

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 24, 2007

SYCAMORE GROVE PARK POND AND HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECT

File No. 06-042
Project Manager: Betsy Wilson

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$425,000 to the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District for the restoration and enhancement of a stock pond and 3.3 acres of riparian habitat in Sycamore Grove Regional Park located in east-central Alameda County.

LOCATION: Southwest of the City of Livermore in east-central Alameda County (Exhibit 1).

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Mitigated Negative Declaration and Initial Study](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Project Area Map](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [Site Photographs](#)
 - Exhibit 5: [Stock Pond Improvements Map](#)
 - Exhibit 6: [Conceptual Restoration Plan for Upper Drainage B](#)
 - Exhibit 7: [Letters of Support](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31165 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed four hundred twenty-five thousand dollars (\$425,000) to the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District (“LARPD”) to restore and enhance a stock pond and 3.3 acres of riparian habitat in Sycamore Grove Regional Park located in east-central Alameda County. 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:

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

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 31160-31165).
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 adopted on May 9, 2007 by the Livermore Area Park and Recreation District, and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 2, and finds that there is no substantial evidence that the implementation of the Sycamore Grove Park Restoration project will have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This authorization would provide up to \$425,000 to the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District (“LARPD”) to restore and enhance a stock pond and 3.3 acres of riparian habitat in Sycamore Grove Regional Park located in east-central Alameda County. The proposed project implements recommendations identified in the Sycamore Grove Regional Park Resource Management Plan (“RMP”), which was developed by the LARPD in 2002 with assistance from the Conservancy. The proposed project would reduce sedimentation, prevent over-flow, flooding, and potential dam failure, and enhance habitat for listed species including the California red-legged frog and the California tiger salamander.

Sycamore Grove Regional Park, originally established in 1974, is owned and managed by the LARPD. In its entirety, the park encompasses approximately 735 acres. The proposed project site is contained within the 370-acre “upper” (southern) portion of the park, which was acquired in 1998 as a result of a transfer of density rights action taken by the City of Livermore. The upper portion of the park has been heavily grazed for over three generations. Consequently, many of the habitats have been severely compromised resulting in invasive plant and animal species taking over both natural and man-made habitats. The loss of habitat and the steady decline of riparian areas prompted the development of the RMP in 2002.

The proposed Sycamore Grove Park Pond and Habitat Restoration project is one of the first major proposals designed to implement several of the highest priority recommendations

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identified in the RMP all within one major project. The proposed project is located in Drainage B (the RMP identified six distinct drainages in the upper portion of the park and labeled them as drainages “A” through “F”); see Exhibit 3 for a project area map and Exhibit 4 for site photographs.

The Livermore Area Recreation and Park District, created in 1947 by a vote of the public, provides recreation and parks for the 245-square-mile area bounded by Contra Costa County to the north, San Joaquin County to the east, Santa Clara County to the south and the cities of Pleasanton and Dublin to the west. The agency provides 28 neighborhood parks ranging from 2-12 acres in size, two community parks with such amenities as an equestrian center and rodeo grounds, sand-based, all weather soccer fields, and soccer and ball fields; four regional parks totaling 1,360 acres; and 10 special use parks. The LARPD has a long history of successful project management, habitat restoration, community outreach, and public education.

Following is a description of the key components of the proposed restoration project:

Stock Pond Restoration. A man-made stock pond is located at the mid-point of Drainage B. The pond is currently overgrown by cattails and supports non-native species, such as bullfrogs and green sunfish. The thick cattail growth and the sediment flowing into the pond from upstream creek erosion are causing flooding at the stock pond site; this sediment-laden flooding harms downstream creek habitat. In spite of the deteriorated condition of the pond, the LARPD has found western pond turtles and California red-legged frogs in the pond. And, the California Department of Fish and Game (“DFG”) believes the pond has the potential to be, or already is, a breeding habitat area for California red-legged frog and California tiger salamander.

The proposed stock pond improvements (Exhibit 5) include the following:

Drain and dredge the stock pond. To address the current condition of the pond, the proposed project includes draining and dredging the stock pond. Built-up sediment will be dredged and removed to an approved upland area in the park and/or to an approved off-site location. Pumps will be screened and monitored; any wildlife caught in the system will be captured and identified. Desirable species such as California red-legged frog and western pond turtle will be relocated, while exotic species such as bullfrogs and green sunfish will be removed.

