

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
March 25, 2021

WHITE SLOUGH RESTORATION, POST-CONSTRUCTION MONITORING

Project No. 13-001-02
Project Manager: Julia Elkin

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$300,000 received from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to contract for post-construction monitoring of the White Slough Restoration Project in the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge (HBNWR) on Humboldt Bay.

LOCATION: Southeast portion of Humboldt Bay shoreline, unincorporated Humboldt County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [February 6, 2020 Staff Recommendation](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [May 26, 2016 Staff Recommendation](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [March 26, 2015 Staff Recommendation](#)
 - Exhibit 5: [CDFW Wetlands Restoration for Greenhouse Gas Reduction Grant Award Letter](#)
-

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) to retain a contractor to conduct post-construction monitoring of the White Slough Restoration Project in the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge on Humboldt Bay.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation 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.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$300,000 to retain a contractor to conduct post-construction monitoring of the White Slough Restoration Project.

The Conservancy previously authorized funding of the White Slough Restoration Project on March 26, 2015, May 26, 2016, and February 6, 2020 (Exhibit 4, 3, 2). The February 6, 2020 authorization approved disbursement of \$838,113 received from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to the Humboldt County Resources Conservation District (HCRCD) for construction of the final phase of the White Slough project and four years of post-construction project monitoring.

The CDFW funding award derives from the State's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, and specifically requires extensive post-construction wetland soils and carbon storage monitoring. Due to administrative rules and capacities, the HCRCD and Conservancy staff have determined the most efficient pathway for securing post-construction monitoring services for the White Slough Restoration Project's post-construction monitoring is for the Conservancy to contract for these services directly, rather than have them contracted by the HCRCD. Therefore, the Conservancy staff, pursuant to delegated authority, reduced the Conservancy's grant to HCRCD to \$538,113, leaving \$300,000 remaining of the amount authorized by the Conservancy on February 6, 2020. Upon Board approval, the Conservancy will use the remaining \$300,000 of CDFW grant funds to retain a contractor to conduct the White Slough Restoration's four-year post-construction monitoring program.

White Slough Restoration post-construction monitoring will consist of four years of data collection and analysis to investigate the influence of geomorphology on the sediment accretion and organic carbon accumulation in the restored tidal wetlands of the White Slough project site on Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. The post-construction monitoring plan to be funded by this authorization will address four monitoring components: 1) sediment accretion, 2) soil carbon development, 3) topographic change, and 4) eco-geomorphic feedback. Field studies and associated laboratory analysis will be conducted to address each of these areas of White Slough project performance. Post-construction monitoring activities will commence upon completion of final construction actions and designed levee breaches at the White Slough site, anticipated to occur in late summer 2021.

Site Description: The project area remains as described in the February 6, 2020 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

As described in the May 26, 2016 staff recommendation (Exhibit 3), the proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on October 2, 2014.

PROJECT FINANCING

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (*via* a grant to the Conservancy) \$300,000

Project Total **\$300,000**

The proposed disbursement under this authorization will derive entirely from the grant by CDFW to the Conservancy for the project. These funds are derived from CDFW's Wetland Restoration for Greenhouse Gas Reduction Program. Funding for that program is derived from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund Investment Plan (GGRF) and Communities Revitalization Act (Health and Safety Code (HSC) Sections 39710 – 39723). The Act requires that GGRF funds be used to (1) facilitate the achievement of reductions of GHG emissions consistent with the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (HSC Sections 38500 *et seq*), and (2) to the extent feasible, achieve other co-benefits. CDFW grant guidelines identify potential co-benefits associated with restoring ecological function in coastal tidal wetlands include improved habitat for fish and wildlife, sea-level rise and inland flooding adaptation, decreased air pollution, and improved water quality. (CDFW & CCI 2019 Proposal Solicitation Notice). The proposed project is consistent with the use of GGRF funding as authorized by the legislature which require the funds be "used for wetland restoration projects that will be managed to maintain benefits for at least 50 years." (Budget Act of 2017, Chapter 249, Statutes of 2017 and Budget Act of 2018, Chapter 30, Statutes of 2018). The project is specifically designed to provide such benefits.

In addition to seeking to capture and offset greenhouse gas emissions, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 sets forth certain GGRF funding priorities (HSC Section 38590.1), including addressing climate adaptation and resiliency. The proposed post-construction monitoring will assess restoration site response and carbon storage to inform the broader community of adaptive coastal restoration project practitioners working to address rising seas over the coming century.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

As described in the May 26, 2016 staff recommendation (Exhibit 3), the proposed project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 5.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Section 31220) and pursuant to Section 31113. The project remains consistent with these sections of the Conservancy's enabling legislation.

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

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective B** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project is a critical component of completing restoration of 40 acres of coastal wetland and intertidal areas within Humboldt Bay.

Consistent with **Goal 8, Objective C** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project monitors the performance of beneficial sediment reuse as a multi-benefit strategy to increase sea-level rise resilience of both the natural wetland system and adjacent road infrastructure.

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

As explained in the May 26, 2016 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2), the project remains consistent with the Humboldt Bay Management Plan (HBMP), the Humboldt Bay Watershed Salmon and Steelhead Conservation (HBSSC) Plan, prepared by the Humboldt Bay Watershed Advisory Committee in March 2005 the Water Quality Control Plan for the North Coast, adopted by the Regional Water Quality Control Board North Coast Region (last updated in 2007), and HBNWR's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), adopted by USFWS in 2009.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

On March 26, 2015, the Conservancy adopted the "Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge White Slough Tidelands Restoration Project Final Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration" (Final IS/MND) and authorized funding for the project. The Conservancy filed a Notice of Determination with the State Clearinghouse on March 27, 2015. The project has been revised slightly from its description in the Final IS/MND to include increased monitoring. The increased monitoring is designed to unobtrusively assess ecological processes on the project site and includes establishing small feldspar study plots, a series of low-profile sediment elevation tables along the reconstructed marsh plain, and limited soil core collection for assessing sediment accretion and soil carbon storage. These monitoring efforts all involve on-foot access by the monitoring team, who are trained in field protocols that minimize impacts to project sites during data gathering. However, otherwise 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 March 26, 2015 authorization and no new CEQA document is required.