

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

June 16, 2005

**CARPINTERIA CREEK WATERSHED RESTORATION:
BLISS AND CATE SCHOOL FISH PASSAGE IMPROVEMENTS**

File No. 02-088-02

Project Manager: Mary Travis/Terri Nevins

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$510,000 to the Community Environmental Council to implement habitat improvement projects at two locations along Carpinteria Creek to improve steelhead migration and habitat.

LOCATION: Carpinteria Creek watershed, Santa Barbara County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map
- Exhibit 2: Final Environmental Impact Report, Updated Routine Maintenance Program, November 2001
- Exhibit 3: 2003/2004 Annual Maintenance Plan, Carpinteria Creek Routine Maintenance Addendum to the Program EIR for Santa Barbara County Flood Control Routine Maintenance
- Exhibit 4: Carpinteria Creek Watershed Fish Barriers
- Exhibit 5: Photos – Bliss Project Site
- Exhibit 6: Photos – Cate School Project Site
- Exhibit 7: Bliss Construction and Grading Plans
- Exhibit 8: Cate School Construction and Grading Plans
- Exhibit 9: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31000 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement to the Community Environmental Council (“the CEC”) of an amount not to exceed five hundred ten thousand dollars (\$510,000) to implement projects at the Bliss property and the Cate School property along Carpinteria Creek to improve passage and habitat for steelhead trout, subject to the following conditions with respect to each site independently:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the CEC shall submit for the review and written approval of the Conservancy’s Executive Officer:
 - a. A work program, budget, and schedule, and the names of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the work.
 - b. Evidence that the CEC has obtained all necessary permits and approvals.
2. The CEC shall enter into and record an agreement under Public Resources Code Section 31116(c), approved by the Executive Officer, to protect the public interest in the future improvements, and to obtain access to the site for construction, maintenance, and monitoring.
3. The CEC shall implement, or shall cause to be implemented, the applicable mitigation and mitigation-monitoring measures contained in the 2001 Final Environmental Impact Report (“EIR”) for the Santa Barbara County Flood Control and Water Conservation District Updated Routine Maintenance Program, and the Addendum to the EIR for the 2003/2004 Annual Maintenance Plan, prepared under the California Environmental Quality Act and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibits 2 and 3.”

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 criteria in Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-31270) regarding enhancement of coastal resources.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The project area has been identified in the certified Local Coastal Program of Santa Barbara County as requiring public action to resolve existing or potential resource protection problems.
4. Community Environmental Council is a nonprofit organization qualified 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.”
5. The Coastal Conservancy has independently reviewed the 2001 Final Environmental Impact Report for the Santa Barbara County Flood Control and Water Conservation District Updated Routine Maintenance Program and the Addendum to the EIR for the 2003/2004 Annual Maintenance Plan (attached as Exhibits 2 and 3 to the accompanying staff recommendation) for the project pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act, and finds that there is no substantial evidence that the activities to which the Conservancy is contributing, as mitigated,

may have a significant effect on the environment as defined in 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15382.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of funds to the Community Environmental Council (CEC) to implement habitat improvements along Carpinteria Creek to improve steelhead migration and habitat. These improvements would serve as the first phase of a comprehensive effort to restore and promote steelhead recovery in the Carpinteria Creek watershed.

The Carpinteria Creek watershed is one of the largest on Santa Barbara County’s south coast and may offer the region’s best opportunity for restoring significant runs of endangered southern steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). The upper watershed has perennial flows and extremely high-quality trout habitat, while the lower creek, unlike most south coast streams, is not channelized and runs freely under open spans at both the Union Pacific Railroad tracks and Highway 101. Historically Carpinteria Creek supported plentiful runs of anadromous steelhead, and the upper watershed continues to sustain a population of resident rainbow trout. But because of human modifications to the watershed—primarily the construction of several road crossings and other impediments to fish migration—anadromous steelhead now enter the stream in very small numbers.

