

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 25, 2008

ARROYO HONDO UPSTREAM HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECT

File No. 03-021-03
Project Manager: Rachel Couch

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to amend the Conservancy's June 29, 2006 action to expand the scope of work to include additional upstream habitat enhancement of Arroyo Hondo Creek, Santa Barbara County.

LOCATION: Gaviota Coast, Santa Barbara County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Integrated Marine and Coastal Resources Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [June 2006 Staff Recommendation \(without exhibits\)](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Site Maps](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Section 31220 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes broadening the use of two hundred thirty-nine thousand five hundred dollars (\$239,500) previously granted to the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County (Land Trust) for the Arroyo Hondo Steelhead Passage Enhancement project to enable implementation of the Arroyo Hondo Creek Upstream Habitat Enhancement project, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to commencement of construction and to disbursement of any Conservancy funds for the upstream habitat enhancement, the Land Trust shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
 - a. A revised work program, project budget and timeline.
 - b. The names and qualifications of any contractors or subcontractors that the Land Trust intends to employ to construct the project.
 - c. Evidence that all applicable permits and approvals for the project have been obtained.

2. The Land Trust shall enter into and record an agreement under Public Resources Code Section 31116(c) to protect the public interest in the project.”

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 currently proposed project is consistent with Public Resources Code Section 31220 regarding watershed restoration.
2. The currently proposed project is consistent with the guidelines and criteria in the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines last updated on September 20, 2007.
3. The Land Trust for Santa Barbara County 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 Public Resources Code.”

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 the proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy’s June 29, 2006 resolution, findings, and staff report, attached to the accompanying current staff report as Exhibit 2, except as indicated in the current staff report.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The proposed authorization would redirect an unused balance of \$239,500 granted originally to the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County for culvert modification instead to the Land Trust for upstream enhancement of Arroyo Hondo Creek.

Arroyo Hondo Creek presents one of the best opportunities for enhancing steelhead habitat in southern Santa Barbara County. Most of the creek is in near pristine condition with good water quality and no dams, flood control basins, grade control structures, or inappropriate road crossings. The primary limiting factors for steelhead in the creek were a serious impediment to steelhead trout fish passage located just upstream of the creek mouth, which has been recently modified through the original grant (see Exhibit 2), and erosion combined with lack of native riparian vegetation in some areas.

The Arroyo Hondo Creek Upstream Enhancement project would enhance aquatic and riparian habitat upstream of the modified culvert structure.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The project consists of expansion of the original project to three defined upstream areas where restoration of riparian habitat and sedimentation control actions will benefit fish habitat and water quality. Two of the project sites will involve revegetation of the native riparian plant community along the main stem of the Arroyo Hondo Creek, and one project site will slow mobilization of fine sediment in a side channel using biotechnical methods along with revegetation. The work will be broken into three phases to be completed over a two-year period

through 2010, with monitoring extending approximately three to five years.

Project Site 1 – Lower Canyon

Work at Project Site 1 (see Exhibit 3), will occur in disturbed pockets within a 2.25 acre area located in the lower canyon adjacent to and upstream of the modified culvert. Work will involve expansion of the riparian corridor and eradication of non-native species, thereby increasing habitat value for steelhead and other riparian species. Invasive species occurring in the project area include primarily Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*), periwinkle (*Vinca major*), garden nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*), and cultivated grape (*Vitis vinifera*), as well as smilo grass (*Piptatherum mileaceum*), thistles (*Carduus* spp., *Sonchus* spp.), bristly ox tongue (*Picris echioides*), and mustards (*Brassica* spp., *Hirschfeldia* sp.).

Project Site 2 – Upper Canyon

Project Site 2 is located approximately ½ mile upstream from Highway 101 in a side drainage east of the main creek. Work at this site, which is dominated by annual grasses and weeds, will consist of expansion of the riparian corridor and reduction of sediment delivery to the main stem to increase habitat value for steelhead and other riparian species. The side channel currently mobilizes fine sediment in storm events, creating the potential for sediment to impact steelhead spawning beds in the main creek. The work will involve use of brush fascines to capture sediment along approximately 900 feet of the drainage, as well as weed control and plantings to expand the riparian corridor. Project Site 2 is located outside the Coastal Zone and is shown in Exhibit 3.

Project Site 3 – Mid-Canyon

Project Site 3 is located in mid-canyon between the other sites (Exhibit 3). Proposed work will expand the riparian corridor through this section of the canyon. Additionally, through plantings of native shrubs and trees, a section of cut creek bank will be partially stabilized preventing sedimentation of the creek and protecting steelhead habitat.

While the original and proposed projects are aimed primarily at steelhead recovery, they also will benefit other aquatic organisms inhabiting Arroyo Hondo Creek and its lagoon. Among these are the California red-legged frog, federally listed as threatened; the Coast Range newt and southwestern pond turtle, both listed as species of special concern in California; and the tidewater goby, federally listed as endangered.

The Land Trust for Santa Barbara County owns and manages approximately 826 acres in Santa Barbara County, including the Arroyo Hondo Preserve. The Land Trust has undertaken habitat restoration projects on several of its properties. It developed the original project with funding from the Coastal Conservancy and National Marine Fisheries Service. The Land Trust is well qualified to undertake this project which is located within its Preserve.

Additional Project History:

In June 2006, the Coastal Conservancy authorized funds to improve fish passage in Arroyo Hondo Creek by modifying the concrete culvert under Highway 101 and creating an expanded and stable lagoon by removing a concrete box channel. Modification of the culvert was completed in 2008, but the lagoon component was scaled back because agreement could not be reached with Caltrans and Union Pacific Railroad regarding design and liability, resulting in the exclusion of modification of the box channel portion of the project.

Habitat enhancements at two sites immediately upstream of the Highway 101 culvert structure also were implemented in spring 2008. A resting pool was constructed near the entrance of the culvert. Immediately upstream of the culvert, erosion control was implemented above the banks of the creek along the Caltrans highway berm through revegetation and placement of erosion control blankets. The staging and construction access areas were likewise revegetated.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy (previously authorized)	\$239,500
Total Project Cost	\$239,500

Project funding remains consistent with the Conservancy's June 29, 2006 authorization (Exhibit 2). Use of the funds has been extended through December 2010.

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

Consistent with **Goal 5 Objectives B, C and D**, the proposed project will enhance coastal aquatic and riparian habitat in the Arroyo Hondo watershed by reducing erosion and sedimentation; the project will restore a wildlife corridor from coastal to inland habitat areas improving habitat for steelhead trout; and the project will remove and control non-native invasive species and plant native species to prevent invasives from becoming re-established.

Consistent with **Goal 6 Objective B**, the proposed project will preserve and restore a coastal watershed thereby improving habitat for anadromous steelhead trout.

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

Because the project will facilitate the restoration of fish and wildlife habitat in coastal watershed and wetlands, the project is 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.

Consistent with Chapter 5.5 of the Public Resources Code Section 31220(a), the State Water Quality Control Board has been consulted on the current project.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The currently proposed project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality (CEQA), pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15333, which exempts habitat restoration projects of less than five acres. The project qualifies for this categorical exemption as there will be no significant adverse impact to an endangered, rare or threatened species or its habitat; no hazardous materials exist at or around the project site; and the project will not result in significant impacts as it relates to effects of past, current or probable future projects.

The biotechnical sediment control structures are off-channel in a side drainage, and will be constructed by hand with live brush and riparian shrub and trees as stakes, with natural fiber erosion control blankets. No grading is included in the restoration plan. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval.