
COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 05, 2020

Restoring Coho Habitat in San Geronimo Creek

Project No. 08-040-03
Project Manager: Julia Elkin

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to amend the January 18, 2018 authorization to disburse funds to the Marin County Resource Conservation District for restoring coho salmon habitat in San Geronimo Creek, to allow the Marin Resource Conservation District to use \$25,000 of those funds for procurement, transportation, and storage of large woody debris for future use on instream coho salmon habitat restoration projects within the greater Lagunitas Creek watershed in Marin County.

LOCATION: Lagunitas Creek watershed, Marin County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Integrated Coastal and Marine Resource Protection

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [January 18, 2018 Coastal Conservancy Staff Recommendation](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

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

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby modifies its authorization of January 18, 2018, to allow disbursement of remaining funds to Marin County Resource Conservation District (“the grantee”) to procure, transport, and store large woody debris for future use on instream coho salmon habitat restoration projects within the greater Lagunitas Creek watershed in Marin County.

Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget for funds disbursed under this authorization.
 2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
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3. A plan for acknowledgment of Conservancy funding and Proposition 1 as the source of that funding.”

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.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy amend its January 18, 2018 authorization to the Marin County Resource Conservation District (MRCD) for restoring coho habitat in San Geronimo Creek to allow the MRCD to use \$25,000 of remaining grant funds to purchase, transport, and store a supply of large woody debris (LWD) for future use on instream coho salmon habitat restoration projects within the greater Lagunitas Creek watershed in Marin County (Exhibit 1).

On January 18, 2018, the Conservancy authorized disbursement of \$199,385 to MRCD to construct in-stream and floodplain habitat improvements for coho salmon and other species in San Geronimo Creek at the McGuinn-Newman Property in the community of San Geronimo. The MRCD and its contractors installed 18 logs and 10 rootwads anchored with boulders in the channel over a 370-foot reach of San Geronimo Creek, at and adjacent to the confluence with Larsen Creek. Construction included the planting of willows, alders, and other native riparian vegetation in the project area. In combination, the vegetation plantings and large wood-boulder structures serve to stabilize the eroding creek banks and protect creek-adjacent property, while also restoring winter high flow refugia and sheltered, shaded summer rearing habitat for salmonids.

MRCD completed the San Geronimo Creek project in fall 2018 with a cost savings of more than \$20,000, directly a result of significant effort on the part of MRCD to secure donated materials for project implementation. Staff is recommending these unspent funds be redirected to purchase, store and transport LWD that will further the completed project’s coho habitat recovery goals by securing critical LWD resources for use on future instream restoration projects in the San Geronimo Creek and broader Lagunitas Creek watershed. No increase in funding would be needed to secure this additional benefit.

Lagunitas Creek watershed supports the highest population of federally endangered wild coho salmon in the California Central Coast ESU. Lack of woody debris habitat has been identified and analyzed as one of the chief limiting factors impacting coho production and survival within Lagunitas Creek Watershed. Securing large woody debris (LWD) for instream restoration that is

both of the correct dimensions and species' has been identified by MRCD as one of the leading logistical challenges and key expenses facing future instream restoration projects planned for the watershed.

Through this amended scope, MRCD would purchase and transport at least 15 pieces of large wood from Sonoma County to West Marin. All of the LWD pieces are of CDFW approved species and appropriately sized for instream restoration project use. The wood would be stored by MRCD at West Marin Compost, free of charge, for as long as necessary until future use of the LWD on instream habitat restoration projects. This same LWD storage location was used by MRCD for wood storage related to the San Geronimo Creek project implemented under the January 18, 2018 staff recommendation. Securing LWD supplies at below market costs available currently would generate cost savings and efficiencies for future restoration projects implemented in the watershed.

Site Description: The Lagunitas Creek Watershed is a 103 square mile watershed located in Marin County, originating at headwaters on the northern slopes of Mt. Tamalpais and flowing southeasterly to the watershed's eventual termination into Tomales Bay. Major tributaries to Lagunitas Creek watershed include Olema Creek, San Geronimo Creek, Devils Gulch, and Nicasio Creek. Lagunitas Creek watershed hosts the largest remaining wild run of coho salmon in Central California.

