

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 24, 2018

**RIPS REDWOODS
CONSERVATION AND TRAIL EASEMENT ACQUISITION**

Project No. 17-032-01
Project Manager: Lisa Ames

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$750,000 to the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District to acquire conservation and public trail easements over the approximately 1,620-acre parcel known as the Rips Redwoods Property in coastal Sonoma County.

LOCATION: 31010 Skaggs Spring-Stewarts Point Road, Sonoma County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Integrated Coastal and Marine Resources Protection

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)
Exhibit 2: [Photos](#)
Exhibit 3: [Conservation Lands Network –Biodiversity Portfolio Report](#)
Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)
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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 disbursement of an amount not to exceed seven hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$750,000) to the Sonoma County Agriculture Preservation and Open Space District (SCAPOSD) to acquire a conservation easement over the Rips Redwoods Property, consisting of all or portions of Sonoma County Assessor Parcel Numbers 122-210-007, 122-210-008, 122-220-006, 122-230-001, 122-230-002, 122-230-008, and 123-110-007 as shown on Exhibit 1 to the accompanying staff recommendation, and to facilitate Sonoma County’s acquisition of a trail easement over a portion of the property, in coastal Sonoma County.

This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds for the acquisition, SCAPOSD shall submit for review and approval by the Conservancy’s Executive Officer:

- a. All relevant acquisition documents, including but not limited to an appraisal, conservation easement, public trail easement, environmental assessment, agreement of purchase and sale, escrow instructions, and documents related to title;
 - b. A baseline-conditions report and monitoring plan; and
 - c. Documentation that all other funds necessary to the acquisition have been obtained.
2. SCAPOSD shall pay no more than fair market value for the property interests as established in an appraisal approved by the Conservancy's Executive Officer.
 3. The easements acquired under this authorization shall be managed and operated in a manner consistent with the purposes of natural resource and water quality protection, sustainable forest management, public access, and open space preservation.
 4. The terms of the grant agreement and the conservation easement acquired with these funds shall be consistent with the Conservancy's 'Conservation Easement Standards and Practices Governing Grants for the Acquisition of Conservation Easements'.
 5. Conservancy funding shall be acknowledged by erecting and maintaining on the property a sign, the design and placement of which has been reviewed and approved by the Conservancy's Executive Officer."

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 Chapter 5.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding integrated coastal and marine resources protection.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to \$750,000 to the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (SCAPOSD) to acquire a conservation easement over the approximately 1,620-acre Rips Redwoods Property in the Gualala River watershed located in coastal Sonoma County (see Exhibit 1). The proposed project includes the landowner's donation of a trail easement to the Sonoma County Regional Parks to provide public access along a previously private stretch of the Gualala River. The proposed project will protect in perpetuity the site's open space character, promote sustainable forestry and late seral stage forest habitat restoration, and provide an opportunity for new public access and recreational opportunities along the South Fork of the Gualala River through the trail easement.

Specifically, the project, consisting of a conservation easement over the entire 1,620-acre property and a trail easement along 1.5 miles of the South Fork of the Gualala River, will:

- Ensure the property remains intact, extinguishing eleven certificates of compliance recorded on title.

- Protect a large tract of coastal redwood forest.
- Ensure the 1,420-acre mixed forest area will be managed in perpetuity under a forest management plan that guarantees forest health and accelerates development of older forest characteristics.
- Protect the east side of almost two miles of the South Fork Gualala River’s spawning habitat for steelhead; the west side of the river is already protected by the SCAPOSD-held Stewarts Point Conservation Easement.
- Allow for the future development of over one mile of a public trail along the South Fork Gualala River, an inland trail with the potential to link to coastal trail.
- Prohibit incompatible development and incompatible residential uses. Grazing could continue under the proposed conservation easement, while cultivation would be limited to 25 acres.
- Preserve the views of the forest from the scenic Skaggs Springs - Stewarts Point Road.
- Leverage the existing Climate Action Reserve-approved carbon project on the property, which reduces the timber value and results in a more affordable conservation easement.
- Increase conservation outcomes in the region as neighboring protected lands will be buffered from incompatible land uses that could have occurred on this property.

