

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 8, 2005

San Francisco Bay Community-Based Habitat Restoration Projects

File No. 05-089
Project Manager: Brenda Buxton

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$100,000 to Save San Francisco Bay Association to carry out six community-based habitat restoration projects around San Francisco Bay.

LOCATION: Alameda, Santa Clara, San Mateo, Marin, and Sonoma Counties (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Locations

Exhibit 2: Project Descriptions

Exhibit 3: 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 the disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$100,000 to Save San Francisco Bay Association to restore habitat at six San Francisco Bay shoreline locations in conjunction with volunteers and students, as follows:

- Schoolhouse Creek in the Eastshore State Park (Berkeley)
 - Damon Slough in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Shoreline (Oakland)
 - San Francisquito Creek in the Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve within the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge (Palo Alto)
 - Bair Island in the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge (San Mateo)
 - East Marin Island in the Marin Islands National Wildlife Refuge and State Ecological Preserve (San Rafael)
 - Tolay Creek in the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge (unincorporated Sonoma County)
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For each of these six projects, prior to the commencement of the project and disbursement of Conservancy funds to implement it, the grantee shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a final work program, schedule, budget, names of any intended contractors, and a plan for acknowledging Conservancy funding. For each project site, the grantee shall also submit for review and approval an agreement or other instrument providing for access to the site for project implementation and subsequent monitoring.”

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 authorization is consistent with Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31164 regarding the Conservancy’s mandate to address the resource 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 grantee 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.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This authorization would grant up to \$100,000 to Save San Francisco Bay Association (Save The Bay) to carry out six community-based habitat restoration projects. Each of the projects has been developed in cooperation with the corresponding public agency landowner and other stakeholders, and each—except Marin Islands restoration--will be carried out as part of Save The Bay’s environmental education program for students in grades K-12, supplemented with help from adult volunteers. Because the Marin Islands can be reached only by kayak, restoration may be accomplished by adult volunteers only.

The six high marsh and transitional area restoration projects are a priority for Conservancy assistance because of the regional significance of the fish and wildlife habitat and because they are a cost-effective, low-impact way to accomplish removal of non-native species and replacement with native species and constitute an investment in long-term stewardship through environmental education and volunteer participation.

With Conservancy funding and 2:1 matching funds from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Save the Bay, within approximately one year will undertake the following activities necessary to accomplish habitat restoration at the six project sites:

- Hire a landscape architect to refine existing planting plans, as needed.
- Propagate plants for each site, mostly in its existing on-site nurseries.
- Schedule school and volunteer groups.
- Purchase equipment.

- Manage field operations, including removal of non-native plants, installation of natives, and monitoring plant establishment.
- Coordinate with project participants in advance of and throughout the project periods.

Additional information about each site and the activities to be undertaken is included in Exhibit 2 to this staff report.

Save The Bay is the San Francisco Bay Area's oldest and largest membership organization working exclusively to celebrate, protect and restore the Bay and its watershed. Its Canoes In Sloughs Watershed Education Program (to which the Conservancy contributed in 2000) has provided science education on the Bay for more than 30,000 students and teachers. Save The Bay has also developed its own program curriculum to aid teachers in incorporating Bay studies into classroom science learning.

In collaboration with local, regional, state, and federal agency site owners and managers, Save The Bay is now engaged with students and volunteers in restoring high marsh and transitional uplands at the six sites along the Bay shoreline that are the subject of this staff recommendation. Save The Bay calls this program "Community-Based Restoration." It has grown and evolved over several years and is managed by staff who have experience and demonstrated expertise in coordinating with public agency partners and technical consultants; cultivating the thousands of plants needed annually at the restoration sites; and organizing and deploying students and volunteers to collect native plant seeds, remove non-native plants from restoration sites, install native plants, and monitor plant survival; and adapting restoration strategies based on results. Save The Bay's Community-Based Restoration Program pursues all of these activities using local students and volunteers who make these labor-intensive aspects of wetland restoration feasible and who, it is hoped, will develop an affinity for their sites and express it through ongoing stewardship.

