



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 11/4/2025

To: Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District
Department or Agency Name(s): Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District
Staff Name and Phone Number: Misti Arias, General Manager, (707) 565-7264; Mary Chambers, Agricultural Specialist, (707) 565-7263
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisory District(s): Countywide

Title:

Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Vital Streams and Forests: Amendment to the Technical Assistance Supplemental Agreement (Project Number 9975)

Recommended Action:

Delegate authority to the General Manager of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) to execute an amendment to the existing 4-year Supplemental Agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, for a grant of additional funding to Ag + Open Space in the amount of \$90,000 for the Vital Streams and Forests project, substantially in the form attached, with minor modifications as may be approved by County Counsel.

Executive Summary:

In 2023, Ag + Open Space was awarded a \$3,500,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Over a five-year period, this grant will provide funding for the purchase of conservation easements over riparian areas of agricultural and nonindustrial private forestland and headwater properties, development of property-specific conservation plans, and implementation of conservation practices with a focus on protecting and enhancing stream corridors and headwater areas.

The Board previously approved and authorized Ag + Open Space's General Manager to execute a master agreement, establishing the framework for cooperation between NRCS and Ag + Open Space; and to execute agreements with the Sonoma and Gold Ridge Resource Conservation Districts for specific tasks described in the master agreement for the life of the grant.

Before Ag + Open Space can submit requests for reimbursement to NRCS, Ag + Open Space and NRCS must sign Supplemental Agreements (SAs) outlining a budget and workplan for each specific area of work. The Board previously approved and authorized Ag + Open Space's General Manager to execute an SA for Technical Assistance - Enhancement (TA-E), which includes tasks that support the grant objectives but are not categorized as implementation. The current proposed amendment adds a second area of work: Technical Assistance - Implementation (TA-I). TA-I includes tasks that support work on specific properties.

Ag + Open Space is requesting the Board approve and authorize the General Manager to execute this amendment to the SA. The shutdown of the federal government has delayed NRCS's ability to provide the SA amendment to Ag + Open Space. However, prior to the shutdown, NRCS advised that if Ag + Open Space is

unable to execute the amendment by December 1, 2025, this aspect of the grant will not be funded. To date, we have no update from NRCS that this deadline will be adjusted to provide both parties more time. Thus, to accommodate the original timeline established by NRCS, staff are seeking a delegation to the General Manager to sign an amendment to the SA substantially in the form attached to this item, with minor modifications as may be approved by County Counsel.

Discussion:

In 2023, Ag + Open Space was awarded a \$3,500,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) under the Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA) of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) for the Sonoma County Innovative Conservation: Vital Steams and Forests project. Over a five-year period, this grant will provide funding for the purchase of conservation easements over riparian areas of agricultural and nonindustrial private forestland headwater properties, development of property-specific conservation plans, and implementation of conservation practices with a focus on protecting and enhancing stream corridors and headwater areas.

The objectives of the project are to:

- Increase the number of riparian corridors on agricultural lands protected via permanent conservation easements
- Improve forest health and protect source water (both surface and ground)
- Implement conservation practices to restore and enhance protected properties

The three high-priority concerns that will be addressed are:

1. Water quality degradation
2. Inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife
3. Degraded plant condition

The Board previously approved and authorized Ag + Open Space's General Manager to execute the RCPP AFA Project Partnership Agreement (PPA), which established the framework for cooperation between NRCS and Ag + Open Space to implement activities eligible for funding. The Board also previously approved and authorized Ag + Open Space's General Manager to execute subcontracts with the Sonoma and Gold Ridge Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) for specific tasks described in the PPA, for the life of the grant.

Before submitting requests for reimbursement of expenses to NRCS, Ag + Open Space and NRCS must sign Supplemental Agreements (SAs) describing specific areas of work and outlining a budget and work plan for each specific area.

The Board previously approved and authorized Ag + Open Space's General Manager to execute an SA for Technical Assistance - Enhancement (TA-E). TA-E includes tasks that support the grant objectives but are not categorized as implementation tasks. This includes project management, outreach, outcome assessment, and conservation innovation. The original SA included \$465,000 to be reimbursed by NRCS.

NRCS has now requested that Ag + Open Space amend this existing SA to include a second area of work: Technical Assistance - Implementation (TA-I). TA-I includes tasks that support work on specific properties. The tasks within this category are pre-application, planning, design, installation of restoration measures on qualifying properties, and check-out.

Ag + Open Space staff are seeking a delegation from the Board to the General Manager to sign an amendment to the SA substantially in the form attached to this item, with minor modifications as may be approved by County Counsel. The amendment to the SA will add an additional \$90,000 of funds to be reimbursed by NRCS, which will be disbursed per the Technical Assistance - Implementation Valuation Table (Attachment 2).

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

By entering into the SA Amendment, neither NRCS nor Ag + Open Space is committing to any specific conservation or restoration project. The purpose of the SA is to establish a funding mechanism to implement small-scale land management activities, such as planting native riparian plants and removing non-native vegetation. Thus, pursuant to 14 CCR 15378(b)(4), the proposed amendment to the SA is exempt from CEQA because it creates a government funding mechanism which does not involve any commitment to any specific project which may result in a potentially significant physical impact on the environment.

Vital Lands Initiative

This project will help meet multiple goals in the Board-approved Vital Lands Initiative, including:

- Protect the highest priority riparian corridors and headwater streams.
- Protect the highest priority aquatic habitats and associated upland areas that support rare, unique, or special status aquatic plants and animals.
- Protect connected aquatic habitats and the lands that support this connectivity.
- Protect areas important for climate change and extreme event resiliency and adaptation, including projects that promote carbon sequestration and avoided emissions and enhance biodiversity.
- Support agricultural use on Ag + Open Space protected lands.

Strategic Plan:

This item directly supports the County's Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

Pillar: Climate Action and Resiliency

Goal: Goal 5: Maximize opportunities for mitigation of climate change and adaptation through land conservation work and land use policies

Objective: Objective 2: Develop policies to maximize carbon sequestration and minimize loss of natural carbon sinks including old growth forests, the Laguna de Santa Rosa, and rangelands. Encourage agricultural and open space land management to maximize sequestration

Racial Equity:

N/A

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

No

Prior Board Actions:

May 14, 2024: Summary Report 8 - The Board of Directors approved a four-year Supplemental Agreement NRCS for Technical Assistance - Enhancement.

Agenda Date: 11/4/2025

June 12, 2023: Summary Report 3 -- The Board of Directors approved a five-year agreement with NRCS for the Innovative Conservation: Vital Streams and Forests project; and related agreements with RCDs for the life of the aforementioned grant.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 25-26 Adopted	FY 26-27 Projected	FY 27-28 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
Total Sources	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

The amendment addressed in this Summary Report describes funds that NRCS will reimburse to Ag + Open Space for expenses incurred by Ag + Open Space and RCDs pursuant to the implementation of the RCPP AFA Vital Streams and Forests Grant. Ag + Open Space anticipates approximately \$30,000 in reimbursements per fiscal year. Three-year total reimbursements resulting from this agreement will be up to \$90,000. The Ag + Open Space FY 25-26 adopted budget includes expenditure appropriations that will be reimbursed by this grant. No additional appropriation is required.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

No staffing impacts are expected to result from this action.

Attachments:

1. Existing Technical Assistance - Enhancement Supplemental Agreement
2. Technical Assistance - Implementation Valuation Table

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

None