Grantee Qualifications: MRCD has a long history of successfully implementing natural resource enhancement projects in Marin County. MRCD provides valuable technical assistance to private residents living alongside County creeks through their Urban Streams Program (USP) and coordinates extensively with County Departments, federal and state agencies, and neighborhood groups on project development and permitting. MRCD also leads on carbon farming project development with ranchers in West Marin through a successful partnership with the Marin Carbon Project, an effort funded in part through a \$200,000 Coastal Conservancy grant. In addition, MRCD successfully led the design, permitting, and implementation of the 'Restoring Coho Habitat in San Geronimo Creek' project, demonstrating capacity to administer state funds and coordinate effectively with landowners in the region to ensure successful development of multi-benefit instream restoration projects. MRCD came in over \$20,000 under budget in implementation of the San Geronimo Creek project, thanks to extensive staff efforts coordinating donated materials and cost-savings for the project. MRCD is now actively developing additional instream coho habitat restoration project opportunities that would use the LWD purchased through this expanded scope.

Project History: The Restoring Coho Habitat in San Geronimo Creek project was developed through the San Geronimo Valley Salmon Enhancement Plan, which was partially funded by a Conservancy grant of \$100,000 to the County of Marin in 2008. The Plan was followed by a Landowner Assistance Program, which was partially funded by a Conservancy grant of \$98,335 to the County of Marin in 2010. The initial design work for the San Geronimo Creek project was prepared as part of the Landowner Assistance Program. Additional work to take the plans from 30% to 100% design was funded by CDFW through a grant of \$93,930 to the County. MRCD submitted a proposal for the Restoring Coho Habitat in San Geronimo Creek project to the

Conservancy's Proposition 1 grant round in May 2017, and the project was fully built as of November 2019. MRCD approached the Conservancy about modifying the existing board authorization after the original San Geronimo Creek project was fully constructed. Simultaneous to the cost savings of the implementation phase becoming clear, a unique opportunity arose to secure a supply of LWD from Sonoma County sources, leading to this staff recommendation for expanding the January 18, 2018 authorization.

PROJECT FINANCING

No new funds are included in the proposed authorization. The expanded scope to be carried out under this authorization remains consistent with the funding source, the fiscal year 2017 appropriation from the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 (Proposition 1, Water Code §§ 79700 et seq.). Funds appropriated to the Conservancy derive from Chapter 6 (commencing with § 79730) and may be used "for multi-benefit water quality, water supply, and watershed protection and restoration projects for the watersheds of the state" (Section 79731). Section 79732(a) states more specifically that these funds may be used to "protect and restore aquatic, wetland, and migratory bird ecosystems including fish and wildlife corridors" and to "assist in the recovery of endangered, threatened, or migratory species by improving watershed health [and] fish passage...." Consistent with these provisions, the project promotes enhancement and restoration of aquatic ecosystems providing habitat for threatened species of anadromous fish.

As required by Proposition 1, the proposed project provides multiple benefits. By facilitating future restoration of winter refuge and summer rearing habitat in San Geronimo Creek and the greater Lagunitas Creek Watershed, the project will benefit depleted native fish populations and other aquatic species. This project will also reduce erosion by enabling bioengineered bank stabilization and/or channel stabilization, thus improving water quality.

The initial project as described in the January 18, 2018 staff recommendation was reviewed and subsequently recommended for funding through a competitive grant process under the Conservancy's *Proposition 1 Grant Program Guidelines* adopted in June 2015 ("Prop 1 Guidelines"). (See § 79706(a)). The proposed expansion of project scope meets each of the evaluation criteria in the Prop 1 Guidelines as described in detail in this section, the "Project Summary" section and in the "Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines" section of this recommendation.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project remains consistent with Chapter 5.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, as described in Exhibit 2: January 18, 2018, Staff Recommendation.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2018-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective E** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will improve fish habitat by securing resources critical to future implementation of instream habitat restoration projects benefitting endangered coho salmon.

