

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

March 24, 2022

Sulphur Creek Fish Passage Improvement Augmentation

Project No. 20-014-01

Project Manager: Erica Johnson

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$281,087 to California Trout, Inc. to augment the Conservancy's grant of \$196,123, authorized on June 18, 2020 for studies and designs, to prepare revised designs of the Sulphur Creek Fish Passage Improvement Project, Napa County to include bridge replacement.

LOCATION: Sulphur Creek, St. Helena, Napa County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [June 18, 2020 Staff Recommendation](#)

Exhibit 3: [Bridge Replacement Trade-offs](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

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

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed two hundred and eighty-one thousand eighty-seven dollars (\$281,087) to California Trout, Inc. ("the grantee") to augment the Conservancy grant of \$196,123 authorized on June 18, 2020, for preparation of revised designs, modeling, and additional planning for permits and CEQA to include bridge replacement in the Sulphur Creek Fish Passage Improvement Project, Napa 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 revised work program, schedule, and budget.

2. Names and qualifications of any additional contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.

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 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the San Francisco Bay Conservancy Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The grantee is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

At its June 18, 2020 meeting, the Conservancy authorized disbursement of up to \$196,123 to California Trout, Inc. (CalTrout) to conduct studies and prepare designs to improve fish passage on Sulphur Creek, which will open up 3.2 miles of high-quality spawning and rearing habitat for Central California Coast steelhead and other anadromous fish, such as Chinook Salmon and Pacific lamprey (Exhibit 2). Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize an augmentation of \$281,087 to enable CalTrout to revise the project designs to include replacement of a bridge that was initially intended to remain in place.

The project addresses current problems with a fish ladder where Sulphur Creek crosses under a bridge on White Sulphur Springs Road in St. Helena, Napa County (Exhibit 1). The fish ladder was installed by California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) in 2002. CDFW staff have monitored the fish ladder and deemed it ineffective due to scour and frequent blockage by storm debris.

An environmental consulting firm, WRA, was hired for the project and has completed field surveys, site investigations, hydraulic modeling, and analysis for a channel design that preserves the existing century-old bridge (this design option may be referred to as bridge revetment). In developing the budget for the 65% designs, WRA found that preserving the existing bridge would be considerably more expensive than originally estimated, and similar in cost to replacing the bridge. Additionally, the 65% designs showed that preserving the existing bridge limited how fully fish passage could be restored.

A stakeholder meeting with the Napa County Resource Conservation District (RCD), CalTrout, CDFW, and landowners occurred both online and on site in October of 2020 to discuss the trade-offs between bridge revetment and bridge replacement (see the ecological and functional comparisons of each option in Exhibit 3). CDFW staff as well as the owner of the bridge and the properties adjacent have expressed their support for the new project direction to replace the bridge, which would allow for the restoration of a natural channel underneath the new bridge. The natural channel will maximize the number of days of optimal flow regimes that allow fish

passage and allow other wildlife to pass through along the creek edges. Other benefits include reduced flood risk, reduced maintenance cost and associated emissions for maintenance visits, and avoiding damage to the stream bed from fire trucks or other utility vehicles that were too large to drive across the existing bridge.

CalTrout has therefore asked the Conservancy for an additional \$281,087 to develop a revised design for the project, under which the existing bridge would be replaced. Work is expected to be completed in December 2023.

The site and grantee remain as described in the June 18, 2020 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

Selection Criteria

1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.

See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Strategic Plan" section below.

2. Project is a good investment of state resources.

The proposed project provides multiple benefits. It will enable opening of 3.2 miles of high-quality spawning and rearing habitat on a tributary to the Napa River that is important to Central California Coast steelhead as well as other anadromous fish, including Chinook salmon and Pacific lamprey. The design will provide for a project that will aid in the recovery of endangered species, provide resilience against climate change-induced loss of anadromous fish rearing habitat, reduce maintenance costs for CDFW, which maintains the fish ladder, and continue to foster working relationships with resource agencies and private landowners to advance essential work on private lands.

3. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.

The bridge replacement provides assurance that the project will be sustainable for the following reasons: The new bridge will have a 75-year design life, whereas the design life of the existing bridge is unknown; and there will be minimal maintenance in terms of debris removal for the new bridge because it will allow for a natural channel to pass underneath instead of the rock armoring that would be required for the existing bridge.

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

This project directly addresses climate change impacts by designing the channel to allow for the maximum number of days of optimal flow regimes that allow fish passage during different portions of the year. Access to cool, year-round stream flows, and to diverse habitat from the mainstem will be increasingly important for the drier and hotter years caused by climate change. In addition, restoring a natural channel underneath the new bridge will allow other

wildlife to pass through along the creek edges and in the channel, where the fish ladder previously collected large debris or increased flow regimes. Other benefits include reduced flood risk, reduced maintenance cost and associated emissions for maintenance visits, and reduced damage to the stream bed because fire trucks or other utility vehicles can use the bridge to cross the creek.

5. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

The project is a result of cooperation between the grantee, the RCD, resource agencies, and private landowners. The project is supported by State Senator Bill Dodd, State Assembly member Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, Napa County Supervisor Diane Dillon, and the RCD.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy (2020 Board Authorization)	\$196,123
Coastal Conservancy (2022 Requested Augment)	\$281,087
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Proposition 68)	\$220,000
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Fisheries Restoration Grant Program)	\$155,000
Project Total	\$852,210

The expected source of Conservancy funds for this augmentation is an FY 2016/17 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 (Proposition 1, Water Code § 79700 et seq.). The project remains consistent with this funding source as described in the June 18, 2020 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The project remains consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation as described in the June 18, 2020 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

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

The project remains consistent with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan Goals as described in the June 18, 2020 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project consists of planning and design activities, including data collection and research to develop engineering design documents, and as such is statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Sections 15262 (feasibility or planning studies for

possible future actions) and categorically exempt pursuant to Section 15306 (basic data collection, research, experimental management and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource).

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