A comprehensive inventory of all fish passage barriers along the county’s south coast has identified Carpinteria Creek as having the highest total habitat value and best restoration potential for endangered steelhead among all south coast streams (*Steelhead Assessment and Recovery Opportunities in Southern Santa Barbara County, California*, Matt W. Stoecker and Conception Coast Project, June 2002; http://www.conceptioncoast.org/projects_steelhead.html). That study found that of all the focal watersheds from Jalama Creek above Point Conception to Rincon Creek along the Ventura County line, Carpinteria Creek offered the highest potential for steelhead recovery, both because of its biological value and because of relative impact of passage barriers on the creek

The Carpinteria Creek Watershed Coalition, a broad-based task force of agencies, nonprofit organizations and private landowners, would help implement each project, under the management of CEC. The Coalition identified these projects for the initial phase of its restoration effort because of the identifiable impacts caused by each of these barriers and because both landowners have agreed to the proposed restoration projects on their property. Because both project areas encompass producing avocado ranches, the projects would also serve to demonstrate and promote stream restoration and sustainable land use practices for other growers and ranchers.

The projects involve the removal of two of the most significant migration barriers in the watershed: two low-flow or “Arizona” crossings, each of which was ranked as an ‘extremely difficult to impassable’ migration barrier in the Stoecker/Conception Coast study and was assigned a severity score of 0.9 (1.0 being impassable). Both sites are located north of Carpinteria and approximately a half mile apart in unincorporated Santa Barbara County (Exhibit 4).

The first project site is located on private property owned by Terry and Patty Bliss at 6217 Casitas Pass Road. [The site is designated as CA_2 on Exhibit 4]. The Bliss crossing is designated in the Stoecker/Conception Coast report as the “keystone barrier” on Carpinteria Creek, i.e. the most downstream barrier. More significantly, the report scored it as the number one priority among all keystone barriers in south coast streams for removal or modification (Exhibit 5).

The second project is located on property owned by the Cate School Corporation at 1717 Lillingston Canyon Road, above the confluence of Carpinteria and Gobernador Creeks and about half a mile upstream of the Bliss site (Exhibit 6). [The Cate School site is designated as CA_5 on Exhibit 4]

At each of the project locations, the crossing would be broken up in place and all concrete, rebar and metal pipe will be hauled off-site. The creek bed will be graded or filled with native cobble and rocks to match the existing gradient of the creek along the reach (estimated to be $\pm 2\%$) and to create pools and riffles consistent with the creek bed located upstream and downstream of the crossing. Matching funding will be used to install a prefabricated clear-span bridge on or adjacent to the same alignment as the current crossings. The bridges will be adequate to bear the weight of farm equipment and will not encroach on the stream channel, but they will require the construction of bridge abutments at both banks of the creek in the vicinity of the existing summer crossing. The extent of the abutments will generally match the areas on the banks where the summer crossing currently exists. The creek bed under the bridge will be comprised of natural substrate.

At the Bliss project site, a series of buried rock keyways will also be installed to stabilize the channel. A series of four deep rock boulder keys will be constructed to prevent channel head cutting and destabilizing the channel above the project site. The new bridge abutments will be surrounded by rock revetment. A bed degradation key will be connected to the rock revetment beneath the bridge to ensure channel bed stability at the base of the bridge (Exhibit 7).

The Cate School project will also include a bank stabilization component. Severe bank scouring and downcutting have created 15-20 foot-high vertical, denuded streambanks along a quarter of the reach, beginning about 300 feet downstream of the crossing. Soil bioengineering techniques will be used in certain sections to stabilize the streambank with root wads or other plant material in order to protect against erosion and undercutting, reduce sedimentation, and protect against bank collapse during high-velocity flows. In other areas, the vertical banks will be graded back to a less severe angle or gradient. As shown on Exhibit 8, this component of the project will involve a combination of techniques along four distinct reaches of the eroding bank and include installing boulder and root wad clusters to protect the toe of the bank, and regrading portions of the bank back to a 1.5 : 1 to a 1.75 : 1 slope.

Reconfiguring the streambank will involve soil removal, which will be disposed of and used elsewhere on site. It may also involve the removal and loss of non-native, invasive plant species and as many as 20 mature avocado trees growing next to the streambank, many of which are now immediately threatened by streambank erosion. Some small willows (and native understory

plants) that have colonized the stream channel may be impacted by grading to lay back vertical banks or by installation of bioengineering methods to control streambank erosion. After regrading and installation of bioengineered erosion control measures, these sections of the streambank would be replanted with native riparian vegetation. The focus of all revegetation efforts in the project will be on planting a community of species consistent with the native plant community along the middle reach of Carpinteria Creek, including western sycamore, coast live oak, arroyo willow, black cottonwood, blackberry and other riparian species.

