

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
May 27, 2004

**MATILIJA DAM STUDIES**

File No. 99-099  
Project Manager: Neal Fishman

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Amend the Conservancy's authorizations of October 26, 2000, and February 27, 2003, regarding the feasibility of removing Matilija Dam, Ventura County, by increasing the amount by \$200,000 for a total of \$1,950,000, and authorizing the disbursement of these additional funds as a grant to the County of Ventura.

**LOCATION:** Ventura County, on the Ventura River and nearby areas, and at the Matilija Dam, on Matilija Creek, a tributary of the Ventura River (Exhibits 1 and 2).

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Resource Enhancement

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**EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit 1: Brochure with description and pictures of dam and Site Map
  - Exhibit 2: Staff recommendation and authorization October 26, 2000
  - Exhibit 3: Staff recommendation and authorization February 27, 2003
  - Exhibit 4: Letters of Support
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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby amends its Matilija Dam Studies authorizations of October 26, 2000, attached as Exhibit 3, and February 27, 2003, attached as Exhibit 4, to authorize disbursement of an amount not to exceed five hundred eleven thousand dollars (\$511,000) to the Ventura County Watershed Protection District to participate with the United State Army Corps of Engineers in studying the feasibility of removing the Matilija Dam, subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, the County shall submit to the Conservancy's Executive Officer a budget, work program and the names of any subcontractors to be employed for the project.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

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1. The proposed authorization remains consistent with the findings adopted by the Conservancy on October 26, 2000 (Exhibit 3),
  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 is consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code (Section 31251-31270).
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### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy augment its authorizations of October 26, 2000, and February 27, 2003, regarding studies to determine the feasibility of removing Matilija Dam, by increasing the total grant amount by \$200,000, and authorizing the disbursement of these additional funds as a grant to the County of Ventura. This would increase the total authorization for this project to one million nine hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$1,950,000).

Since the Conservancy's original authorization in October of 2000, the County of Ventura and the United States Army Corps of Engineers agreed to jointly conduct the study to determine the feasibility of removing the Matilija Dam. Removal of the dam is one of the most important measures that can be taken toward the recovery of the endangered southern steelhead, and to reestablish the supply of sand to Ventura County beaches. The Corps originally estimated the cost of the feasibility study as \$4,200,000. That cost has now risen to \$4,600,000 due to the addition of a number of design features and analysis including: (1) a high flow bypass system to ensure that stored sediments could quickly wash past the Robles Diversion dam, (2) a sediment basin along the Robles Diversion canal to ensure that fine sediments could be trapped before entering the Casitas Reservoir, (3) analysis and designation of multiple sites to store fine sediments, (4) design analysis for temporary storage of sediments in the canyon behind the dam and the integrity of the dam during deconstruction, (5) analysis needed to determine impacts to existing water diversions downstream and methods to mitigate those impacts, and (6) analysis of impacts to upstream, Ventura River estuary and ocean resources. Congress is expected to appropriate sufficient funds to the Corps to complete its share of these additional costs. The County of Ventura, the local sponsor, will need the additional funds to match federal funding.

The County of Ventura will use Conservancy grant funds to match federal funding to complete the feasibility study and environmental documents for the project. This will include finishing reports needed for federal authorization of the project, leading to implementation funding. It will also include completing initial designs and analysis needed to determine project costs. All of this work is nearly complete. The final design work, including a chief engineers report from the Corps is expected by the end of the calendar year. Final environmental documents will be complete in the first half of 2005.

As the County of Ventura is the local sponsor for this project, all work will be carried out under the direction of the Ventura County Watershed Protection District. The district has been an integral part of the planning process to date. It has provided many hours of civil engineering and other expertise to this project.

## ***MATILIJIA DAM STUDIES***

**Site Description:** This proposed authorization remains consistent with the Conservancy staff recommendation of October 2000, Exhibit 3, for the Site Description.

**Project History:** This proposed authorization remains consistent with the Conservancy staff recommendation of October 2000, Exhibit 3 for Project History.

However, there has been great progress on this project since the Conservancy first authorized funding in October of 2000. The Conservancy had authorized expenditure of \$1,750,000 with no commitment of matching funds from any other public agency or private source. Since that time the United States Army Corps of Engineers and the County of Ventura agreed to undertake the project as a joint feasibility study. The project has received funding from the County, Army Corps, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Geological Survey. The feasibility study and environmental documents are now nearly complete and there is wide support for the proposed method for removing the dam and dealing with stored sediment.