Coastal redwood forests have been harvested so extensively over the past 200 years that remaining tracts have become critically important to the resiliency and biodiversity of associated habitats and wildlife. Many of these habitats (coastal redwood/Douglas-fir forest, open grasslands, riverine and riparian) contain rare, threatened, endangered and other special-status species such as coho salmon, steelhead trout, marbled murrelets and northern spotted owls. Under current California Forest Practice Rules, the forest on the Rips Redwood property, with its high timber volume and good road network, could have been aggressively harvested.

In 2014, the Climate Action Reserve approved an “Improved Forest Management” carbon project on the property. The approved “Project Activity” of the carbon project involves greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions and removals through sustainable, non-industrial forestry in conjunction with forest management activities that provide for enhanced protection exceeding the requirements of the California Forest Practice Act. While the improved forest management practices imposed by the carbon project afford protection beyond current forest practice rules for the 100-year life of the project, acquisition of a restrictive conservation easement will protect the resources even further and in perpetuity.

For example, restrictions on timber harvesting in the proposed conservation easement are more stringent than allowed under the carbon project, and thus will accelerate development of late-seral stage coniferous forest. Under the approved carbon project, approximately 12,200 MBF (million board feet) can be harvested from the property in the years 2025 and 2050 combined; under the conservation easement harvest regime, only 2,000 MBF can be harvested during the years 2025 and 2050 combined. In addition, the proposed conservation easement prohibits development and intensive crops, and therefore, the grasslands on the property will continue to sequester carbon and provide additional habitat value.

A dominant threat to redwood forests in Sonoma County is subdivision and development. A recent analysis of forested land in the county indicated that approximately half of the county's forested parcels are of 50 acres or smaller. Subdivision of the remaining large forested properties will further fragment habitat and reduce owners' ability to efficiently manage their forests. Under the proposed conservation easement, all remaining old growth redwood trees and other conifers, as well as the hundreds of very large conifer and hardwood trees on the property, would be permanently retained; and management restrictions would focus on restoring the forest to a late-seral condition, and protecting riparian zones and water quality. Essentially the easement would cause the property to be owned as a single tract of 1,620 acres, limit residential development to three designated building envelopes around the existing homestead, and require the residential, agricultural and recreational uses of the property be restricted to protect natural resources.

The Rips Redwoods property is part of a greater conservation effort in the northern Sonoma Coast/southern Mendocino area to maintain an intact transition zone between two major biomes that converge in this region: the temperate coniferous forests that stretch north into Canada and the Mediterranean shrublands and woodlands that continue south into Baja California, Mexico. There is an existing network of over 90,000 acres of protected lands within this region, running between Sonoma County and The Conservation Fund's protected working forestland in Mendocino County. Four miles northeast of the property is a large network of protected lands that include Buckeye Forest (formerly known as Preservation Ranch), Howlett Forest, Flat Ridge Ranch, Gualala River Forest and the Garcia River Forest. Just over two miles to the southwest of the property are conservation easements over Rocky Point and the Kashia Coastal Reserve, with Salt Point State Park just to the south. The protected Stewarts Point Ranch is located directly across the South Fork Gualala River from the property. Protection of the Rips Redwoods property will enhance these previous investments by providing a critical migration link between the coast and inland ecosystems. (See Exhibit 1)

Acquisition of a trail easement will allow for the future development of an approximately 1.2 mile public trail along the South Fork of the Gualala River. The trail easement will allow for parking and a trail staging area, a 10-foot wide pedestrian path, and access to the river. SCAPOSD will facilitate the public trail easement going directly to the Sonoma County Regional Parks ("County Parks") for planning, development and management of the trail and associated access developments.