The Community Environmental Council would undertake the work plan for each project in cooperation with the landowner. CEC is a nonprofit organization established under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and has operated successful environmental programs in Santa Barbara County for more than 30 years. Its watershed restoration program manages a number of stream restoration planning and implementation projects, including several funded by Conservancy grants: the South Coast Urban Streams Program (00-078), the Mission Creek/Museum Area Restoration Project (02-083), the Cate School Restoration Planning Project (02-088), and the Gobernador Creek Fish Passage Design Project (04-078).

Mauricio Gomez, the grantee's expected project manager for the Bliss and Cate School fish passage projects manages CEC's Watershed Restoration Program. He also facilitates and provides staff support for the Carpinteria Creek Watershed Coalition and serves as the co-chair of the Santa Barbara County Task Force of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project. Before joining CEC, Mr. Gomez worked as a restoration ecologist on the research staff of the University of California at Santa Barbara, where he was involved in constructing wetlands and restoring areas such as grasslands, vernal pools and dunes systems. He has over ten years of experience working in coastal and marine systems in Santa Barbara County.

SITE DESCRIPTION:

Carpinteria Creek is located in coastal Santa Barbara County, about 10 miles southeast of the City of Santa Barbara and 16 miles northwest of the City of Ventura, and drains a watershed of about 15 square miles, or about 9700 acres. The stream and its major tributary, Gobernador Creek, originate in the Santa Ynez Mountains and in less than eight miles drop more than 4,700 feet from their headwaters to the Pacific. In the mountains the creek flows through narrow canyons with steep slopes of exposed bedrock, large boulders and thin topsoil. Downstream it flows through orchards, agricultural fields, and residential areas before passing through the City of Carpinteria to its mouth at Carpinteria State Beach.

The upper watershed contains a thick overstory of riparian trees and native plant understory. Although development has altered the lower portion of the watershed, many sections still retain a dense canopy. While the quality of habitat is somewhat compromised in the lower reaches compared with that in the upper reaches of the creek, restoration potential is high because (unlike other streams along the south coast) there is no concrete channelization anywhere along the creek.

At both sites, the dominant vegetation communities along the creek are riparian woodland and riparian scrub, with an active avocado orchard extending to the top of the bank in some areas.

Native trees in the riparian woodland include western sycamore, coast live oak, arroyo willow and black cottonwood. The creek banks and understory contain a mixture of native and non-native species, dominated by such natives as California blackberry, poison oak, toyon, coyote bush, and mugwort. Nonnative plants include blue gum eucalyptus, *Arundo donax*, German ivy, periwinkle and sweet fennel. In addition to trout populations, the watershed provides habitat for tidewater goby, mule deer, arroyo toad, coast range newt, Belding's savannah sparrow, red-tailed hawk, two-striped garter snake, and least Bell's vireo.

The average channel gradient through both project sites is between 1.8 and 2.0 percent. The channel bedload is generally dominated by small- to medium-size cobbles in the 6 to 12 inch class. Scattered throughout the creek bed are large multi-ton boulders up to several feet in diameter. During summer months the creek is generally dry.

Bliss site: Located 2.1 miles upstream from the Pacific, the existing low-water crossing on the Bliss property is the primary access from Casitas Pass Road (State Highway 192) to the Bliss's avocado orchards, agricultural operations and family residence; it also provides informal access to several adjacent agricultural parcels. The crossing is 28 feet wide with an overall length across the creek of about 100 feet. The height of the crossing, from the bottom of the downstream pool to the downstream lip of the crossing, is over eight feet. Large boulders have been placed below the crossing to reduce scour and undercutting of the structure.

The **Cate School site** is a 17-acre parcel located above the confluence of Carpinteria Creek and Gobernador Creek and about half a mile upstream of the Bliss crossing. The property includes about 1,920 linear feet of stream channel, an avocado orchard in agricultural production, and two residences that provide housing for Cate School faculty. The northwestern bank of the creek is deeply incised along a quarter of the reach, with 15-foot vertical, denuded streambanks.