The planning process involved numerous meetings of various technical committees in which a wide range of issues were highlighted and resolved. The consensus plan that has emerged from the planning process includes the following elements:

- 1) The dam would be removed all at one time, rather than being taken down over time;
- 2) Approximately two million cubic yards of fine sediments would be slurried downstream to disposal sites;
- 3) Approximately four million cubic yards of coarse and fine sediments would be temporarily stored in the canyon behind the dam and would eventually be moved downstream during storms to nourish Ventura beaches;
- 4) There would be a high flow bypass allowing sediment to easily move beyond the Robles Diversion, preserving the ability to divert water to the Casitas Reservoir and keeping intact the ability of fish to use the new fish ladder at the diversion; and
- 5) There would be a basin developed along the Robles Diversion canal to ensure that deposit of fine sediments to the Casitas Reservoir would be minimized.

### **PROJECT FINANCING\*:**

Coastal Conservancy	\$1,950,000
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	2,400,000**
Bureau of Reclamation	700,000
County of Ventura	500,000
U.S. Department of Justice	500,000
United States Geological Survey	250,000
National Park Service	25,000

**Total Project Cost** **\$6,325,000**

The new funds are expected to come from the Habitat Conservation Fund. These funds can be used for the acquisition, restoration or enhancement of habitat for spawning or rearing of salmon and trout. A key purpose of this project is to restore the steelhead fishery of the Ventura River.

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\* Includes financing during initial reconnaissance phase, feasibility phase and related research.

\*\* Includes \$931,000 expected to be appropriated in the next federal fiscal year

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The proposed authorization remains consistent with the Conservancy's October 2000 staff recommendation (Exhibit 3).

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

Consistent with **Goal 5, Statewide Strategy**, the project will restore habitat throughout the Ventura River system, and will be a major step in the recovery of the southern steelhead.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective A**, the project restores significant acreage of stream habitat, by removing a major barrier to fish passage and by removing invasive species such as arrundo.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective C**, the project involves the eradication of arrundo throughout the Ventura River and Matilija Creek.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Statewide Strategy**, the project helps anadromous fish and is a key component of the recovery plan for the southern steelhead.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective A**, project will improve habitat for anadromous fish, increase riparian habitat, and promote public recreation.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective C**, project is designed to reintroduce natural passage of sand down the Ventura River and to release stored sand. This constitutes a regional approach to prevention of beach erosion.

### **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"
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The project is supported by a widely supported by local legislators, public agencies, environmental groups and the public. See letters of support attached under Exhibit 5.

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4. **Location:** See “Location” section of the Conservancy’s October 2000 staff recommendation (Exhibit 3).
5. **Need:** The County of Ventura has allocated \$500,000 to this project and cannot contribute more. The funding is needed to complete the feasibility planning process and environmental documents. These funds will be matched by federal dollars one for one.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Matilija project has generated interest throughout the State and nationally. It is the largest dam removal project now being planning in the United States and will have direct impact on the recovery of the endangered southern steelhead. The project will also be a model for the removal of large dams and will have the added benefit of reestablishing a natural supply of sand for beaches.

### **Additional Criteria**

7. **Urgency:** The feasibility phase of this project is nearing completion. Funding to complete the study will make it possible for the project to be authorized in the pending Water Resources Development Act.
7. 8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** See this section of the Conservancy’s October 2000 staff recommendation (Exhibit 3).
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
10. **Conflict resolution:** Over the past year the technical committees have solved a number of potential conflicts between advocates and dam removal and the Casitas Municipal Water District. It will be possible to remove the dam without significant impacting the district’s ability to divert water.
11. **Innovation:** The project plan includes a number of innovative technical features including a high flow bypass system, temporary storage of sediment, and removal of fine sediments.
12. **Readiness:** The planning is nearly complete. These funds will be used immediately to finish the feasibility study and environmental documents.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See this section of the Conservancy’s October 2000 staff recommendation (Exhibit 3).
15. **Cooperation:** See this section of the Conservancy’s October 2000 staff recommendation (Exhibit 3). Additionally, the process to date has been a model of cooperation. Numerous public agencies and nonprofit organizations have participated in the technical teams and are supporting this effort.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

This section remains consistent with the Conservancy’s October 2000 staff recommendation (Exhibit 3).

### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed feasibility studies for the Matilija Dam will only involve data collection that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Therefore, the project

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is categorically exempt pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15306. Upon approval, staff will file a notice of exemption for this project.