Construct sediment basin. To reduce future accumulation of sediment in the stock pond, a sediment catch basin will be constructed within upper Drainage B. A three-foot-wide section of rock will be placed within the channel of the intermittent stream of Drainage B. Water will pool behind the rock dam, where sediment will be allowed to settle out. The sediment basin will be cleaned periodically by hand.

Rebuild stock pond dam. The dam of the stock pond is badly eroded and in danger of failing. Erosion is occurring at the toe of the downstream side slope near the middle of the dam. The slope of the dam outfall will be expanded into a larger footprint to spread the weight of the water more evenly and reinforce the dam. Also, a weir will be installed within the dam to allow park staff to control the water level in the pond, including periodic drainings. By controlling water levels in the pond, park staff can better control non-native species in the pond, thus benefiting potential California red-legged frog and California tiger salamander use.

Upper Drainage B Restoration. The RMP assessed the streambed of Drainage B above the stock pond and determined the risk of increasing head-cuts and deposition of high sediment loads

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to be high. The RMP also states that tributary creeks, such as Drainage B, provide wildlife movement corridors and recommends that their habitat value be improved through erosion control, native riparian restoration, and adaptive management. Therefore, the proposed project also includes the restoration of 3.3 acres of riparian habitat in the upper portion of Drainage B.

Reduce drainage head-cuts through re-contouring. Where head-cuts are most prevalent in upper Drainage B, the slope will be lightly graded and filled with rock and engineered fabric. This will allow water to escape while reducing the slope instability the head-cutting creates. Additionally, the slower water will reduce erosion, foster the development of under-story species, and help to establish new and existing over-story species.

Native plant restoration. Further restoration of the riparian corridor of upper Drainage B will be achieved through re-vegetation with native plants. The conceptual restoration plan is included as Exhibit 6. Over-story species that will be planted include oaks, willows, buckeye, and cottonwood. New under-story species will consist of a variety of existing sedges, rushes, shrubs, and willows. Wood chips will be added to the base of each plant for greater water absorption and protective netting will be placed over it for at least one year. The plants will require frequent irrigation during the first dry season, through a temporary drip irrigation system or other measures. There will be a three-year maintenance and monitoring period.

Relocation of Existing Trail/Service Road. A publicly-accessible trail currently runs through the vulnerable wetlands below the stock pond. The trail is also used as a service road by park staff and other agencies (e.g., Department of Water Resources, local water district, and local fire district). When the dam is rebuilt, the trail/service road will be moved upslope to cross the dam, rather than traverse through the wetlands. The area where the trail/service road is abandoned will be re-graded to match the natural slope of the surrounding land, re-vegetated with native wetland species, and monitored to assess conditions. A total of 2,540 square feet of trail will be removed and re-routed out of existing wetlands.

Installation of a Boardwalk and Interpretive Signs. A 10-foot wide by 15 to 20-foot long boardwalk is proposed to be constructed from the new trail on top of the dam out into the open water of the pond. The new boardwalk will improve the park rangers' ability to assess and manage pond conditions, as well as providing for greater public access and nature observation opportunities. Additionally, interpretive panels will be designed and installed either along the new trail on top of the dam and/or on the boardwalk. The interpretive panels will offer basic information regarding the stock pond and the surrounding riparian corridor.

It is important to note that the lower portion of Drainage B is scheduled to be improved by the City of Livermore as a mitigation project for a new Caltrans highway interchange. However, the lower Drainage B project cannot proceed until the stock pond dam is repaired, since failure of the dam would destroy any restoration work done in the lower Drainage B. Therefore, it is important that this pond restoration project proceed so as not to lose the Caltrans mitigation funds currently committed to the lower Drainage B project. Together the two restoration projects will result in the restoration of the entire Drainage B area, thus allowing the entire corridor to function as a natural wildlife system capable of enhancing and sustaining threatened species.

Site Description: Sycamore Grove Regional Park lies in a mostly rural area, just southeast of the City of Livermore and is easily accessible from Highway 84 or Interstate 580 in eastern Alameda

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County (Exhibit 1). It is nearly contiguous with Del Valle Regional Park, managed by the East Bay Regional Park District. The park is bordered by a variety of land uses, including a golf course, a water treatment plant, and nearly 400 acres of vineyards and grassland protected by agricultural conservation easements.

