



November 17, 2022

Mr. Douglas Bosco, Chairman  
California State Coastal Conservancy  
1330 Broadway, 13th Floor  
Oakland, CA 94612

RE: Letter of Support for the Elkhorn Slough Biomass Pilot Project

Dear Mr. Bosco:

I am writing to support the Elkhorn Slough Foundation's (ESF) \$483,600 proposal to the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) to pilot the conversion of felled invasive eucalyptus trees to biochar.

Eucalyptus groves in North Monterey County represent a significant and spreading wildfire and public safety hazard. Their presence directly reduces water supplies in our areas, affecting seasonal wetlands and rare amphibians that depend on those wetlands. The Elkhorn Slough Reserve has removed 12 acres of eucalyptus forest over the last several years. This effort has reestablished a trajectory of coast live oak woodland establishment, reduced fire danger in our community and eliminated trees that are prone to falling on our county roads during storm events. The project has improved both the habitat and public safety in our area.

Our partners in the conservation of the Elkhorn Slough Watershed, the Elkhorn Slough Foundation has cleared 7 acres of eucalyptus trees in the Elkhorn Slough watershed. There is strong support here to continue removing these trees from critical habitat areas and in areas where these trees threaten community safety. A major challenge with this work is dealing with the resultant biomass. Tree removal projects face the dilemma of what to do with woody material produced. There is low demand from the fire wood and power plant sectors. In addition, this results in complete release of the carbon stored in the trees.

Instead of disposing of trees in the conventional manner ESF has stockpiled 8,500 tons of logs and is working with a contractor to use a mobile kiln in early 2023 to convert them into about 213 tons of charcoal. Both North County Fire Protection District and CalFire have issued burn permits for this operation. Converting wood into charcoal reduces the amount of carbon released into the atmosphere and creates a stable form of carbon that can be added to soil and sequester carbon indefinitely. This proposal includes studying the effectiveness of 1) mixing charcoal with compost to make biochar and adding to farmland soil to increase soil health and 2) improving the quality of farmland waste water through biochar filtration. If it proves useful then it could potentially be supplied to the farm sector to help finance future tree removal projects. ESF has about 100 acres of eucalyptus on its land and an additional 2,000 acres occur on private land in the watershed.

This project proposes to pilot this approach to biomass reduction, carbon capture, charcoal production, and test its usefulness for the farmland sector. We believe this may provide a pathway to reducing the cost of large-scale eucalyptus removal and help restore native habitats, create fire-safe communities, and increase water availability. We enthusiastically support this proposal.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Feliz", with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Feliz  
Elkhorn Slough Reserve Manager