



Consideration of Award of Proposition 1 Grant Funds for Van Buskirk Multi-Benefit Ecosystem Restoration Planning Project Staff Recommendation

This agenda item presents for Board consideration a recommendation to award Proposition 1 Grant Program funding for the Van Buskirk Multi-Benefit Ecosystem Restoration Planning Project.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Applicant	American Rivers
Project ID	2212
Project Type	Planning
County	San Joaquin
Funding Request	\$467,848
Total Project Cost	\$472,548
Funding Recommendation	\$467,848
Score	88/100

RECOMMENDATION

Conservancy staff recommends that the Board approve up to \$467,848 in grant funding for the Van Buskirk Multi-Benefit Ecosystem and Restoration Planning Project proposed by American Rivers conditional upon the applicant providing a landowner letter of support for the project. The project proposal received overall favorable reviews from staff with no additional requirements. Staff prepared the text below based on staff’s best understanding of the information provided in the application. Conservancy staff and the Professional Review Panel consisting of the following agencies: California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Delta Protection Commission, Delta Stewardship Council, California Department of Food and Agriculture have scored this proposal against the established criteria. Conservancy staff contacted local governments and districts, water agencies, and tribes via the local notification process to receive comments and ensure project support. Prior to entering into a grant agreement, staff will work with the applicant to further refine the project’s scope of work.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The proposed Van Buskirk Multi-Benefit Ecosystem and Restoration Planning Project will result in a multi-benefit ecosystem restoration project on the former 192-acre Van Buskirk golf course located along the San Joaquin River in Stockton, California. In partnership with the City of Stockton and the San Joaquin Area Flood Control Agency (SJAFCA), the proposed project will conduct agency coordination and community engagement; prepare conceptual restoration design plans; integrate nature-based design solutions and multi-benefit flood protection into planning; and seek implementation funding with project partners.

Currently, there are two concurrent, yet disparate, planning efforts converging at the Van Buskirk property. First, the United States Army Corps of Engineers is planning to fortify the levees bordering

the property to reduce flood risk in Stockton. Second, the City of Stockton is developing a plan to transform the former municipal golf course property into a park. This project would connect and leverage the existing planning efforts to create a multi-benefit project that would address the following goals: reduce flood risk due to levee failure, connect the San Joaquin River and sloughs to natural floodplains and riparian habitat, create public access or recreational opportunities along Delta waterways, and benefit a severely disadvantaged and socially vulnerable community.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE

This planning effort is not considered a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). For project implementation, the City of Stockton will be the CEQA lead agency for the park development and ecosystem restoration on the Van Buskirk property owned by the City of Stockton. Design Workshop is contracted by the City of Stockton to develop an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan for the park site pursuant to CEQA. The levees along Van Buskirk are included in the Lower San Joaquin River Feasibility Study Area. The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) completed a Final Integrated Interim Feasibility Report/Environmental Impact Study (EIS)/Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Lower San Joaquin River Project in 2018. USACE will be the lead NEPA agency and SJAFCA will be the lead CEQA agency. American Rivers will determine if the EIR/EIS covers a levee setback as part of this planning grant.

COST SHARE

The cost share amount is one percent of the project budget. The applicant will provide \$4,700 as cash to support unrecovered indirect and direct costs. While not a part of the planning project, the applicant states that the USACE, SJAFCA, and California Department of Water Resources will contribute \$845 million, \$135 million, and \$318.5 million, respectively, to implement the Lower San Joaquin River Project.

ALIGNMENT WITH STATE PRIORITIES

The project is consistent with and directly links to multiple actions and priorities identified in Proposition 1, California Water Action Plan, Conservancy's governing statute, Conservancy's strategic plan, the Delta Plan, and other state and regional plans. The project is a multi-benefit project that will safeguard Delta communities, restore riparian habitat for sensitive species, and create high-quality recreational opportunities for the residents of Stockton.

LONG TERM VIABILITY

The proposal describes how the proposed project will contribute to a specific on-the-ground project. The proposal describes long-term management and addresses the intent to maintain for the required 15-year duration. The City of Stockton is investing time, staff, and resources to develop the park plan, as well as maintain the park in perpetuity.

LOCAL SUPPORT

The proposal demonstrates local support. The applicant has received letters of support from Restore the Delta, River Partners, and the San Joaquin Area Flood Control Agency. The applicant proposes a task to continue public outreach to address community concerns.

SCIENTIFIC MERIT

The proposal describes and references the scientific basis of the project and incorporates the best available science. The proposal addresses concerns of future increased flood risk and makes sufficient effort to account for and mitigate the impact of those occurrences with researched backed methodologies. The project cites over a dozen listed species that would benefit from habitat restoration including the Valley elderberry beetle, greater sandhill crane, Swainson's hawk, riparian brush rabbit, Chinook salmon, green sturgeon, and steelhead.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The applicant has worked with the landowner and has a tentative agreement that they support the planning project. Staff will ensure there is landowner support prior to executing the grant agreement.

SUGGESTED MOTION LANGUAGE

Move to award funding up to \$467,848 to American Rivers from the Proposition 1 Grant Program for the Van Buskirk Multi-Benefit Ecosystem Restoration Project conditional upon the applicant providing a landowner letter of support for the project.

CONTACT

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FIGURE 9.13 VAN BUSKIRK MULTI-BENEFIT ECOSYSTEM PLANNING PROJECT AREA