At the northeast corner of the Cate School site is an instream road crossing that provides the only access between the lower section of the parcel and the upper part of the orchard. The crossing consists of a shallow, concave 76-foot long concrete road that spans the stream channel. Because of scouring that has undercut the substrate support for the crossing, the structure is on the verge of failure and presents a hazard to vehicle passage and to downstream property during flood flows. The crossing overlays rocks and boulders that constitute the substrate of the creek. Upstream of the crossing, however, a large scour hole 2 feet deep by 3 feet wide has undercut the middle of the structure and washed away streambed material that the concrete was originally poured on, producing a 15-foot wide by 17-foot long void over 2-feet deep. Downstream scour has created a 4-foot drop from the downstream edge of the crossing to the deepest part of the streambed.

PROJECT HISTORY:

For more than four years, the Coastal Conservancy and other state agencies have supported community efforts to enhance and restore Carpinteria Creek. A South Coast Urban Streams grant from the Conservancy to CEC in 2001 funded CEC's work with the Carpinteria Creek Watershed Coalition. (That group is a broad-based task force of rural and urban landowners, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations whose vision is to improve stream and watershed conditions for steelhead recovery; to assist landowners in protecting their property

from bank erosion; to restore the habitat and water quality of the Creek; and to generate public and landowner support for creek protection and enhancement. Its members include resource professionals from both DFG and NMFS who have assisted the Coalition in identifying and developing restoration projects.)

From the beginning, the Coalition identified both the Bliss and Cate School barriers as priorities for steelhead recovery and sought funding for site analysis and conceptual designs for their modification or removal.

In February 2002, CEC applied on behalf of the Coalition for a grant from the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project to fund planning and implementation of the Cate School restoration project. That project was ranked as a Tier 1 project on the Recovery Project's work plan, and the Coastal Conservancy funded the planning component of the project by awarding a \$70,000 grant to CEC. Using those monies, CEC contracted for site investigations of existing hydrology, hydraulics, geomorphic conditions, baseline conditions, and to define opportunities and constraints. As part of the contract CEC prepared a set of project alternatives for removal or modification of the low-flow crossing and stabilization of the vertical streambank downstream from the barrier.

Funding for preparation of similar studies and design alternatives for the Bliss project was provided by grants to the County Water Agency from the Wetlands Recovery Project's Small Grant Program (which is supported by monies contributed by Earth Island Institute) and from the California Resources Agency under Part B (Coastal Habitat Protection) of the State's Coastal Resources Grant Program.

Removal of migration barriers along Carpinteria Creek has become a regional priority as well. In 2003, the Coastal Conservancy awarded a \$453,000 grant to the Santa Barbara County Water Agency to create a Santa Barbara County Fish Passage Design Project that would plan, design and permit a select number of barrier removal projects along the county's south coast. The Water Agency, along with the Santa Barbara County Task Force of the Wetlands Recovery Project, organized a community workshop to bring together local fisheries interests with statewide experts to discuss considerations for project selection and prioritization. A technical advisory committee, composed of resource agencies and community representatives, then met for much of last year and selected Carpinteria Creek as the top priority watershed in the region to focus efforts for fish passage barrier removal.

Currently efforts are underway to remove or modify almost all other significant migration barriers in the watershed. Last year the Coastal Conservancy awarded a \$40,000 grant to CEC to prepare engineering designs, environmental documentation, and permit applications for the removal of three barriers to fish passage on Gobernador Creek (SCC project number 04-078). The monies supplement funds that CEC received from DFG and the Wendy P McCaw Foundation to conduct outreach to private landowners and develop potential projects to remove or modify the remaining major artificial barriers located on private property.

To implement conceptual designs for modification of the remaining barriers in the watershed, the County Flood Control District has submitted grant proposals for funds to modify the Gobernador Creek debris basin and CEC (in collaboration with private landowners) has submitted grant

proposals to remove or modify other barriers on private property. Retrofitting the debris basin to accommodate fish passage would open up more than five miles of upstream habitat that are currently blocked by the dam.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$510,000
NRCS	250,000
Landowner contributions	120,000
In-lieu mitigation funds ¹	<u>100,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$980,000

The expected source of Conservancy funds is a FY 03/04 appropriation to the Conservancy from the “California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Fund” (Proposition 40). The Proposition 40 funds were appropriated to the Conservancy under the Watershed, Clean Beaches and Water Quality section of Proposition 40. Authorized projects include those that, like the proposed project, protect or restore fish and wildlife habitat within coastal watersheds, restore riparian habitat and reduce unnatural erosion and sedimentation of coastal watersheds. Proposition 40 also requires the Conservancy to give priority to grant projects with matching funds (Public Resources Code Section 5096.651). The proposed project is supported by a commitment by others to provide matching funds.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 6 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-31270), regarding enhancement of coastal resources.

