

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
August 5, 2010

**LOWER CARMEL RIVER FLOODPLAIN RESTORATION**

Project No. 08-036-01  
Project Manager: Trish Chapman

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to augment the Conservancy's June 5, 2008 authorization to accept a grant of \$180,000 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and disburse these funds to the Big Sur Land Trust for preparation of final designs, additional environmental review, and permit applications for the Lower Carmel River Floodplain Restoration Project in Monterey County.

**LOCATION:** Lower Carmel River, Monterey County (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Integrated Coastal and Marine Resources

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [June 5, 2008 Staff Recommendation](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31111 & 31220 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy amends its authorization of June 5, 2008 to authorize the acceptance of grant funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and to disburse up to one hundred eighty thousand additional dollars (\$180,000) to the Big Sur Land Trust (BSLT) to prepare final designs, conduct additional environmental review, and prepare final permit applications for the Lower Carmel River Floodplain Restoration Project in Monterey County. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the Conservancy shall have received the funds from the USFWS and the Executive Officer of the Conservancy shall approve in writing a work program, including budget and schedule, and any contractors to be employed for these tasks.”

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 current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.

2. The proposed remains consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 5.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding Integrated Coastal and Marine Resources Protection.
  3. The proposed project remains consistent with local watershed management plans and water quality control plans.
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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

On June 5, 2008, the Conservancy authorized a grant of \$250,000 to the Big Sur Land Trust for preparation of planning documents for the Lower Carmel River Floodplain Restoration Project. The proposed authorization would provide an additional \$180,000 to BSLT to prepare final design plans, conduct additional environmental review, and prepare permit applications for the. Funding for the augmentation would be from USFWS National Coastal Wetland Conservation grant awarded to the Conservancy in 2010 specifically for planning and implementation of the Lower Carmel River Floodplain Restoration project. Of the \$925,000 awarded to the Conservancy, \$180,000 is specifically targeted for completing the project designs, environmental review pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and permit applications. Consistent with the grant budget approved by the USFWS, the remaining \$745,000 will be reserved for project implementation. Use of these funds cannot be approved by the Conservancy until completion of environmental review pursuant to both NEPA and the California Environmental Quality Act.

The Floodplain Restoration project is a multi-objective project that was identified as the number one priority in the Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP) for the Monterey Peninsula, Carmel Bay, and South Monterey Bay. The project is also part of the Carmel River Parkway Plan. The project is summarized below and described in greater detail in Exhibit 2.

The Lower Carmel River Floodplain Restoration Project will restore natural floodplain function to 90 acres of the Odello East property owned by the Big Sur Land Trust and the Eastwood family. The Eastwood Family intends to donate its share of the project area to BSLT for the project. The project will also establish an agricultural preserve on 36-acres of the property. A key component of the Lower Carmel River Floodplain Restoration Project is the construction of a causeway for Highway 1 as it crosses over the floodplain. The causeway will allow flood flows to move directly from the eastern to the western floodplain. The overall environmental goal is to restore natural ecological function to the Carmel River's lower floodplain/estuary system. The project will increase riparian and wetland habitat, recharge groundwater and base flows to the Carmel River, improve the river's connection with the floodplain, and improve water quality.

The proposed project is a cooperative effort of BSLT, Monterey County, and the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District (MPWMD), and is being developed in close coordination with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). BSLT will complete the design phase of the project and lead the habitat restoration components; however, the County will lead design and construction of the causeway. In recent years, BSLT has made the Carmel River a major focus of its efforts. BSLT has thirty years experience undertaking conservation projects.

**Site Description:** See Exhibit 2.

**Project History:** The USFWS National Coastal Wetland Conservation (NCWC) program provides grants to State agencies for acquisition, restoration, management or enhancement of coastal wetlands. In 2009, the Conservancy, in coordination with BSLT, submitted a NCWC grant proposal for the Lower Carmel River Floodplain Restoration project. The grant proposal requested \$180,000 for the final design and permitting, and \$745,000 for project implementation. In January 2010, USFWS awarded a \$925,000 grant to the Conservancy for the project and approved the scope of work and budget submitted with the grant proposal. See Exhibit 2 for additional details on the project history.

