



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 7/11/2023

To: Board of Directors, Sonoma County Water Agency
Department or Agency Name(s): Sonoma County Water Agency
Staff Name and Phone Number: David Cook 547-1944
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisorial District(s): Fifth

Title:

Laguna-Mark West Creek Watershed Master Restoration Planning Project - High Priority Project

Recommended Action:

Adopt a resolution determining that the Laguna-Mark West Creek Watershed Master Restoration Planning Project - High Priority (Project) will not have a significant adverse effect on the environment, adopting the California Environmental Quality Act Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Project, adopting mitigation measures and the mitigation monitoring reporting program, making certain related findings, and approving the Project.
(Fifth District)

Executive Summary:

The Sonoma County Water Agency (Sonoma Water) is proposing the Laguna High Priority Restoration Project (Project). The Project would restore a 3,200-foot-long reach of the Laguna de Santa Rosa (Laguna) channel and freshwater marsh, wet meadow, and riparian forest habitats on 119.43 acres. The Project site historically supported these habitat types prior to agricultural development. An Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration was prepared to evaluate and disclose the potential environmental impacts of the Project, which determined that all potential impacts would be less than significant with mitigation incorporated. Approval of this item would adopt a resolution determining that the Project will not have a significant adverse effect on the environment, adopt the Initial Study and the mitigation monitoring reporting program for the Project, make certain related findings, and approve the Project.

Discussion:

HISTORY OF ITEM/BACKGROUND

The Project is located approximately five miles west of the City of Santa Rosa. The Project site is located on the western edge of the Laguna watershed between the confluences of Santa Rosa and Mark West creeks, and is bound by vineyards and agricultural lands to the north and east, Guerneville Road Bridge to the south, and the Laguna channel to the west. Historically, the Laguna within the Project site supported valley freshwater marsh bounded by small areas of oak savanna/vernal pool complex and oak savanna at higher elevations along the eastern boundary. The western boundary of the Project site contained willow forested wetland, mixed riparian forest, and wet meadow habitat types. Currently, the Project site is farmed wetland producing corn. The site is difficult to farm due to frequent and prolonged inundation by Laguna floodwaters and backwater from the Russian River that forms during fall, winter, and spring storms.

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In 2016, Sonoma Water received a \$517,000 grant from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to help fund the preparation of the comprehensive Master Restoration Plan for the Laguna-Mark West Creek watershed and the concurrent identification of up to two high priority projects that would produce the greatest ecological benefit.

In 2019, Sonoma Water executed a \$200,000 agreement with FlowWest LLC to prepare a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) document and engineering designs for the Laguna-Mark West Creek Watershed Master Restoration Planning Project - High Priority Project.

In September 2022, CDFW extended the grant term to August 15, 2023 and increased the award amount to \$601,245 (which includes an increase of \$84,245 awarded through CDFW's Proposition 1 contingency funding plus the original grant of \$517,000). The additional funds were designated to perform a geoarcheological analysis of the Project site, and to complete the CEQA document and the Final Master Restoration Plan for the Laguna de Santa Rosa, as required by the grant agreement. GEI Consultants, Inc. completed the geoarcheological analysis in December 2022 and Sonoma Water incorporated the results into the CEQA document presented to the Board today.

LAGUNA-MARK WEST CREEK WATERSHED MASTER RESTORATION PLANNING PROJECT - HIGH PRIORITY PROJECT

The Project would restore a 3,200-foot-long reach of the Laguna channel and adjacent freshwater marsh, wet meadow, and riparian forest habitats on 119.43 acres. By realigning the Laguna channel to its historical path, the Proposed Project site would inundate more gradually during floods and drain slowly as floodwaters recede than under current conditions. The restoration actions would consist of reestablishing the historic alignment of the Laguna, converting the existing engineered channel to a backwater, connecting two small east-west flowing tributary drainages to the new channel, and revegetation with native plants. The new channel and tributary connections would form a meandering stream configuration representative of the historic channel at the Project site. The new channel and floodplain would be graded to inundate newly established wetland habitat types and to connect existing tributaries traversing the site. The Project would also include an access path to allow for trash and debris removal. Sonoma Water will be working with project partners on future implementation. Project implementation funding will likely come from grant sources, similar to the planning for this project.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT DOCUMENTATION