SCAPOSD has partnered with the Conservancy on a number of Sonoma County resource conservation and public access projects and is qualified to carry out this easement acquisition. SCAPOSD has a respected working relationship with the farming and resource conservation communities and maintains ongoing stewardship obligations for over 140 conservation and agricultural easements in Sonoma County. SCAPOSD receives significant annual funds from a ¼ percent county sales tax to ensure it carries out these long-term stewardship obligations. Joint projects between the SCAPOSD and the Conservancy include: fee title acquisition of Sonoma Mountain, Poff (Wright Hill Ranch), Montini property, Roche Ranch, Skiles, Willow Creek, Saddle Mountain, and Tolay Lake; the North Slope and the Laguna de Santa Rosa trail projects; and helping to fund the acquisitions of the Estero Americano Preserve, Jenner Headlands Preserve, Estero Ranch, the Kashia Coastal Reserve and the Stewarts Point Conservation and Trail Easements. All of the projects demonstrate a competence and commitment by SCAPOSD to complete conservation projects like the one proposed here.

Site Description: The approximately 1,620-acre Rips Redwoods property is located in the rural, coastal area of northwestern Sonoma County, two miles inland from the small hamlet of Stewarts Point and south of the community of Annapolis. The southwestern edge of the property fronts along the South Fork of the Gualala River for two miles and the property's southern edge is Skaggs Springs-Stewarts Point Road. The property extends northward and eastward from the river and road frontage and exists as 11 separate legal parcels. A network of interior roads provides good access throughout the property. (See Exhibits 1 & 2). Two regional conservation planning efforts, the Conservation Lands Network and the Bay Area Critical Linkages Study, identify the Rips Redwoods property as highly suitable for conservation with high biodiversity values. (See Exhibit 3)

The property contains significant natural ecosystems, including coastal redwood/Douglas-fir forest, open grasslands, riverine and riparian habitat, and a large pond. These ecosystems provide habitat for native fish and wildlife species, including for rare, threatened, endangered and other special-status species. Elevations on the property range from 180 feet along the river frontage to 1170 feet along the ridge road on the northeastern edge of the property. See Exhibit 2 for site photos.

The property contains approximately 1,420 acres of forested coastal hills with a mix of stands of redwood, Douglas fir, and hardwoods. Over half of the conifer timber volume is young growth redwood trees and approximately 13% is old growth redwood, with hundreds of very large trees. There are three open grassland/meadow ridgetop acres with a total of 107 acres identified to have vineyard development suitability.

The South Fork of the Gualala River contains active spawning habitat for steelhead (federally listed as threatened; state species of special concern) and historical habitat for coho salmon (federally and state listed as endangered). In addition, marbled murrelets (federally listed as threatened) have been detected by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife in the area south of the Clipper Mill bridge, which is located immediately south of the property. Northern spotted owls (federally listed as threatened; state species of special concern) were detected on the property in 2007.

The property includes a rural ranch compound comprised of an older single-family residence, a modular home and several barns and outbuildings.

Project History: The current and historical use of the property has been for timber production, grazing and rural residential/recreational use. The Richardson family, who has a long history of property ownership and ranching in the coastal Sonoma County area, owned and managed the property for approximately 130 years as a working forest and cattle ranch. The property, along with the adjacent 1,275-acre Bessie M. Richardson Trust property made up the estate of Donald R. Richardson. The previous landowners grazed up to 50 beef cattle on the grasslands and meadows in the early 2000's. The most recent timber harvest on the property reportedly occurred more than twenty years ago.

Rips Redwoods, LLC purchased the larger portion (1,620 acres) of the estate in a probate sale in 2013 with the intention of managing the property to conduct very selective timber harvests and working towards the goal of accelerating the forest to late-seral conditions. In 2014, the Climate Action Reserve approved an "Improved Forest Management" carbon project on the property; the landowner has not yet sold any carbon credits. The improved forest management practices

imposed by the carbon project have reduced the value of the timber on the property to a point where a conservation easement that limits subdivision, provides additional protections from harvest and provides public trail access, is affordable for SCAPOSD.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$750,000
SCAPOSD	\$3,750,000
Project Total	\$4,500,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project is the FY 2016 appropriation of the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (“Proposition 84”), codified at Public Resources Code (PRC) §§ 75001 et seq. Proposition 84 authorizes the use of these funds for the purpose of protecting natural habitat values of coastal lands of the state and for promoting access to and enjoyment of coastal resources of the state (PRC § 75060). Conservancy projects funded pursuant to Proposition 84 must be consistent with Division 21, *i.e.*, the Conservancy’s enabling legislation (PRC § 75060(b)). Finally, for projects that include the acquisition of property for natural resource protection, Proposition 84 requires the Conservancy to give priority to those that meet one or more of the criteria identified at PRC § 75071.

