

## COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
February 3, 2006

### **PRINCE MEMORIAL GREENWAY PIERSON REACH RESTORATION**

File No. 05-053  
Project Manager: Betsy Wilson

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse \$400,000 to the City of Santa Rosa for the construction of instream habitat enhancement features and riparian planting for the Prince Memorial Greenway, Pierson Reach in downtown Santa Rosa along Santa Rosa Creek.

**LOCATION:** City of Santa Rosa, Sonoma County (See Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

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#### **EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Maps
  - Exhibit 2: Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration
  - Exhibit 3: Site Photos
  - 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 31160-31164. of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed four hundred thousand dollars (\$400,000) to the City of Santa Rosa to construct instream habitat enhancement features and riparian planting along the Pierson Reach of the Prince Memorial Greenway project on Santa Rosa Creek, subject to the condition that the project shall not commence and no funds shall be disbursed for the project until the Executive Officer of the Conservancy has reviewed and approved in writing:

1. A project work program, budget, and timeline.
2. The names of any contractors the City will retain to carry out all or part of the project.
3. A signing plan that acknowledges Conservancy funding.
4. Documentation that the City has obtained all permits and approvals required for the project under federal, state, and local law.”

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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 the purposes and objectives of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31164.
  2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
  3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed the Mitigated Negative Declaration as adopted on January 24, 2006 by the City of Santa Rosa, and as attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 2, and finds that there is no substantial evidence that the implementation of the Greenway Pierson Reach project will have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382.”
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### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

**Project Description:** This authorization would allow for disbursement of \$400,000 to the City of Santa Rosa for the removal of grouted concrete and non-native vegetation, planting with native riparian species, bank stabilization, and construction of stream habitat structures along a 1,900-foot stretch of Santa Rosa Creek called Pierson Reach. The City has undertaken restoration of the creek through a multi-year effort known as the Prince Memorial Greenway Project (“Greenway Project”), the last segment of which is the proposed Pierson Reach Project. The City proposes to restore this last segment in a similar manner as was successfully done for the previous five phases of the Greenway Project, transforming the creek from a concrete channel built in the 1960s to a meandering healthy stream with riparian habitat. In addition to enhancing habitat conditions for fish and wildlife, the overall Greenway Project creates stream-side trails and overlooks, establishes alternative transportation pathways, improves water quality, maintains the flood capacity, revitalizes the downtown area, and provides educational opportunities for the citizens of Santa Rosa. The Conservancy previously contributed to the construction of public access improvements along the Creek as part of Phase 2004 of the Greenway Project. While the subject proposal is for the Conservancy to assist with creek restoration, other funding sources will allow the City to build access improvements and educational signage in conjunction with the stream restoration of the Pierson Reach stretch.

Specifically, the proposed project is to remove rock and grouted concrete which currently lines the creek, create pools and a low flow channel, construct boulder weir structures, install boulder and redwood clustered structures, stabilize banks, and re-vegetate banks with native riparian plant species. Restoration of the 1,900-foot Pierson Reach stretch will complete approximately 1 mile of restored stream that includes a mix of riffle, pool, and riparian habitats. Restoration will improve habitat for federally listed as threatened, steelhead trout and Chinook salmon, and for other riparian bird and fish species. The threatened fish species were once abundant here, and the endangered California yellow-billed cuckoo and the California freshwater shrimp also once inhabited the Santa Rosa Creek, but are no longer present. Completion of the project will increase the chances for return of these species, and recovery of the steelhead trout and Chinook

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salmon because it will provide access to 14 miles of excellent spawning and rearing habitat upstream, and connect to the existing riparian canopy downstream.

The Santa Rosa Public Works Department has successfully administered a multitude of grants for previous phases of the Greenway Project, and for other restoration and multi-use access ways along the Santa Rosa Creek and around the community. For example, the City recently completed two habitat restoration projects along Brush Creek, and in the process, developed expertise in fisheries biology and wetland ecology.

**Site Description:** Santa Rosa Creek is a 22-mile long tributary of the Laguna de Santa Rosa, which flows into the Russian River. Rainbow/steelhead trout were once abundant in the Russian River and up to the headwaters of the Santa Rosa Creek. The downtown section of the creek was channelized in the 1960s for flood control purposes, and is now lined with concrete grout, and is essentially devoid of riparian vegetation, greatly impeding the use of the creek by juvenile fish.