## PROJECT FINANCING

### Current authorization

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	\$180,000
<b>Subtotal of Current Authorization</b>	<b>\$180,000</b>

### Previous authorization

Coastal Conservancy	\$250,000
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	\$200,000
County of Monterey (requested)	\$75,000
Big Sur Land Trust	<u>\$65,000</u>
<b>Subtotal of Previous Authorization</b>	<b>\$590,000</b>

<b>Total Project Costs</b>	<b>\$770,000</b>
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The funding for this authorization is to be provided by a grant from the USFWS National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant awarded to the Conservancy specifically for the Lower Carmel River Restoration Project. The National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program provides matching grants to States for acquisition, restoration, management or enhancement of coastal wetlands. The Big Sur Land Trust will provide a land donation, in-kind services, and additional funding to serve as the non-federal match necessary to receive these funds. The grant budget approved by USFWS allocates \$180,000 to final design, environmental review and permitting, and the remaining \$745,000 to project implementation.

### CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation as described in the June 5, 2008 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2). The USFWS grant will assist in providing additional funding to complete the project objectives to protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat within coastal and marine waters and coastal watersheds, and acquire, protect, and restore coastal wetlands, riparian areas, floodplains, and other sensitive watershed lands, including watershed lands draining to sensitive coastal or marine areas. Public Resources Code § 31220(b)(2) & (6). The project seeks restore approximately 90 acres of riparian and wetland habitat on the historic Carmel River floodplain in order to provide important habitat for sensitive species including steelhead trout, California red-legged frogs, and western pond turtles.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2007  
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan goals and objectives as described in the June 5, 2008 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY:**

Consistent with **Climate Change Policy 2**, BSLT will assess the project's vulnerability to sea-level rise (SLR) for 16 inches of SLR by 2050 and 55 inches by 2100, and, to the extent feasible, incorporate design measures to reduce expected risks from and increase project resiliency to SLR. The project area is located approximately 0.75 miles from the ocean at an elevation of approximately 30 feet. The most likely effect of SLR on the proposed project would be a shift in habitat types from freshwater to brackish or estuarine. The ability for those habitat types and the species that use them to shift landward is considered a benefit of the project.

Consistent with **Climate Change Policy 4a**, the proposed project will reconnect an area adjacent to the Carmel River Lagoon which will facilitate the inland shift of the river mouth lagoon in response to sea-level rise.

Consistent with **Climate Change Policy 4k**, the proposed project will reconnect the Carmel River with its southern floodplain, resulting in a wider riparian corridor that will also accommodate increased flooding that could result from expected changes in climate.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S  
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria as described in the June 5, 2008 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2). The proposed project is also consistent with the following updated project selection criteria:

**Required Criteria**

1. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** Consistent with Executive Order S-13-08, for new projects located in areas vulnerable to future sea level rise, planning shall consider a range of sea level rise scenarios for the years 2050 and 2100 in order to assess project vulnerability and, to the extent feasible, reduce expected risks and increase resiliency to sea level rise.

**Optional Criteria**

2. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** The proposed project would reconnect the lower river channel to its southern floodplain and the Highway 1 causeway will allow flood flows to move directly from the eastern to the western floodplain. These improvements will reduce flooding on the north side of the river and overtopping of Highway 1 in smaller flood events which may become more frequent as a result of climate change. Thus, the project would reduce the vulnerability of the lower river area from the impact of increased storm intensity that is predicted along the Central Coast as a result of climate change.

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The proposed project remains consistent with the Local Coastal Program as described in the June 5, 2008 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

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

The proposed project remains consistent with local watershed management plans and the State Water Quality Control Plan as described in the June 5, 2008 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

In June 2008, the proposed project was found to be exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262. Consistent with §15262, the project only involves preparation of planning studies and environmental documents for possible future actions which the Conservancy has not approved, adopted, or funded. Consistent with this section, the studies will consider environmental factors.