The proposed acquisition will conserve natural habitat values of the property and promote access to and enjoyment of coastal resources by facilitating future development of public access. The project satisfies three of the specified criteria in Section 75071: subsection (a), the project will link a large network of 90,000 acres of protected lands within the northern Sonoma Coast/southern Mendocino area and serve to facilitate wildlife movement and botanical transfer, and result in sustainable, combined acreage; subsection (b) by providing additional habitat within the conserved area; subsection (c), acquisition of the property will support a relatively large area of under-protected major habitat types including coastal coniferous forest; and subsection (e), the project is supported by significant non-state matching funds – SCAPOSD will contribute 5 times the Conservancy’s funding and the landowner is contributing an additional funds in the form of a bargain sale. As also required by Section 75071, staff have submitted to the Resources Agency and have posted on the [Conservancy’s website](#) an explanation as to how the proposed acquisition meets these criteria.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 5.5 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation (Public Resources Code § 31220) in the following respects:

Section 31220(a) authorizes the Conservancy to award grants for coastal watershed, habitat, and water quality protection and restoration. Consistent with this section, the acquisition of these property interests within the Gualala River coastal watershed prevent fragmentation of forestlands; protect and enhance water quality and salmonid habitat; improve forest structure and

increase natural diversity. In addition, the acquisition will provide limited public access where appropriate and compatible with resource protection and restoration objectives of the project.

Consistent with subsection 31220 (b)(2), the proposed project will implement land use practices that protect and restore fish (namely coho and other salmonids) and wildlife habitat within a coastal watershed. Consistent with subsection (b)(3), the proposed project will implement land use practices that reduce threats to coastal and marine fish (again, coho and other salmonids) and wildlife, largely through reducing temperature in and sediment to the South Fork Gualala River. Consistent with subsection (b)(4), the proposed project will implement land use practices that reduce unnatural erosion and sedimentation of a coastal watershed (caused by current and past timber harvest levels). Consistent with subsection (b)(6), the proposed project will acquire, protect and restore coastal riparian areas and other sensitive watershed lands. Consistent with subsection (b)(8), the proposed project will provide for public access compatible with resource protection and restoration objectives, as well as with public safety.

In accordance with section 31220(c), the proposed project is consistent with the Integrated Watershed Management Program established under Public Resources Code Section 30947, local watershed management plans, and water quality control plans adopted by the SWRCB. Please see the discussion in the “Consistency with Local Watershed Management Plan/State Water Quality Control Plan” section of this report, below. Also in accordance with Section 31220(c), the proposed project will contain a monitoring and evaluation component that includes indicators of ecosystem health and forest productivity (e.g., water quality, including flow rates and temperature, timber volumes and growth rates, presence of salmonids). Conservancy staff has also consulted with the State Water Resources Control Board to ensure consistency with Chapter 3 (commencing with Section 30915) of Division 20.4 of the Public Resources Code.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2018-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN
GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective G**, the proposed project will acquire land to allow for development of a new inland river trail and future coastal trail connection.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective A**, the proposed project will protect up to 1,620 acres of a significant coastal and watershed resource property.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective C**, the proposed project will preserve fish and wildlife corridors between core habitats along the coast and from coastal to inland habitat areas.