The Greenway Project includes fourteen acres and encompasses a 110-foot-wide, 4,100-linear-foot open space corridor that includes Santa Rosa Creek in downtown Santa Rosa. The corridor is adjacent to businesses, schools, and residences and is a central point of city and county transportation linkages. The Pierson Reach covers a 1,900-foot section between Railroad/Olive Street to Pierson Street adjacent to historic Railroad Square. Currently the site is a concrete flood control channel owned by the Sonoma County Water Agency and offers little instream or riparian habitat (see Exhibit 3). A paved pedestrian pathway is located on the north side of the creek with connections to the Santa Rosa Creek, Joe Rodota, and future SMART trails.

Although the current habitat of the creek is far from ideal, rainbow/steelhead trout have been documented as rearing in the project area. The creek is also home to numerous native and non-native aquatic species. The habitat restoration component of the Pierson Reach is designed to enhance an additional 1,900 feet of anadromous fish and riparian habitat and improve water quality while maintaining the flood carrying capabilities of the channel.

**Project History:** The Greenway project is rooted in a strong community-based effort. After the Prince family bequeathed the City a \$4,000,000 gift to create a public area along the creek, citizens formed the Committee for Restoring Santa Rosa Creek in 1989. The group sponsored a series of public workshops that led to the development of the Santa Rosa Creek Master Plan that was adopted by the City, Sonoma County and the Sonoma County Water Agency in 1993. The group continued to work with the City and the Greenway project was developed.

The City received a Conservancy grant in 2003 for an earlier phase of the Greenway project, upstream of Pierson Reach. This earlier project, called “Phase 2004”, was associated with the construction of a recreation pathway and fencing improvements to enhance pedestrian access along the Greenway.

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**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Following are the proposed funding sources for the Pierson Reach Restoration project:

Coastal Conservancy	<u>\$400,000</u>
<i><u>Secured</u></i>	
Natural Resources Conservation Service	\$2,000,000
Transportation Development Act	\$300,000
CA Department of Transportation	\$250,000
City of Santa Rosa – Storm Water Utility Fee	\$250,000
CA Department of Water Resources – Urban Streams	\$200,000
CA Department of Fish and Game	\$159,000
Transportation Fund For Clean Air	<u>\$140,000</u>
<u>Subtotal:</u> \$3,299,000	

*Pending*

Prop. 50 River Parkways Program	\$1,000,000
Natural Resources Conservation Service*	\$754,875
Zone 1A Flood Control Program*	\$354,000
CA State Parks Habitat Conservation Fund	<u>\$150,000</u>
<u>Subtotal:</u> \$2,258,875	

<b>Total Project Cost for Pierson Reach Restoration Project</b>	<b>\$5,957,875</b>
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\*Finalizing agreements

The Conservancy's contribution of \$400,000 is expected to come from its FY 04/05 appropriation from the "California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002" (Proposition 40) for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. This funding source may be used for the acquisition, development and restoration of land and water resources in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The proposed project serves to assist in the restoration of the Pierson Reach of Santa Rosa Creek, a water resource that has been severely degraded. In addition, as discussed below, the project is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21. Proposition 40 also requires the Conservancy to give priority to grant projects with matching funds. The bulk of the Pierson Reach Restoration project is supported by matching funds. As shown above, the City has already received a commitment for \$3,299,000 of funding for this project and the City is finalizing agreements for \$1,108,875 of the remaining pending funds; these sources combined represent 74% of the total project cost. The City anticipates starting construction on the Pierson Reach Restoration project in the summer of 2006.

Awards for the Proposition 50 River Parkways Program are expected in March or April of 2006.

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

The project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31164, to address resource and recreational goals in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Under §31162(b) the Conservancy may provide grant funding for projects that protect, restore, and enhance natural habitats and connecting corridors, watersheds, scenic areas and other open-space resources that are of regional significance. This project would restore riparian habitat to approximately 1,900 feet of stream bank by removing a large portion of grouted concrete channel and adding elements of a more natural creek. The proposed creek restoration will likely benefit the federally listed anadromous rainbow/steelhead trout and Chinook salmon, and will certainly improve water quality of the Santa Rosa Creek and the Laguna de Santa Rosa/Russian River.

Under §31162(c) the Conservancy is encouraged to assist in the implementation of the adopted plans of local governments. The Pierson Reach Restoration project is consistent with and supported by numerous local and regional planning documents including the Pierson Reach Restoration Concept Plan (2001), the Santa Rosa Creek Master Plan (1993), the Santa Waterways Plan (1996), the Santa Rosa General Plan, and the Sonoma County General Plan. The Russian River Action Plan, developed by the Sonoma County Water Agency, specifically mentions the restoration of Pierson Reach as a priority project. The project will also address multiple goals, strategies, and recommendations set forth in the California Department of Fish and Game's Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon (2003), Steelhead Restoration and Management Plan (1996), and the Russian River Basin Fisheries Restoration Plan (2002 draft).

