



SACRAMENTO - SAN JOAQUIN

DELTA CONSERVANCY

A California State Agency

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Request for Approval of a Grant Award for the Elk Slough Fish Passage and Flood Improvement Project

Staff Report

This agenda item presents the Elk Slough Fish Passage and Flood Improvement Project to the Board to consider award of Cycle 4 Proposition 1 Ecosystem Restoration and Water Quality Grant Program funding.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Board approve funding up to \$984,695 for the Elk Slough Fish Passage and Flood Improvement project.

DESCRIPTION

Staff recommends a two-phased funding plan for the Elk Slough Fish Passage and Flood Improvement project, proposed by Reclamation District 999. The first phase of funding, \$251,600, would be spent on the development of a feasibility study to determine the project's potential to benefit listed fish species (Phase 1), as described below. The second phase of funding, \$733,095, would be available to the project team upon the completion of a feasibility study that has been reviewed by key technical experts and approved by Conservancy staff. The second phase of funding would be used to conduct additional public outreach, develop project design plans, conduct necessary CEQA compliance, and prepare an implementation grant application (Phase 2).

Reclamation District 999 submitted a full proposal requesting \$989,695 for the Elk Slough Fish Passage and Flood Improvement project as part of the Conservancy's fourth Proposition 1 grant solicitation cycle. During the proposal review process, reviewers questioned whether this project would lead to ecosystem benefits because the proposal did not definitively explain whether the feasibility of improving salmon habitat at Elk Slough had been analyzed. At the May 22, 2019 Board meeting, staff did not recommend funding for the project. The Board directed Conservancy staff to meet with the applicant, determine if they are able to clarify information and address concerns raised by the review panel, conduct a feasibility review to determine the ecosystem benefit, and bring a recommendation to the Board for consideration no later than the September 2019 meeting.

In the intervening time period, Conservancy staff worked with the project team to host a workshop attended by technical experts from local, state, and federal agencies. The goal of the workshop was to assess the feasibility of the project and identify its potential benefits to salmonids. Workshop participants expressed interest in the project and a desire to see further analysis of the potential impacts on and benefits to salmon. Participants suggested that the project team consider analyzing:

- existing baseline conditions within Elk Slough, particularly as related to salmonid usage/life stage,
- the impact of the proposed project on baseline conditions,
- the threat posed to salmon by predation, and
- the impact of the proposed project on water supply.

Conservancy staff worked with the project team to formulate a scope of work (see attachment 2) for the feasibility study, which has been reviewed by Carl Wilcox, Policy Advisor to the Director on the Delta, with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife; Ted Sommers, Lead Scientist, with Department of Water Resources; and Ruth Goodman, Marine Habitat Resource Specialist and Brian Ellrott, Recovery Coordinator, both with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries branch. Many – but not all – aspects of the feasibility study align with the early tasks and deliverables proposed in the grant proposal submitted to the Conservancy. Staff is recommending that a portion of the funds requested in the proposal to the Conservancy be used to cover those activities described in the feasibility study scope of work that align with the proposal; the remainder of the costs associated with the feasibility study will be paid for by the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency (SAFCA). SAFCA has provided approximately \$300,000 to this project to date because of the agency's interest in advancing a multi-benefit project that meets local, state, and federal interests, and is committed to supporting the project through the feasibility stage. The table below outlines how the proposed feasibility study aligns with the tasks and budget proposed to the Conservancy, and where additional funding will be brought in.

Phase 1 Funding Table

Grant Application Tasks	Delta Conservancy Phase 1 Feasibility Study Funding	SAFCA's Pre-feasibility and Feasibility Study Funding
Elk Slough Pre-Planning, Reconnaissance Study, and Geotechnical Evaluation	N/A	Approx. \$300,000 (spent to date)
Task 1: Grant Management	\$9,500	N/A
Task 2: Define Existing Environmental Conditions	\$116,600	\$90,000*
Task 3: Conduct Detailed Hydrodynamic Modeling	\$116,000	\$20,000
Task 4: Conduct Community Engagement	\$9,500	\$10,000
Phase 1 Funding Request	\$251,600	\$420,000

**Approximately \$10,000 of the Task 2 funds contributed by SAFCA will be used to collect available predatory density data from existing studies and to estimate comparative travel times.*

The project team expects to complete the feasibility study by July 2020. Conservancy staff will work with the project team to ensure that the feasibility study has been informed and reviewed by appropriate technical experts.

If the Board awards funding for Phases 1 and 2 for this project, Conservancy staff will enter into one grant agreement for both phases of the project, for an amount not to exceed \$989,695. Phase 1 of the grant agreement will include tasks related to the development of a feasibility study, for an amount not to exceed \$251,600. The grant agreement will include a provision that Conservancy staff must provide approval to proceed prior to the start of work on Phase 2 tasks. Upon completion of Phase 1, Conservancy staff will reevaluate the project to determine whether it should advance to Phase 2, the planning phase. If the feasibility study developed in Phase 1 demonstrates that it will provide ecological benefits for salmon, the remainder of the grant amount, \$733,095, will be available to complete Phase 2 planning tasks.

BACKGROUND

The Elk Slough Fish Passage and Flood Improvement project is proposed to prepare a detailed design plan for Elk Slough that the applicant asserts will restore a critical anadromous fish passage, enhance shaded riverine aquatic habitat, substantially improve the slough's water quality, and implement flood improvements for the legacy Delta community of Clarksburg by installing flood gates at the upper and lower ends of Elk Slough and improving the levees to accommodate increased flow velocities through the slough and to improve their flood protection performance. The applicant claims that these benefits will be achieved by more directly connecting Elk Slough to the Sacramento River, and thus provide an alternative route for federally-threatened winter run and spring-run Chinook salmon migrating through the Delta. This project is located in Yolo County.

SUGGESTED MOTION LANGUAGE:

Move the Board approve a grant not to exceed \$984,695 to Reclamation District 999 for the Elk Slough Fish Passage and Flood Improvement Project.

Contact

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