In establishing the Coastal Conservancy, the Legislature found that important fish and wildlife habitat and environmental resources within the coastal zone have been degraded by the impacts of incompatible land uses (Public Resources Code § 31053), and it authorized the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations to enhance coastal resources that have suffered the loss of natural values because of the improper location of improvements or incompatible land uses (Public Resources Code §§ 31251). Consistent with these provisions, the proposed project would lead to improvements in the quality and availability of habitat in the Carpinteria Creek watershed for the benefit of endangered southern California steelhead, an important coastal resource whose numbers have dwindled because road crossings and other structures have impeded passage to historic spawning and rearing habitat.

¹ CEC has received \$100,000 from Level 3 Communications, Inc. under an agreement between Level 3 and the local office of the California Department of Fish & Game. Those funds represent fees in lieu of mitigation for environmental impacts associated with construction of Level 3’s fiber optic network in Santa Barbara County from 2000 to 2004 and are to be administered by CEC for on-the-ground stream restoration to improve steelhead habitat in Carpinteria Creek.

The proposed authorization is consistent with § 31252, in that the certified Local Coastal Programs of both Santa Barbara County and the City of Santa Barbara identify coastal streams as requiring public action to resolve resource protection problems, as described in the “Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies” section below.

The proposed authorization is consistent with § 31253, which states that the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of any coastal resource enhancement project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

The Coastal Conservancy's *Strategic Plan* (2003) emphasizes the importance of the Conservancy's role in removing barriers to historic spawning and rearing areas for the state's declining steelhead population (pages 22-23). The Carpinteria Creek Watershed is specifically cited in the Geographic/Goal Matrix of the *Strategic Plan* (page 55) as a locus for Goals 5 (Coast/Ocean Habitat), 6 (Wetlands, Rivers & Watersheds) and 7 (Coastal Agriculture).

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective A**, the proposed project would preserve, restore, and enhance coastal habitats through a comprehensive restoration program for a regionally-significant steelhead stream, and increase biological diversity in a coastal area by removing two critical barriers to upstream migration, opening access to 15 miles of historic spawning and rearing habitat.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective B**, the proposed project would help enhance and restore longitudinal connectivity within the Carpinteria Creek habitat corridor, benefiting endangered steelhead and other regionally important species.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective A**, the proposed project would help implement the Carpinteria Creek Watershed Plan and implement two projects to improve habitat and upstream passage for anadromous fish.

Consistent with **Goal 7, Objective B**, the proposed project would also assist two agricultural landowners in the Carpinteria Valley in reducing impacts of their operations on wildlife habitat and water quality, and help demonstrate to other growers in the area the value and effectiveness of such conservation measures.

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 proposed project is supported by Assemblymember Pedro Nava and First District County Supervisor Salud Carbajal, as well as by several local community-based organizations including the Carpinteria Creek Watershed Coalition and the Santa Barbara County Task Force of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (see Exhibit 9).
4. **Location:** Both proposed project sites are located within the coastal zone of the County of Santa Barbara.
5. **Need:** The number of spawning southern California steelhead trout—a federally listed endangered species—in Carpinteria Creek has declined to a small fraction of historic levels, and continues to fall. Neither the landowners, Community Environmental Council, nor other members of the Carpinteria Creek Watershed Coalition have sufficient funds to complete either of these projects and must secure significant external funding if either project is to proceed. At this time, neither project can be implemented without Conservancy participation.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** As noted above, Carpinteria Creek has been designated in the *Steelhead Assessment and Recovery Opportunities in Southern Santa Barbara County, California*, Matt W. Stoecker and Conception Coast Project, June 2002; http://www.conceptioncoast.org/projects_steelhead.html as the highest priority watershed for restoration of endangered steelhead populations along the south coast of Santa Barbara County. Removal or modification of both of these barriers is critical to steelhead recovery in this watershed. In addition, the watershed supports a number of other regionally significant species, including tidewater goby, arroyo toad, coast range newt, Belding’s savannah sparrow, two-striped garter snake, and least Bell’s vireo.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** The continued existence of barriers to upstream fish migration presents a threat to the long-term viability of steelhead populations in Carpinteria Creek. The proposed projects would provide permanent solutions to two “extremely difficult” migration barriers and would implement the initial stage of a concerted plan to remove all major artificial barriers in the watershed. The existing creek crossings are facing immediate risk of failure and without the public/private cooperation proposed in this staff report, the landowners may elect to repair the crossings without the benefit to fish passage and riparian habitat.
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
12. **Readiness:** Community Environmental Council and the other participants in the Carpinteria Creek Watershed Coalition have completed the preliminary designs and environmental review for both projects and are in the final stages of all remaining approvals necessary to construct them. If CEC can secure the remainder of the funding, it will proceed with construction of both projects this summer.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** Publication of the *Inventory of Barriers to Fish Passage in California’s Coastal Watersheds* in 2005 signals the Conservancy’s focus on and commitment to the improvement of fish passage in coastal streams. As noted in the “Project