As required by §31163(c), the Conservancy is to give priority to projects that support adopted local or regional plans, are multi-jurisdictional or serve a regional constituency, can be implemented in a timely way, and include matching funds. The proposed project meets these criteria as it supports numerous local and regional plans (see above paragraph), the partner-funded trail improvements will benefit urban populations of Santa Rosa and people of the surrounding communities, and the initial phase of restoration work is anticipated to begin in the summer of 2006. Also, the project includes a significant amount of matching funds, with over 93% of the funding coming from a variety of local, regional, state, and federal funding sources other than the Coastal Conservancy (see the "Project Financing" section above).

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

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objectives A and B** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the project will restore instream habitat and is a river parkway. The project will also improve water quality to benefit threatened salmonid fish species.

Consistent with **Goal 10, Objective A**, the proposed project will restore 1,900 feet of the Santa Rosa Creek/Laguna de Santa Rosa watershed. The project will also restore riparian habitat along the 1,900 feet of Santa Rosa Creek slated for restoration.

**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:** Local public support for creek restoration has been responsible for initiating this project and has been strong since citizens of Santa Rosa formed the Committee for Restoring Santa Rosa Creek in 1989. This project also enjoys financial support from its partners (see the "Project Financing" section above) and strong support from Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey, Senator Wesley Chesbro, Assembly Member Patricia Wiggins, Assembly Member Noreen Evans, the Committee for Restoring Santa Rosa Creek, the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, and numerous federal, state, and local agencies (see Exhibit 3, Letters of Support).
4. **Location:** This project is located in downtown Santa Rosa in Sonoma County, and is within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. The proposed creek restoration will benefit the federally listed anadromous rainbow/steelhead trout and Chinook salmon, and water quality of the Santa Rosa Creek and the Laguna de Santa Rosa/Russian River. The partner-funded trail improvements and its linkages to the regional and Ridge Trail will benefit urban populations of Santa Rosa, the most populous city in Sonoma County, and people of the surrounding communities.
5. **Need:** The Conservancy's contribution is needed to fill in a gap in funding necessary to enable the City of Santa Rosa to commence with the proposed project.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** See "4. Location" above for a discussion of why the project serves a greater-than-local interest.

**Additional Criteria**

7. **Urgency:** Unless the project can begin on schedule, enhancement of instream habitat will be delayed and the access to upstream high quality habitat for the anadromous rainbow/steelhead trout will be postponed indefinitely. The opportunity to provide the gap funding matched by over four million dollars in other local, state, and federal funding will also be lost.
8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** This project will simultaneously resolve the following issues:
  - Restoration of fish and wildlife habitat of the Santa Rosa Creek.
  - Construction of bicycle and pedestrian trails and recreational facilities providing access to urban open spaces to the populations of Santa Rosa and surrounding communities.

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- Protection of water quality of the Santa Rosa Creek watershed covered by a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit issued by the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board.
  - Erosion control of stream banks.
  - Education and increased awareness of sensitive natural resources related to fish and wildlife habitats in the Santa Rosa Creek watershed.
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
10. **Innovation:** The City is innovative in its boldness with plans to remove the existing channel and complete channel reconstruction to provide channel improvements. The innovative design has received numerous awards including the 2001 American Planning Association’s Planning Project Award; League of California Cities Helen Putman Awards for Excellence in Planning and Environmental Quality and Excellence in the Public Works, Infrastructure and Transportation; and Honor Award in the Consulting Engineers and Land Surveyors of California (CELSOC) Engineering Excellence Award competition.
11. **Readiness:** The City is poised with commitments for funding and the ability to start construction in the summer of 2006. Based on the City’s past performance in completing previous phases in a timely manner, there is every reason to expect that the City will be able to complete the proposed Pierson Reach project in a timely manner.
12. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See the “Project History” section above.
13. **Cooperation:** The entire Greenway project has involved numerous federal, state, and local agencies and public support to fund and complete the project phases. Citizens of Santa Rosa continue to encourage the construction of the Greenway project by supporting creek restoration funding through the Storm Water Parcel Utility and involvement in the City/Sonoma County Water Agency’s Creek Stewardship Program.

### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The City of Santa Rosa is the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the Prince Memorial Greenway Pierson Reach Project. The City circulated the Initial Study for the project for public review between November 22, 2005 and December 22, 2005, and responded to comments. The City Council adopted a Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation and Monitoring Program for the Prince Memorial Greenway Pierson Reach Project on January 24, 2006 (Exhibit 2). The Negative Declaration identified potentially significant impacts in the areas of biological resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, and noise, and recommended 28 mitigation measures that would reduce these impacts to a level of insignificance.