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

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on October 2, 2014, 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. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:**
 - *CA Climate Adaptation Strategy/Safeguarding California: Reducing Climate Risk Plan (July 2014)* by creating a large-scale well-connected sustainable system of protected areas and by conserving forestland to sequester carbon to enhance biodiversity and habitat (page 59).
 - *California Wildlife Action Plan, 2015 Update*, by furthering the following statewide-recommended actions: d) state and federal agencies should work with cities and counties to secure sensitive habitats and key habitat linkages; and g) federal, state, and local agencies and nongovernmental conservation organizations, working with private landowners and public land managers, should expand efforts to restore and conserve riparian communities.
 - *California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report*. The project supports Goal #1 to preserve and steward the state’s lands and natural resources, specifically by increasing ecosystem services and biodiversity, increasing resilience of natural systems, and preserving working landscapes. The proposed conservation easement would restrict development and timber harvesting in order to protect natural resources.
4. **Support of the public:** Project letters are included in Exhibit 3.
5. **Location:** The project is located just outside the coastal zone and is critical to protect water quality for salmon and steelhead populations in the Gualala River, a coastal draining stream.
6. **Need:** Without Conservancy funding, SCAPOSD will be unable to acquire the easement interests, protection of the forest in perpetuity would not occur and the opportunity to provide public access to and along the South Fork Gualala River would be lost.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The project has regional significance with respect to recreation and natural resources. A future trail along the South Fork Gualala River, with access to the river, provides a unique opportunity to experience the Gualala River and adjacent forest from private land. This future trail would complement two new segments of the California Coastal Trail, on the Stewarts Point Ranch and the Kashia Coastal Reserve, which are within a few miles of the Rips Redwoods property. In addition, this future trail would add to the network of nearby coastal trails at The Sea Ranch and Gualala Regional Park, approximately six to ten miles to the north, and at Stillwater Regional Park and Salt Point State Park, approximately five to ten miles to the south.

The project will protect habitat for listed species within the Gualala watershed; the South Fork Gualala River is one of the key anadromous fish streams in northern Sonoma County and is a high priority for conservation and restoration as it is on the federal Clean Water Act’s 303(d) listing of impaired water bodies.

8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** Because it is located two miles inland from the Pacific Ocean, the project will not be affected by projected sea level rise and will provide for the migration and adaptation of downstream habitats.

Additional Criteria

9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
10. **Readiness:** SCAPOSD has funded an appraisal, drafted the conservation and trail easements and has been in negotiations with the landowner for over a year; the district is ready to acquire the property interests when funding is available.
11. **Return to Conservancy:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
12. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** The property may be vulnerable to the climate change impacts of fire, drought, and species and habitat loss, however, protection of the property will help provide refuge for species impacted by climate change. The northern coastal region of Sonoma County represents the confluence, or ecotone, of two major continental biomes: the temperate coniferous forests that stretch north into Canada and the Mediterranean shrublands and woodlands that continue south into Baja California, Mexico. The diverse climatic conditions that exist at this ecotone produce suitable habitat for a wide range of plant and wildlife species adapted to one or both biomes, such as mountain lion and black bear. Maintaining an intact transition zone between these biomes for species movement is a primary driver for conservation in the northern coastal region of Sonoma County. More specifically, preserving the redwood/Douglas-fir forest on the Rips Redwoods property provides a refuge for multiple plant and animal species.
13. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The Rips Redwoods property has an approved Registered Carbon Project through the Carbon Action Reserve (CAR) on it, which ensures greater carbon storage than would result from standard forest harvest practices over a 100-year period. The proposed conservation easement ensures additional carbon storage than the carbon project and in perpetuity.

The forest will continue to sequester carbon as trees grow larger. Restrictions on timber harvesting in the proposed conservation easement are more stringent than allowed by California Forest Practice Rules and the carbon project, and thus will cause more carbon to be sequestered than would otherwise occur. Under the carbon project, approximately 12,200 MBF (million board feet) can be harvested from the property in the years 2025 and 2050 combined; under the conservation easement harvest regime, approximately 2,000 MBF can be harvested during the years 2025 and 2050 combined. The project would also result in fewer greenhouse gas emissions, as there would be fewer log trucks on the road and fewer gas-powered equipment such as tractors, saws, loaders, and chippers. In addition, the proposed conservation easement limits development and intensive crops, and therefore, the grasslands on the property will also continue to sequester carbon.