Sonoma Water, as a lead agency under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), prepared an Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration of Environmental Impact (Initial Study) for the Project pursuant to the requirements of the CEQA (California Public Resources Code sections 21000 et seq.), the State CEQA Guidelines (Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3), and Sonoma Water's Compliance Procedures for CEQA. The Initial Study discloses potential environmental impacts of implementing the Project; identifies the means to avoid or reduce potential significant adverse impacts on the environment; and concludes the construction, operation, and maintenance of the Project would not have a significant adverse effect on the environment.

The Notice of Completion, and Notice of Availability and Notice of Intent to Adopt the Initial Study were filed

with the California Governor’s Office of Planning and Research’s State Clearinghouse. The Initial Study was available on February 23, 2023, for a 32-day public review period that closed on March 27, 2023. The Notice of Availability for the Initial Study for public review was distributed to the jurisdictional and permitting agencies and sent to stakeholders, interested persons, and property owners adjacent to the Project area on February 22, 2023. Copies of the Initial Study and Notice of Availability were also made available at Sonoma Water’s administrative office and an electronic version of the document was made available on Sonoma Water’s website. A legal notice was also published in the Press Democrat on February 23, 2023. During the review period, Sonoma Water received no comment letters.

Sonoma Water staff recommends that the Board adopt a resolution determining that the Project will not have a significant adverse effect on the environment, adopting the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Project, adopting mitigation measures and the mitigation monitoring reporting program, making certain related findings, approving the Project, and acknowledging the filing of a Notice of Determination.

Strategic Plan:

Pillar: Resilient Infrastructure

Goal: Goal 5: Support, fund, and expand flood protection.

Objective: Objective 1: Develop partnerships with cities, tribal governments, and private organizations regarding flood protection and sustainability to identify gaps and address climate change impacts.

Sonoma Water Strategic Plan Alignment Flood Protection, Goal 1: Provide efficient and effective flood protection programs.

The Project will assist with managing flood risk in a flood-prone area.

Prior Board Actions:

07/09/19: Adopted a resolution authorizing a budgetary adjustment in the amount of \$200,000 programming Flood Control Zone 1A available fund balance to finance the Engineering, Design, and Environmental Services for the Laguna-Mark West Creek Watershed Master Restoration Planning Project.

07/09/19: Authorized Sonoma Water’s General Manager to execute an agreement with FlowWest LLC for engineering and design of watershed restoration, environmental compliance, and related services through December 31, 2020 in the not-to-exceed amount of \$200,000.

02/21/17: Authorized General Manager to execute professional services agreements with (1) San Francisco Estuary Institute for development and preparation of the Watershed Restoration Master Plan in the amount of \$577,000; and (2) Laguna Foundation in the amount of \$25,000 for technical assistance, public outreach and facilitation services related to the Master Plan development; term end for both agreements is December 31, 2020.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 23-24 Adopted	FY24-25 Projected	FY 25-26 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	\$200,000		

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Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures	\$200,000		
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other	\$200,000		
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
Total Sources	\$200,000		

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

Budgeted amount of \$200,000 is available from FY 2023/2024 appropriations for Flood Control Zone 1A. No additional appropriation is required.

Sonoma Water will be working with project partners on seeking grant funding, and planning and scheduling project implementation. Project implementation expenditures are estimated to be \$4 million and funding will likely come from grant sources, similar to the planning grant for this project.

Staffing Impacts:			
Position Title (Payroll Classification)	Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

Resolution
Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

None