The Conservancy, a CEQA responsible agency with respect to the project, will provide funds to the City for habitat improvements. Specifically, the Conservancy will help fund construction of instream habitat enhancement features and riparian planting. As approved, the Pierson Reach restoration project will incorporate the recommended mitigation measures and all project impacts will be mitigated to reduce impacts to less than significant. A majority of the impacts are short-term and associated with the construction phase of the project. Overall, since the project involves the restoration of an existing channelized creek, most project impacts are beneficial.

**Biological Resources:** Restoring native vegetation and a more natural creek configuration would result in long-term beneficial impacts to biological resources, including riparian vegetation and fisheries. However, over the short-term, the project could result in impacts to biological resources from erosion and increased sedimentation, and exposure to contaminants released during the construction process. To minimize the potential for disruption and harm to aquatic life indigenous to the water body, fish and amphibians will be removed from the project area (to a upstream or downstream location depending on the species) prior to channel disturbance activity, work will only be conducted during the dry season as permitted by several federal and state agencies, and a biological monitor will be onsite when construction work is taking place in the aquatic habitat.

Other mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate potentially significant impacts to a less-than-significant level include utilizing native species in the Restoration Planting Plan, designing points of excessive erosion potential with a hardened un-erodible surface, protecting exposed soils with erosion control fabrics and other best management practices for erosion control, and installing in-stream vegetation to trap sediments and decrease downstream transport of fine sediments. After project completion, use of the project area by aquatic and terrestrial animals will be monitored to evaluate the effectiveness of the improvements to the stream.

**Geology and Soils:** Excavation of the low-flow channel and grading of the channel to add more natural hydraulic features would result in the potential for sedimentation. To reduce this potential impact to a less-than-significant level, project construction will employ best management practices for handling of soil to ensure that the project does not result in sedimentation of the channel. Geo-fabric or other slope stabilization materials would be used to stabilize reconfigured slopes prior to the onset of winter rains.

**Hazards and Hazardous Materials:** There are no hazardous waste sites listed on the Cortese List in the project vicinity. However, since some parcels in the project vicinity have a history of contaminated soil, contaminated soils and/or groundwater could be encountered during construction. Mitigation measures to reduce potentially significant impacts to a less-than-significant level include discussing the potential to encounter contaminated soil and groundwater with the selected contractor, and identifying methods for handling various hazardous materials should they be encountered during the project. In addition, water monitoring will be conducted on a periodic basis to identify any increases in sediment load or contaminants.

**Hydrology and Water Quality:** The project involves some excavation into the existing channel and the removal of existing grouted concrete and rock along the creek banks and bottom of the channel. The recontouring and re-grading of the channel would result in the potential for sediment to enter the creek. Mitigation measures to reduce potentially significant impacts related to water quality to less-than-significant level include the implementation of best management practices to minimize erosion and sedimentation, constructing the project during the dry season between June 15<sup>th</sup>-October 15<sup>th</sup>, hydro-seeding/mulching all exposed surfaces prior to the onset of winter rains, and employing bio-engineering techniques to stabilize the banks. Water monitoring will be conducted on a periodic basis to identify any increases in sediment load and/or contaminants; additional plantings will be installed to provide additional stabilization of slopes if increases in sediment are observed.

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While recontouring and re-grading the channel could effect the drainage pattern of the site and effect the potential for flooding, the design criterion and performance standard for the project is that there be no significant increase in water surface elevation for any particular storm. Adhering to this criterion limits flooding related impacts to a less-than-significant level.

**Noise:** Development of the project would result in substantial noise during the construction period that would be audible from nearby residences and other land uses. Construction activities would include removal of existing grouted concrete with jack-hammers, excavation and re-contouring of the creek channel, and transportation of construction materials to and from the site. Mitigation measures will be employed during the construction phase to reduce the potentially significant noise-related impacts to a less-than-significant level including limiting the hours of construction, outfitting construction equipment with noise reduction devices, and locating stationary noise sources as far as practical from nearby residences and other noise-sensitive uses.

Staff has reviewed the City's Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation and Monitoring Program and agrees that the Pierson Reach Restoration project will not have a significant effect on the environment if the proposed mitigation measures and Mitigation Monitoring Program are implemented. Staff, therefore, recommends that the Conservancy find that the proposed project, as mitigated, does not have the potential for an adverse effect on the environment as defined in 14 Cal. Code of Regulations, Section 15382.

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