The proposed project site is entirely within the 370-acre “upper” portion of the park (Exhibit 2). The upper portion of the park consists of rolling hills, riparian habitat, and varied plant communities. Elevations in this section extend to 1,024 feet above sea level. The rolling hills are mostly dominated by non-native annual grassland, but also support substantial areas of native grasslands, wetlands, small tributary creeks, several seasonal ponds, and oak woodlands. Several distinct riparian areas are present in this portion of the park.

The stock pond in the project area is known to support populations of the California red-legged frog and the western pond turtle. In addition, the pond provides suitable habitat for the California tiger salamander. Several additional sensitive wildlife species have moderate to high potential to occur within the project area including the short eared owl, long eared owl, California horned lark, and the burrowing owl.

Project History: In January 2001, the Conservancy approved funding to assist in the development of a Resource Management Plan for Sycamore Grove Regional Park. The RMP, which was completed in November 2002, provides a long-term planning, resource stewardship, and operational framework for park management, along with guidelines for recreational development and habitat restoration. The RMP documents the current condition of trails and natural resources in the park, and also recommends policies, procedures, and restoration measures to ensure that resources in the park are adequately protected and that public use can be maximized without detrimentally affecting those resources.

At the time the Conservancy approved funding for the RMP, the staff recommendation indicated that it was anticipated that the LARPD would ask the Conservancy for additional funding in the future to help pay for implementation of the plan. Along this line, the proposed Sycamore Grove Park Pond and Habitat Restoration project is one of the first major proposals designed to implement several high priority recommendations of the RMP all within one major project.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$425,000
LARPD	64,000
Other Funds/In-kind Services (TBD)	<u>57,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$546,000

The expected source of funds is the Conservancy’s FY 2005/06 budget appropriation for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program from the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Act of 2000 (Proposition 12).

In addition to the \$64,000 match the LARPD is providing for the proposed restoration project, the LARPD, the City of Livermore, San Francisco Water and Power, and the Zone 7 Water Agency have already spent over \$500,000 on other Sycamore Grove Regional Park restoration projects. Other projects include the Arroyo Mocho Burn Plan, Sycamore Grove Recovery Plan -

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Phases I and II, Hetch Hetchy road repair and Drainage B bank erosion, Greenville pond mitigation, and a Sycamore Grove Park Range Management Plan.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Public Resources Code, which established the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.

Under Section 31162, the Conservancy may award grants to public and private agencies in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.

Consistent with Section 31162(b), the proposed pond and habitat restoration project will restore and enhance natural habitats, watershed, and other open-space resources of regional importance, a primary goal of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. The project will restore and enhance a failing stock pond that provides aquatic habitat for two federally threatened species, the California red-legged frog and the California tiger salamander. The project will also restore 3.3 acres of upstream riparian habitat, thus reducing erosion upstream of the stock pond and enhancing habitat for sensitive and other native species.

This project meets the criteria set forth in Section 31163(c), in that it would: (1) be consistent with the LARPD's Sycamore Grove Park Resource Management Plan, the City of Livermore's South Livermore Valley Specific Plan, and the Alameda County East County Plan; (2) involve multiple agencies working together; (3) be implemented and completed in a timely manner; (4) provide opportunities to protect the riparian habitat downstream from the dam which would be significantly damaged if the dam fails and prevents the pond from reverting to open meadow, thus continuing to provide and enhancing habitat for several sensitive species; and (5) includes matching funds from LARPD for this specific project as well as significant funds that have already been contributed by other entities, including the LARPD, City of Livermore, San Francisco Water and Power, and the Zone 7 Water Agency, to implement restoration projects in the Sycamore Grove Regional Park.

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

Consistent with **Goal 10, Objective A**, the project will restore and enhance a deteriorating stock pond that provides habitat for several endangered species, including the California red-legged frog, California tiger salamander, and the Western pond turtle. The project will also restore 3.3 acres of upstream riparian habitat, which will help reduce erosion and provide an enhanced movement corridor for wildlife.

