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Request for *approval* to develop agreements in the amount of up to \$1,350,000 to conduct regional planning for the NE Delta.

November 4, 2015

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends board authorization for the Executive Officer to develop agreements in the amount of up to \$1,350,000 to conduct regional planning for the NE Delta in support of Eco Restore. Agreements once complete to will be brought back to the Board for authorization to execute.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

California Eco Restore directs the Delta Conservancy to facilitate locally led regional planning processes to identify priority projects in the Cosumnes (NE Delta), Cache Slough, Western and Southern Delta regions. To support this effort, a subset of the Restoration Network has developed a three step framework, to be piloted for the Northeast Delta region. The process aims to engage the best available science for restoration design by connecting science and stakeholder experts to advanced analytical tools in a real-time analysis and decision support environment. The Framework helps scientists, stakeholders, and agencies envision how complex ecosystem restoration alternatives can be integrated with flood protection, the agricultural economy, and heritage values of the Delta. **Step 1. Implement Data, Modeling, and Decision-Support Tools.** First, the Framework integrates diverse data from physical and ecological processes to economics and demographics within an advanced data analytics and visualization platform. The goal is to produce modeling, data visualization and decision-support tools that can be used in real-time by stakeholders and system experts alike as alternative futures are deliberated. **Step 2. Develop a Vision of Regional Ecological Potential .** Second, using the data and modeling tools, the Framework will produce a science-based vision of northeast Delta ecological potential as a guide to assure that individual restoration actions yield high-functioning landscapes in the future. The vision will represent our best data-driven current understanding of ecosystem function and potential while providing an overarching reference tool to guide restoration actions. **Step 3. Develop Multi-Benefit Alternatives and Facilitate Decisions.** The Framework ultimately supports co-development of broadly acceptable landscape restoration strategies using the best available tools and scientific understanding. Moreover, the Framework provides a decision support environment that facilitates clarification of tradeoffs between alternatives to promote informed decisions among all stakeholders. The framework will support successful design, selection and implementation of projects eligible for funding through Proposition 1 grant programs.

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Steps 1 and 2 will be led the by San Francisco Estuary Institute - Aquatic Science Center. SFEI-ASC is a unique public-service institution established as part of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) for the San Francisco Estuary. Per their founding bylaws, SFEI is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, led by a representational Board of Directors that includes high-level representatives from the EPA, the State Water Board, Regional Water Boards, local flood control agencies, clean water agencies, environmental NGOs, and industry. On behalf of the State of California, SFEI administers a Joint Powers Authority to provide science support to natural resources agencies. The SFEI staff are expert in collaborative processes to develop the ecological potential of a given area and the scientific basis for restoration strategies and individual projects. The cost for completing steps 1 and 2 for the NE Delta will not exceed \$1,100,000. It is anticipated that an interagency agreement will be developed between the Conservancy and ASC to complete these steps.

Step 3 will require expert facilitation and administrative support to ensure multiple stakeholders, agency representative and recognized science experts can engage at appropriate times, and efficiently to develop broadly accepted landscape restoration strategies and projects that support those strategies. The Conservancy will run an Invitation for Bid process to obtain qualified facilitation support from one or more contractors. The cost for facilitating the NE Delta processes will not exceed \$250,000.

BACKGROUND

The Delta Reform Act of 2009 established the Conservancy and includes four relevant mandates: (1) Protect and enhance habitat and habitat restoration, (2) Protect and preserve Delta agriculture and working landscapes; (3) Identify priority projects and initiatives for which funding is needed; and (4) Protect, conserve and restore the region's physical, agricultural, cultural, historical and living resources.

The Conservancy's Strategic Plan identifies a goal of leading efforts in protecting, enhancing and restoring the Delta ecosystem in coordination with other governmental and non-government entities and citizens in the Delta, and an objective to identify restoration priorities in collaboration with existing federal, state, regional and local governmental and not-governmental entities. The plan also identifies a goal of establishing the Conservancy as a valuable partner with Delta growers, agriculture-related businesses and residents in protecting and enhancing the Delta's agricultural and working landscapes.

The Conservancy's current Three Year Work Plan specifically identifies the planning process envisioned in this project under the Restoration Hub work priority.

Proposition 1 allows for 10% of the Conservancy's allocation to go toward planning and monitoring to ensure successful design, selection and implementation of projects. The project is intended to identify projects that would meet criteria and be eligible for Prop. 1 funding, thereby improving the long-term efficacy of the public funding. The need for additional regional planning in the Delta is called for in the Delta Plan, has been articulated in the High Impact Science Agenda as approved by the Delta Plan

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Interagency Implementation Committee, and has been specifically called for in the Governor's Eco Restore Program. The Framework for regional planning has been in development for several years. The Conservancy has worked extensively with the Delta Science Program, SFEI-ASC, The Nature Conservancy and several consultants to develop the Framework. The Framework has been vetted through the Delta Restoration Network which includes agencies working in the Delta, several NGO organizations, and local stakeholders. Additionally, countless meetings with agencies and stakeholders have been conducted to get input on the Framework. There is currently support from State and local agencies to do the regional planning envisioned.

BUDGET

The total project cost is \$1,650,000, with the Delta Stewardship Council providing funding to secure time from science experts (Approx. \$150,000), and The Nature Conservancy contributing funding for data acquisition (Approx. \$150,000). Both organizations will fund their components directly. The funding to support the Delta Conservancy components of the projects will come from Prop. 1 for the Interagency Agreement with SFEI-ASC and Federal funding through the US Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) will support the Invitation for Bid for facilitation services. Prop. 1 allows for 10% of the Conservancy's allocation to go toward planning and monitoring to ensure successful design, selection and implementation of projects. These funds are not required to be competed through local assistance grant solicitation process.

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