHI and others have identified several opportunities for restoration along the creek and some of these projects are being implemented through other grant funds. While development is encroaching around the creek, there is still a significant amount of open land along the riparian corridor. A public trail allows for continuous public access along the creek from Big Break through Brentwood.

Project History: In December 1999, the Coastal Conservancy gave a grant to the Natural Heritage Institute to help fund planning of the Delta Science Center and to identify restoration opportunities in the Marsh Creek Watershed. Under the Conservancy's 1999 grant, NHI identified restoration opportunities along Marsh Creek. The City of Brentwood and NHI have received

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grants from the Department of Water Resources Urban Streams Program and the California Department of Parks and Recreation Riparian Program to fund two of these restoration projects. In addition, DWR and American Rivers have provided technical support and grant funding to evaluate barrier removal for a fish passage barrier on the creek.

Marsh Creek flows along the western boundary of the 1,166-acre Dutch Slough Restoration Project (Exhibits 2 and 3). For more than two years, the Conservancy has worked with the Department of Water Resources, NHI, The Conservation Fund, the City of Oakley, CBDA, and others to implement this restoration project. This outreach program and restoration planning will complement the restoration work at Dutch Slough.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$ 0
California Bay Delta Authority Grant	<u>357,146</u>
Total Project Cost	\$357,146

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed authorization is consistent with Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31164, regarding the Conservancy's mandate to address the resource and recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay Area. Specifically, §31162(b) directs the Conservancy to protect, restore, and enhance watersheds of regional importance. The Marsh Creek watershed is regionally important because it provides habitat to a number of listed species, it links together significant open space areas, and a regional trail follows along the creek for several miles. This project will help to protect, restore, and enhance these important resources.

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

Consistent with **Goal 11 Objective C**, the proposed project will help develop an interpretive program that is linked to real restoration projects and will serve an urban population.

Consistent with the Conservancy's Long Term Financial Strategy, this project will bring outside funding to the Conservancy that will implement a priority project.

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.

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3. **Support of the public:** The grant application to CBDA included letters of support from many individuals and organizations, including: Assemblywoman Leach, State Senator Torlakson, County Supervisor Uilkema, Liberty Union High School Superintendent Smith, Brentwood Union High School Superintendent Adams, the Mayor of Brentwood, the Mayor of Oakley, the President of the Delta Informal Gardeners, the General Manager of East Bay Regional Park District, the President of the Ironhouse Sanitary District, the General Manager of the County Mosquito and Vector Control District, and others. These letters were attached to the December 2003 staff report.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located in Contra Costa County, within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Program.
5. **Need:** As discussed above, the public outreach program is needed to improve local support and participation in regional restoration efforts.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Marsh Creek is a significant regional resource and the watershed outreach program will work with a number of communities in the area to improve public understanding of this resource and create opportunities for the community to get involved in resource protection.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** Both Oakley and Brentwood are rapidly developing communities and as development is approved there are important opportunities to protect the resources of the creek through control of storm water and preservation of the riparian corridor. In addition, as new residents move into these communities, there is a tremendous need to educate people about the natural resources of the region.

Restoration planning at Dutch Slough will begin this fall. The public outreach program in the watershed needs to be established as soon as possible so that it can be used to help identify volunteers to participate in and support the Dutch Slough project.
8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** This project educates the public, creates opportunities for the community to improve their environmental quality, and helps implement the long-term plans to protect the creek corridor and restore wetlands in the watershed.
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
11. **Innovation:** Public participation in data collection and environmental stewardship creates educational opportunities and helps build support for the environmental protection. This program is innovative because the watershed outreach and stewardship is being planned as a valuable component of other restoration efforts in the watershed.
12. **Readiness:** If approved, this project will begin immediately.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See the “Project History” section above.
14. **Return to Conservancy:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
15. **Cooperation:** This project will be implemented in partnership with local schools, the County, the Cities, and local organizations such as the Delta Science Center and the Delta Informal Gardeners.

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COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed elements of the public outreach program are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under a variety of specific provisions.

Water quality monitoring is categorically exempt from review as provided in 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15322, as it does not have the potential to result in any physical changes to the environment. Trash clean-up along the flood control channel is categorically exempt from review as provided in §15301(h), as it consists of minor alterations of existing facilities. Planting native plants along the creek is categorically exempt from review as provided in §15304(b), as it consists of minor alterations to land. Development of public education materials in the outreach program is categorically exempt from review as provided in §15322(a).

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon Conservancy approval of this project.