History” section above, the Conservancy has funded many of the initial efforts to achieve steelhead recovery in Carpinteria Creek. Implementation of these two projects will serve as the first step in removing or modifying all major artificial barriers in the watershed.

15. **Cooperation:** Development of both projects represents a significant level of cooperation among CEC, the landowners, and the many members of the Carpinteria Creek Watershed Coalition, including staff from DFG and NMFS who provided design assistance.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is consistent with policies in the Santa Barbara County Coastal Plan (January 1982) that provide for the protection and enhancement of environmentally sensitive habitat areas.

Section 3.9.2 of the County’s LCP (at 116) defines environmentally sensitive habitat areas as those in which plant or animal life or their habitats are rare or especially valuable because of their special nature or role in an ecosystem. Under the LCP such areas include rare and endangered species habitats, wetlands, streams, and “specialized wildlife habitats which are vital to species survival.” Such habitats are to be preserved and protected. In addition, Policies 9-38 and 9-39 of the County’s LCP prohibit any structures within a stream corridor, especially dams or other structures that prevent upstream migration of anadromous fish (unless other measures are used to allow fish to bypass obstacles).

Each of the proposed projects would be consistent with the goals and policies of the LCP by protecting habitat for the endangered southern California steelhead and removing structures that prevent their upstream migration. The proposed project is also consistent with Section 3.3.4 of the LCP and its attendant watershed protection policies, whose objectives include the long-term preservation of the biological productivity of coastal streams and wetlands.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN/ STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN:

This spring, the Coalition and the Cachuma Resource Conservation District completed a comprehensive assessment and management plan for the entire Carpinteria Creek watershed. The project was funded by a \$109,065 grant awarded by the Department of Fish & Game, which has approved the plan, *Carpinteria Creek Watershed Plan* (March 2005). The 180-page plan examined historic conditions, sediment sources and biological resources; surveyed stream habitat conditions using Fish and Game protocols; analyzed stream health using current and historic water quality data; evaluated watershed conditions; and inventoried recommended projects for barrier removal or modification, bank stabilization, invasive species eradication and other ecological restoration. The watershed plan, which incorporates the analysis and recommendations of the Stoecker/Conception Coast barrier study of the Carpinteria Creek watershed, includes modification of both the Bliss and Cate School crossings among its highest category of recommended restoration projects.

The projects would also help implement several major regional goals and Santa Barbara County objectives in the Regional Strategy of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project. The project would help meet one of County’s key objectives: improving steelhead habitat “by

modifying and removing passage barriers and enhancing habitat. . . and [helping] implement high-priority steelhead recovery projects identified in Conception Coast Project's South Coast Steelhead Recovery Study." It would also promote at least four of the six Regional Goals of the Wetlands Recovery Project: restoring stream corridors in coastal watersheds, recovering native habitat and species diversity; integrating wetlands recovery with other public objectives; and promoting education related to coastal watersheds.