Future construction of the public trail will result in minimal production of greenhouse gas emissions as the trail will be an unpaved trail on an old logging roadbed with minimal additional amenities.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

Although located outside the coastal zone, the proposed project effects a coastal watershed and is consistent with several policies contained in the *Sonoma County Local Coastal Program* (LCP), certified in 1981 and revised and incorporated into the *Sonoma County General Plan 2020 (2008)*. The LCP identifies the need for public action and assistance to resolve existing problems in special resource areas including coastal redwood forest. The proposed project advances policies of the General Plan which establishes that “environmentally sensitive habitat areas shall be protected against any significant disruption of habitat values” (policy 30240) and calls for protecting and enhancing public access to the coast (policy 30212 *et seq*).

The proposed authorization advances numerous goals of the *Sonoma County General Plan 2020* by protecting the largely open, scenic character of an important Scenic Landscape Unit; preserving the roadside landscape of scenic Highway One (Goal OSRC-3); preserving the unique rural and natural character of the area (Goal OSRC-6); protecting the County’s natural habitats (Goal OSRC-7); and preserving, sustaining and restoring forestry resources for their conservation, recreation and open space values (Goal OSRC-12).

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

Under Public Resources Code section 31220(c), projects funded under Chapter 5.5 of Division 21, the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, must be consistent with the Integrated Watershed Management Program established pursuant to PRC Section 30947 and local watershed management plans, “if available and relevant to the project.” The proposed project is consistent with the relevant plan and program described below.

Integrated Watershed Management Program. The *North Coast Integrated Regional Water Management Plan, Phase III (NCIRWMP)*, prepared by *North Coast Resource Partnership, August 2014*) was developed pursuant to PRC § 30947. The NCIRWMP identifies six primary integrated water management goals and twelve associated objectives for the North Coast region, relevant at both the local and regional scale, of which the following apply to the proposed project: (Goal 3) Ecosystem Conservation and Enhancement and (Goal 5) Climate Adaptation and Energy Independence. As discussed immediately below, the proposed project is consistent with applicable objectives of the NCIRWMP, and thus with the Integrated Watershed Management Program.

- Goal 3, Objective 5 – “Ecosystem Conservation and Enhancement. Conserve, enhance and restore watershed and aquatic ecosystems, including functions, habitats and elements that support biological diversity”. The proposed project will ensure 1,620 acres remain undeveloped and implement a forest management plan that guarantees forest health and accelerates development of older forest characteristics. By these actions, the project will conserve and enhance the biodiversity of a large intact parcel of coastal redwood forest.
- Goal 3, Objective 6 – “Ecosystem Conservation and Enhancement. Enhance salmonid populations by conserving, enhancing, and restoring required habitats and watershed processes”. The proposed project will reduce sediment discharges into the Gualala River watershed associated with allowable harvest activities, thereby enhancing riparian

habitat, improving water quality, decreasing water temperature and thus enhancing salmonid habitat.

- Goal 5, Objective 11 – “Climate Adaptation and Energy Independence. Promote local energy independence, water/energy use efficiency, GHG emission reduction, and jobs creation”. By combining an approved carbon project with a restrictive conservation easement, the proposed project will increase carbon sequestration and reduce GHG emissions over and above reductions required by standard forest harvest practice regulations.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA: The proposed project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations §15313 as an acquisition of land for preservation of fish and wildlife, and §15325 as a transfer of an interest in land to preserve open space and habitat.

A CEQA analysis of the possible significant environmental effects of the trail easement cannot be evaluated. At this time, no public access plan or specific route exists, only public access concepts that have not been approved by a public agency and that do not contain sufficient detail for an analysis of any possible significant environmental effects. Acquisition of the trail easement will not have a significant adverse effect or limit the choice of alternatives or mitigation measures employed in the exact routing and design of the trail (see 14 Cal. Code of Regulations § 15004(b)(2)).

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