**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:

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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 project is supported by the Tri-Valley Conservancy and the City of Livermore, both of whom participated in the development of the policies and recommendations of the RMP. Other supporters of the project include the Friends of the Sycamores, the County of Alameda, DFG, and the East Bay Regional Park District. Letters of support are included as Exhibit 7.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is in Alameda County, within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
5. **Need:** In 1992, facing a serious deficit, the State of California began shifting local property tax revenues from cities, counties, and some special districts into Education Revenue Augmentation Funds to reduce the cost of education to the state General Fund. The LARPD has operated under difficult financial constraints since this time and does not currently have the financial ability to undertake this restoration project without financial assistance from the Conservancy.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed pond and habitat restoration project will create and enhance habitat for several listed species, including the California red-legged frog, the California tiger salamander, and the Western pond turtle. The restoration project is regionally significant as the number of these threatened species are steadily decreasing due to increasing development throughout the Tri-Valley area of Alameda County. Revitalization and maintenance of riparian corridors in protected areas like Sycamore Grove Regional Park will hopefully help these species maintain a healthy, stable population and expand their regional range.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** The stock pond dam is badly eroded and in danger of failing. If the dam is not restored in this year's Fall construction season, it may fail over the course of the year, resulting in a loss of habitat for listed species and a release of any accumulated sediment downstream into the lower portion of Drainage B. The City of Livermore is planning to restore the lower portion of Drainage B as a mitigation project for a new Caltrans highway interchange. Since the failure of the dam would negate all the work of lower Drainage B restoration project, the LARPD will not allow the lower Drainage B project to proceed until the stock pond dam is repaired. If the lower Drainage B project is significantly delayed, Caltrans may have to redirect their mitigation funds to a different mitigation project that can meet their required timeframe.
8. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
9. **Readiness:** The LARPD is ready to begin the project in August 2007 and complete the proposed restoration work within approximately two years. The planning work for the project has already been completed. Engineering plans and a cost estimate for the dam repair

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work were prepared by Mark Thomas & Company, Inc. and the conceptual restoration plan for Drainage B riparian habitat improvements was prepared by Circuit Riders Productions.

10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** “See “Project History” above.”

11. **Cooperation:** The Sycamore Grove Regional Park Resource Management Plan was prepared through a collaborative planning process that solicited, addressed, and incorporated input from numerous stakeholders. A Technical Advisory Committee with representatives from the LARPD, Conservancy, Zone 7 Water District, local fire, resource conservation, and school districts, Tri-Valley Conservancy (formerly the South Livermore Agricultural Land Trust), City of Livermore, DFG, UC Extension Service, East Bay Regional Park District, park neighbors, and the community at large provided input on the RMP. These cooperating entities want the implementation of conservation, restoration, and enhancement policy goals and objectives identified in the RMP to move forward as quickly as possible.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The LARPD is the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) for the Sycamore Grove Park Pond and Habitat Restoration Project. The LARPD circulated the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration and Initial Study for the project for public review between April 9, 2007 and May 8, 2007. The only public comment letter received was from the Army Corps of Engineers stating they did not have jurisdiction over the project. The LARPD Board of Directors adopted a Mitigated Negative Declaration (Exhibit 2) and Mitigation Monitoring Program (Appendix A of Exhibit 2) for the Sycamore Grove Park Restoration Project on May 9, 2007.

The Initial Study indicated that the proposed project has the potential to significantly affect air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, and noise in the project area and vicinity. Overall, the proposed project will have a long-term beneficial impact to sensitive species through improvement of habitat and water quality within and adjacent to the project area. Impacts are short term and will be minimized through avoidance and minimization measures, as well as through mitigation. For these reasons, project impacts are less than significant with mitigation incorporated.

Air Quality: Project construction will result in emissions from construction equipment and fugitive dust from soil excavation. The project will implement all of the appropriate control measures identified in the Bay Area Air Quality Management District’s CEQA Guidelines, including watering the construction site and unpaved access roads at least twice daily.

Biological Resources: Implementation of the proposed project could result in short term potentially significant impacts to wildlife species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status. This includes displacement and possible mortality to special status wildlife during construction-related activities. The proposed project could also temporarily impact the movements of migratory or resident wildlife species during project construction through obstruction of access for sensitive species to suitable habitat in the project area.

The following mitigation measures will be implemented to ensure that potential short term impacts to special status wildlife species would be reduced to a less than significant level:

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- To avoid impacts to the California red-legged frog (“CRLF”) and California tiger salamander (“CTS”), draining of the stock pond would occur during October at the end of the dry season. Pumps used to dewater the pond would be screened and monitored; any wildlife caught in the system will be captured and identified. Handling of wildlife will be conducted only when a biologist in possession of a 10(a)(1)(A) recovery permit is present. Desirable species would be relocated while exotic species would be removed.
- Dredging of the stock pond and vegetation removal shall be implemented outside of the breeding season for the CRLF and CTS (i.e. breeding season is November through March).
- To minimize potential impacts to aestivating individuals, all construction-related activities shall be limited to existing roads and trails to the greatest extent feasible.
- Raptors and passerine birds are expected to nest in and adjacent to the project study area, including the long and short eared owls, the horned lark and the western burrowing owl. LARPD shall identify and protect active songbird and raptor nests during construction with appropriate buffers and avoidance. To the extent feasible, construction activities in or near active stream channels shall avoid the songbird and raptor nesting season between March 15 and August 15.
- The western pond turtle, a federal and state species of concern, was observed in the stock pond in 2003 and 2005. Pre-construction surveys for individuals shall be performed by a qualified biologist prior to and during drainage of the stock pond. Individual western pond turtles, if found, will be returned to the pond after it is refilled.

In addition, Best Management Practices (“BMPs”) will be implemented for all construction related to the proposed project to avoid impacts to wetlands in the project area. The required BMPs include: prohibition of construction-related ground disturbance within wetlands or within 50 feet of the edge of tributaries to Drainage B; installation of RWQCB-approved physical barriers adequate to prevent the flow or discharge of sediment into streams and wetlands; dewatering systems will be properly designed to prevent pumping soil fines with the discharged water; asphalt concrete shall not be placed in a stream, pond, or wetland; all construction equipment will be cleaned of potential noxious weed sources before entry into the site and after entering a potentially infested area; only native plant species appropriate for the project study area will be used in any erosion control or revegetation seed mix or stock; and, all temporary construction disturbance areas will be restored and re-vegetated.

Cultural Resources: The project area is positioned on two geologic formations with a high potential to contain paleontological resources, such as freshwater mollusks and extinct Pleistocene vertebrate fossils. The proposed project requires a limited amount of surface excavation, primarily associated with removal of sediments within the stock pond that have collected over the recent past and for rehabilitation of the existing dam. A qualified paleontologist will be contacted in the event that fossils are discovered during construction, in order to salvage finds and assess the need for further mitigation.

Geology and Soils: The potential for ground surface rupture due to faulting at the site is considered low. Based on available geological and seismic data, the possibility of the site to experience strong ground shaking is moderate to high. However, rehabilitation of the existing dam will reduce the risk of dam failure from seismic shaking.

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The streambed of Drainage B above the stock pond was assessed in the RMP and the risk of increasing head-cuts and deposition of high sediment loads was determined to be high. The proposed project will reduce erosion, channel incising, and the potential for landslides through re-contouring of portions of the stream channel and through planting of native species along the banks of Drainage B. Where head-cuts are most prevalent in Drainage B, the slope will be lightly graded and filled with rock and engineered fabric. The riparian corridor of Drainage B will be re-vegetated with native plants.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials: The proposed project involves the handling of hazardous materials through the operation and maintenance of equipment used for construction of the proposed project. However, BMPs (see Biological Resources section above) will be implemented for the duration of project construction that will avoid and minimize the release of hazardous materials into the environment.

Hydrology and Water Quality: Runoff or drainage patterns within the project study area will be altered as a result of re-contouring of eroded portions of Drainage B, as well as from the construction of a sediment basin and repair of the stock pond dam. Temporary, construction related impacts from increased sediments associated with construction of the proposed project would be less than significant, as these actions will in the long term serve to stabilize stream banks, reduce erosion and prevent dam failure. Construction work will be performed prior to the onset of the rainy season. Any residual impacts will be mitigated by LARPD as it pursues the regulatory permitting process for erosion control efforts. In addition, BMPs employed during project construction would minimize any soil erosion and siltation.

Noise: Project-related construction will result in short-term increases in noise levels in the project area. The project will implement practices to reduce noise impacts to a less than significant level including limiting the hours of noise-generating construction-related activities, outfitting construction equipment with noise reduction devices, and designating a “noise disturbance coordinator” to respond to any complaints about construction noise associated with the project.

The LARPD Board also adopted a Mitigation Monitoring Program (Appendix A of Exhibit 2) for the proposed project. The Mitigation Monitoring Program includes all of the mitigation measures identified in the Initial Study, as discussed above, to avoid potentially significant impacts. The LARPD will be responsible for implementing and/or overseeing implementation of all mitigation measures.

Staff has reviewed the LARPD’s Initial Study, Mitigated Negative Declaration, and Mitigation Monitoring Program and agrees that the proposed Sycamore Grove Park Pond and Habitat Restoration project will not have a significant effect on the environment if the proposed mitigation measures 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.