Because the project will facilitate the restoration of fish and wildlife habitat in coastal watersheds and wetlands, the project is also consistent with the Water Quality Control Plan for the Central Coastal Basin (adopted by the Regional Water Quality Control Board Central Coast Region in 1994 and reviewed every three years) in that it will further the following beneficial use objectives: estuarine habitat; wildlife habitat; rare, threatened or endangered species; and migration of aquatic organisms.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

In 1991, the Santa Barbara County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (District) certified a Programmatic Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) under the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") for County-wide routine creek maintenance activities. The District certified an Updated Routine Maintenance Program FEIR in 2001 (see Exhibit 2) to incorporate new information regarding threatened and endangered species listed since 1992; include additional geographic areas and analytic tools; and improve the standard maintenance practices. Each year the District prepares an Annual Routine Maintenance Plan, conducts public workshops, and completes CEQA review for the planned work program. The Annual Routine Maintenance Plan includes a description of the work to be performed, the presence of sensitive biological resources, impacts of the intended activities on biological resources, standard maintenance practices to reduce impacts, and restoration measures. The District documents impacts and mitigation of each activity and confirming that all planned activities are consistent with the adopted Program EIR. An annual Addendum to the EIR is then approved.

The proposed projects to which the Conservancy would contribute were considered and approved by the County in the 2003-2004 annual Addendum to the EIR for the Santa Barbara County Flood Control Routine Maintenance (see Exhibit 3). The District included the Bliss and Cate School sites in its Annual Routine Maintenance Plan to assist the CEC in compliance with CEQA and streamline permitting requirements. (The inclusion in the District's CEQA documentation of projects to be undertaken by other entities is itself consistent with mitigation measure F-1 contained in the 2001 FEIR which requires the District to provide technical and regulatory assistance to other parties that seek to remove or modify fish passage impediments, and to assist in acquiring access easements and permits.)

The 2003/2004 Addendum addresses nine projects, the first two of which are the subject of the Conservancy's action. The Addendum then considers the potential impacts of the projects collectively, by type of impact. The two projects in question are not capable of causing all of the types of impacts identified. Further, although some of the impacts identified were considered Class 1 (unavoidable significant)—under the worst case scenario assumptions of the 2001 EIR—the County found with respect to the 2003/2004 Addendum that, due to the limited scope of the projects and the current state of the creek, the nine actual projects will not cause the worst case scenario. Therefore, the Addendum treats the impacts described below as Class II (significant

impacts that can be mitigated). The Addendum then requires mitigation measures for the potential adverse effects, and imposes mitigation monitoring and reporting, as required by CEQA.

The Bliss and Cate School projects had the potential to affect hydrology and water quality by removing vegetation and obstructions that cause channel resistance. The Addendum mitigates for this by requiring the application of hydraulic principles regarding creation and maintenance of channel stability and sediment transport equilibrium; in these cases, these have been incorporated into the project design. The movement of equipment in the channel bed could also disrupt and loosen sediments. The CEC and its consultants considered and evaluated the hydraulic factors in the design of the proposed projects consistent with mitigation measures H-1 and B-7. The CEC will minimize removal of vegetation from the channel bottom (mitigation measure B-2). Also, accidental spills or leakage of fuel and/or oil from heavy equipment could cause discharge of pollutants to the creek. This will be prevented by fueling and maintaining equipment outside of the channel course and having spill containment and clean-up procedures in the event of an accidental spill or leak (mitigation measure W-4).

The 2003/2004 Addendum also identifies potential impacts to riparian habitat, rare plants, fish, aquatic species and wildlife. Construction of this project during the summer months, when the creek is dry, and restoration of the disturbed areas (mitigation measure B-4) will reduce the impacts to less-than-significant levels.

Minor temporary impacts to air quality and noise would be mitigated to insignificant levels by implementing Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District (APCD) approved measures for heavy duty diesel construction equipment to minimize NO_x emissions and minimizing fugitive dust emissions; and limiting work to weekdays and the hours of 7:30 AM and 4:30 PM, and equipping trucks and other vehicles with functioning and properly maintained muffler systems. The Addendum cites a remote chance of disturbing buried prehistoric and historic archaeological sites and isolated artifacts. The Addendum mitigates for this by requiring consultation with a qualified archaeologist if cultural materials are unexpectedly uncovered during project implementation.

The proposed Conservancy resolution requires CEC to implement, or cause implementation of the relevant mitigation measures contained in the 2003/2004 Addendum. Staff believes that the activities at the Bliss and Cate School sites recommended for Conservancy funding, with the mitigation and mitigation monitoring/reporting proposed, do not have the potential for a significant adverse effect on the environment.

Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination for the project.