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***Consideration of Grant Award for the Mello/Jensen Heirs Sandhill Crane Preserve Project  
Staff Report***

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This agenda item presents for Board consideration a recommendation to award Proposition 1 Ecosystem Restoration and Water Quality Grant Program for the Mello/Jensen Heirs Sandhill Crane Preserve Conservation Easement project.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Board find this project is categorically exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to California Code of Regulations Title 14, Chapter 3, Article 19 Section 15313, subsection (a), and Section 15325, subsections (a) and (b).

Staff further recommends the Board approve funding for the project, not to exceed \$2,273,469, conditional upon the applicant submitting and Conservancy staff approving:

- A revised budget narrative that clarifies indirect costs and selected subcontractors and justifies the need for a hazardous materials assessment and direct charges for audit expenses.
- Revised task descriptions that include a baseline report and easement monitoring plan description and due dates.
- Audited financials from current audit.

**DESCRIPTION**

At the May 22, 2019 Board meeting, staff did not recommend that the Board approve funding for funding for the following reasons.

- The proposal did not include enough information about the project's tasks and budget, including an estimate of the easement's fair market value, to evaluate the eligibility and reasonableness of the proposed expenses.
- The proposal did not demonstrate that the project team has sufficient ornithological expertise to implement a scientifically-robust project.

The Board directed Conservancy staff to work the applicant and present a recommendation for consideration at a future Board meeting. In the intervening time, staff has worked with the applicant to address these issues. Staff met with the applicant on June 6, 2019 to discuss a timeframe for addressing the identified issues. During July and August, Conservancy staff received from the applicant and provided comments on a partial set of draft materials. The applicant submitted a full set of materials on October 15, 2019. Staff met with the applicant on December 12, 2019 to provide feedback and guidance on the materials. The applicant submitted the final materials on February 19, 2020. Staff reviewed the materials and have found:

**Tasks and Budget.** The information provided is sufficient to evaluate the eligibility and reasonableness of the proposed expenses. Staff finds that, overall, expenses are eligible and reasonable. However, additional information is still necessary, as reflected in conditions included in the recommendation for approval.

**Science.** The information provided demonstrates that the project team has sufficient ornithological expertise to implement a scientifically-robust project. The applicant has cultivated partnerships with crane experts and relevant partners, and the revised science effort meets the objectives of the project.

The Delta Conservancy is the lead agency for this project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). This project is categorically exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to California Code of Regulations Title 14, Chapter 3, Article 19 Section 15313, subsection (a), and Section 15325, subsections (a) and (b), which exempts acquisition of lands for fish and wildlife conservation purposes, including preservation of fish and wildlife habitat; acquisition, sale, or other transfer of areas to preserve the existing natural conditions, including plant or animal habitats; and acquisition, sale, or other transfer of areas to allow continued agricultural use of the areas; none of the exceptions to the exemptions identified in California Code of Regulations Title 14, Chapter 3, Article 19 Section 15300.2 apply.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Mello/Jensen Heirs Sandhill Crane Preserve and Conservation Easement project is proposed to preserve Sandhill Crane habitat by placing a conservation easement on 275 acres of farmland. The easement will allow the land to continue to be farmed while ensuring that it remains managed to benefit crane populations. This project is located in Sacramento County on Tyler Island.

## **SUGGESTED MOTION LANGUAGE:**

Two separate motions are required.

*Move that the Board find that the Mello/Jensen Heirs Sandhill Crane Preserve Conservation Easement project is categorically exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to California Code of Regulations Title 14, Chapter 3, Article 19 Section 15313, subsection (a), and Section 15325, subsections (a) and (b).*

*Move that the Board approve a grant not to exceed \$2,273,469 to the Agricultural-Natural Resources Trust for the Mello/Jensen Heirs Sandhill Crane Preserve Conservation Easement project.*

## **CONTACT**

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