Site Description: The six project sites comprise 1.0 - to 4.4-acre portions of high marsh and transitional uplands contiguous with saltmarshes being restored at Schoolhouse Creek in Eastshore State Park in Berkeley; Damon Slough in Martin Luther King, Jr. Shoreline in Oakland; San Francisquito Creek in the Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve within the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge in Palo Alto; Bair Island in the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge in San Mateo, East Marin Island in the Marin Islands National Wildlife Refuge and State Ecological Preserve in San Rafael; and Tolay Creek in the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge in unincorporated Sonoma County (Exhibit 1). The total of approximately 18 acres that Save The Bay proposes to restore through its Community-Based Restoration Program this year will add to the approximately 57 acres that it reports having restored through the same program over the past several years.

The high marsh and uplands at the project sites have been disturbed by diking, filling, and informal refuse dumping, all of which have degraded or destroyed the natural habitat and enabled invasion by non-native flora and fauna. Since the high marsh and transition areas are integral parts of the saltmarsh ecosystems, their restoration is an important facet of saltmarsh restoration. Once returned to an approximation of their natural condition, the project sites will provide refugia for birds and small mammals during high tide, nesting for resident songbirds and certain shorebirds whose nests "raft" during high tides, foraging for raptors, and seeds and

insects for additional fauna. Among the endangered species expected to benefit from the restoration are the saltmarsh harvest mouse and the California clapper rail.

The project sites are all owned and managed by local, regional, state, and federal agencies. These agencies are in the process of restoring the adjacent saltmarshes and have welcomed the assistance of Save The Bay's Community-Based Restoration Program with the labor-intensive task of first removing non-native vegetation and trash and then collecting seed, cultivating and installing plants, and monitoring replanted areas. Each of the agencies has provided a letter of support for Save The Bay's ongoing work (Exhibit 3).

Additional information about each of the project sites and proposed restoration activities is attached as Exhibit 2 to this staff report.

Project History: The Conservancy has provided grant funding to many San Francisco Bay Area nonprofit organizations for small-scale habitat restoration using students and volunteers, where the restoration serves the additional goals of providing activity-based environmental education and cultivating a sense of stewardship for the restored areas and the larger Bay ecosystem. Most recently, the Conservancy conducted a grant round culminating in the award in August 2003 of fourteen grants totaling \$665,000 to nonprofit organizations for environmental education and restoration projects at wetland and upland sites around the Bay Area. Most of those projects have been successfully completed.

Among the August 2003 grants was one for \$90,000 to Save The Bay for removal of invasive plants and growing and planting of native wetland and riparian species at several Bay shoreline sites, including three that are among the sites in the current project proposal. The nursery operations established under the 2003 grant have been successful and will be enlarged upon at the three sites for the proposed additional restoration. The restoration authorized under the 2003 grant was successfully completed; the proposed restoration will be on other portions of shoreline.

In addition to the small grants, the Conservancy contributed significant funding for property acquisition, wetland restoration, and/or public access at each of the six proposed project sites. The work to be undertaken by Save The Bay at these sites would complement prior Conservancy-funded activities.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$100,000
NOAA—Restore America's Estuaries	<u>200,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$300,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is the FY03 appropriation from the California Clean Water, Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks Coastal Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 40) to the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed projects are undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 (Sections 31160-31164) and Section 31119 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, to address natural resource goals in the San Francisco Bay Area. The proposed restoration projects will protect, restore, and enhance natural habitats of regional importance as called for in Section 31162(b). Furthermore, by bringing urban school children to the shoreline wetland areas and engaging them in restoration work, the projects will "promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes," consistent with Section 31162(d).

Consistent with Section 31163(b), the Conservancy's proposed grant will support joint efforts between the public agencies that own and manage the six project sites and the private nonprofit organization that is the grantee for the purpose of enabling broad-based local involvement in support of habitat restoration goals of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. The projects also meet the criteria established in Section 31163(c), as they are supported by the regional San Francisco Bay Plan, serve a regional constituency, can be implemented in a timely way, and include matching funds.