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:**

By securing LWD resources needed for restoration and enhancement of instream habitat, the proposed project serves to promote and implement several state plans, including:

- Priority Action 4 identified in the 2014 *California Water Action Plan*, prepared by CalEPA, the California Natural Resources Agency, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture), which provides: "Protect and Restore Important Ecosystems". The Project promotes this action by facilitating future restoration of instream habitat in creeks that supports important and threatened fish populations.
- *California Wildlife Action Plan*, prepared by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) in 2015. The project promotes future implementation of the following conservation strategy identified by the Wildlife Plan for anadromous salmonids statewide:
 - Enhance and protect key spawning and rearing habitat for each specific anadromous species (pg. 6-19)
- The following tasks identified in the *Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon*, prepared by CDFW in 2004:
 - Lagunitas Creek Task BM-LA-12: Work with private landowners to encourage biotechnical bank stabilization, riparian protections, woody debris retention, and timing of water withdrawals to help protect coho salmon.
 - Rangewide- Task XXII-A-04 Encourage restoration of LWD and shade by the improvement of existing riparian zones through planting, release of conifers or other appropriate native species, and control of blackberries and other competitors.

4. **Support of the public:** Instream restoration efforts in the watershed enjoy broad public support. Supporters of the 'Restoring Coho Habitat in San Geronimo Creek' project included Senator McGuire, Supervisor Rodoni, and Assemblymember Levine.
5. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the Lagunitas Creek watershed, which is partially within the coastal zone of Marin County. The project benefits coastal and ocean resources by enabling instream habitat restoration efforts for recovery of coho salmon that spawn in the Lagunitas Creek watershed.
6. **Need:** Without funding from the Conservancy for purchase and transportation, the available supply of low-cost LWD could be lost.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** Lagunitas Creek is identified as a focus population in NMFS 2012 Central California Coho Salmon Recovery Plan and as a Rank 5 (highest priority) recovery site in the 2004 Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon. Lagunitas Creek is also identified as an important watershed for steelhead in DFG's 1996 "Steelhead Restoration and Management Plan for California." Consistency of the project with these plans is described in the "Project Summary" section above.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The storage of LWD at the West Marin Compost facility is not vulnerable to sea-level rise.

Additional Criteria

9. **Urgency:** Coho salmon are currently at 6 to 15% of their abundance during the 1940s. Given this decline, and in light of the State's primary objective of returning coho salmon to a level of sustained viability, while protecting their genetic integrity, enhancement projects with a high potential for recovering local populations of coho salmon are a high priority for the State. A number of San Geronimo Valley landowners are interested in implementing restoration and enhancement projects on their properties to benefit these endangered fish; securing limited LWD supplies is critical to implementing these projects. LWD of the allowable tree species and appropriate dimensions for instream restoration use is in very limited supply and high cost. The opportunity to secure a supply of restoration-compatible LWD at a lower cost is both urgent and opportune. If the LWD supply is not purchased in the near term, it could be lost.
10. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
11. **Innovation:** MRCD's work with small private landowners to implement instream coho habitat enhancements is innovative; securing LWD supplies for future such projects will help facilitate successful restoration within this key watershed.
12. **Readiness:** MRCD is ready to proceed with the purchase and transportation of the LWD as soon as funding is available.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See "Project History" above.

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

The proposed project remains consistent with the local watershed management plan/State Water Quality Control Plan as described in the January 18, 2018 Staff Recommendation (See Exhibit 2).

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

On January 18, 2018, when it authorized disbursement of funds for the San Geronimo Creek project, the Conservancy adopted findings regarding the environmental effects of the project based on the “Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Marin Coastal Watersheds Permit Coordination Program” (Final IS/MND) for the Marin Coastal Watersheds Permit Coordination Program. The Conservancy filed a Notice of Determination with the State Clearinghouse on January 18, 2018. Purchase, storage and future use of the LWD is part of the project reviewed under the Final IS/MD as necessary for implementation and maintenance of the conservation and restoration practices. As such, the project remains substantially unchanged from its description in the Final IS/MND, and no new environmental information or change in circumstances require a re-evaluation of the potential environmental effects of the project. (14 Cal Code. Regs. Section 15162(b)). Accordingly, the proposed authorization remains consistent with the CEQA findings adopted by the Conservancy in connection with the January 18, 2018 authorization.