The educational component of these restoration projects is consistent with Chapter 3, Section 31119(a)(1), which authorizes the Conservancy to "undertake educational projects and programs for pupils in kindergarten to grade 12, relating to the preservation, protection, enhancement, and maintenance of coastal resources and may award grants to nonprofit organizations...for those purposes." Save The Bay will directly preserve, protect, enhance, and maintain coastal resources by engaging students in hands-on restoration projects and teaching them how their work benefits the environment.

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

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective C**, the six recommended projects will expand or improve educational that are tied to on-the-ground restoration projects and serve urban populations.

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:** All of the restoration sites are the locus of larger, ongoing restoration projects which have had strong public support. In addition, the subject projects expand upon restoration projects already underway with the participation to-date of thousands of students and many adult volunteers through Save the Bay's Community-Based Restoration Program. Letters of support have also been provided by the public agencies that own and manage the property at each site (Exhibit 3).
4. **Location:** All of the projects are along the shoreline of San Francisco Bay in the Conservancy's jurisdiction.
5. **Need:** The grant that Save The Bay has obtained from NOAA for FY05/06 is not sufficient to fully fund the proposed projects. Save The Bay needs the Conservancy's funding in order to utilize the NOAA funds for the intended purposes, serve all of the schools participating in the Community-Based Restoration Program, and accomplish the intended habitat restoration.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** All of the project sites are part of San Francisco Bay wetlands of regional importance. The high marsh and transitional habitat are essential components of fully functioning, self-sustaining saltmarshes.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** The high marshes and transition areas at the project sites are habitat for endangered species including the saltmarsh harvest mouse and the California clapper rail. The habitat needs to be restored to support the continued existence of these and other plant and animal species of concern.
8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The proposed projects will result in fish and wildlife habitat restoration, environmental education, and cultivating long-term stewardship of Bay wetlands.
9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
11. **Innovation:** Save The Bay's Community-Based Restoration Program serves as a necessary and promising new alternative for low-cost habitat restoration and, potentially, for cultivating a source of volunteer land stewards who will help protect and maintain Bay wetlands over the long term.
12. **Readiness:** The proposed projects will be a continuation of the Community-Based Restoration Program that Save The Bay has been running successfully for several years. As indicated in the letters of support (Exhibit 3), it has coordinated with the public agencies that own and manage the project sites and already has nurseries operating at several.
15. **Cooperation:** The projects entail cooperation between Save The Bay, public agency property owners and managers, school districts, and volunteers.

CONSISTENCY WITH SAN FRANCISCO BAY PLAN:

The San Francisco Bay Plan (as amended 2002), in Part III: The Bay as a Resource: Findings and Policies includes the following policy regarding Fish, Other Aquatic Organisms and Wildlife:

1. To assure the benefits of fish, other aquatic organisms and wildlife for future generations, to the greatest extent feasible, the Bay's tidal marshes, tidal flats, and subtidal habitat should be conserved, restored and increased.

Consistent with this Bay Plan policy, the proposed project will restore high elevation tidal marsh and the transition habitat that provides refuge from high tides and other complementary habitat.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed authorization would result in six high marsh and transitional habitat restoration projects around the San Francisco Bay. Each project would be undertaken by volunteers—mostly schoolchildren—and would entail removing exotic species and growing and planting appropriate native species. These projects will not involve grading, construction, removal of scenic trees, or herbicide applications; nor will the projects entail removing exotic species, which would require obtaining permits from regulatory agencies.

Each of the projects is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Public Resources Code Sections 21000 *et seq.* The restoration activities are exempt under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15304 (minor alterations to land not involving removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees); and under Section 15301(i) (maintenance of wildlife areas and stream channels to protect fish and wildlife resources).

The proposed educational activities will have no physical effects on the environment and therefore, under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15378, are not “projects” for purposes of CEQA.

Upon Conservancy approval, staff will file CEQA Notices of Exemption.