



COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION
DRIVE, ROOM 102A
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 6/3/2025

To: Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): Sonoma County Public Infrastructure

Staff Name and Phone Number: Johannes J. Hoevertsz, 707-565-2550

Vote Requirement: Informational Only

Supervisorial District(s): Second

Title:

Biannual Update on the Development of the Bank Enabling Instrument for the Mecham Road Mitigation Bank

Recommended Action:

Receive and file this biannual update on the progress of the Bank Enabling Instrument for the Mecham Road Mitigation Bank, informing the Board on recent activities and outlining the plan for the next three to six months.

Executive Summary:

In December 2023, the Board approved an agreement with Wetlands Research Associates, Inc. (WRA) to support development of the Mecham Road Mitigation Bank. This long-term conservation project will help the County meet environmental mitigation requirements for public infrastructure projects, while also contributing to habitat protection. Sonoma County Public Infrastructure (SPI) is providing updates to the Board every six months on the development of the Bank Enabling Instrument (BEI) for the Mecham Road Mitigation Bank. This report outlines SPI's accomplishments to date and lays out the steps being taken over the next three to six months.

Discussion:

Background:

The County's efforts to establish a mitigation bank at Mecham Road aim to balance infrastructure needs with ecological stewardship, particularly for protected species like the California tiger salamander (CTS). Many infrastructure projects, such as roads, bridges, and flood control improvements, can inadvertently affect sensitive ecosystems. To comply with environmental regulations, the County must offset these impacts by restoring or protecting habitat elsewhere. The Mecham Road Mitigation Bank provides a forward-looking solution: it allows the County to proactively create and manage high-quality habitat that can be used to satisfy future environmental permitting requirements. By investing in a single, strategically located conservation site, the County aims to streamline the permitting process, reduce project delays, and achieve better ecological results. The Mitigation Bank will generate "credits" based on habitat quality and performance standards, which can then be applied to future infrastructure projects within eligible service areas.

Current Status:

Habitat Planning and Site Design: Multiple locations were explored on the property for creating breeding ponds suitable for the CTS. Based on feedback from County technical staff and site constraints, the focus will be on pond development in the southern portion of the parcel and along the eastern drainage.

Wildlife Surveys: From October 31, 2024, through February 14, 2025, upland trapping surveys were conducted in collaboration with Sonoma Water to detect the presence of CTS's. While no CTS's were captured during this period, these results help guide future habitat and project design.

CTS Translocation Strategy Development: Since CTS have not been found on-site, we developed a salvage-only translocation plan detailing how CTS would be moved to the project site. This plan also includes survey data from the property, information on CTS observations in nearby areas, and relevant details about surrounding land uses.

Regulatory Documentation: The County is finalizing a memorandum for review by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). This memo covers pond placement and design, the CTS translocation plan, and how credit will be released as milestones are met. Submitting this memo is a key step toward obtaining agency approval and advancing the project to its next phase.

Next Steps:

Finalize Technical Memo and Secure Concurrence: The County and WRA will complete the draft memo and formally submit it to CDFW and USFWS. The goal is to obtain agency agreement on the pond layout, species strategy, and overall project framework. This step is critical for ensuring that future mitigation credits will be recognized and approved.

Follow-up Meetings with Agencies: Additional coordination meetings with state and federal agencies will be scheduled to address any questions and finalize project parameters. These meetings help maintain transparency, address issues early, and prevent delays during the Bank Enabling Instrument (BEI) review process.

Draft BEI Submittal: Once regulatory feedback is incorporated, the team will prepare and submit the draft BEI to the Board for review. This formal document lays out how the mitigation bank will be operated, monitored, and maintained over time.

Ongoing Wildlife Surveys: Additional aquatic surveys will be conducted during the spring to determine if any CTS or other sensitive species are present in pond areas. These results will further refine site planning and mitigation strategies.

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 1: Align the Board of Supervisor's strategic priorities, policy, and operational goals with funding and resources.

Racial Equity:

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

No

Prior Board Actions:

06/04/24 - The Board received and filed the first mitigation bank biannual update on the development of the Bank Enabling Instrument for the Mecham Road Mitigation Bank.

03/26/24 - The Board approved a First Amendment to expand the scope of service with WRA Environmental Consultants.

12/12/23 - The Board approved an agreement with WRA Environmental Consultants for the preparation of a Bank Enabling Instrument for the Mecham Road Mitigation Bank.

9/15/20 - Board approved an agreement with WRA to prepare a draft mitigation bank prospectus for creating habitat for California Tiger Salamander.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

There are no new fiscal impacts associated with this biannual update; however, the overall cost of developing the Mecham Road Mitigation Bank remains an important consideration for the Board. To date, the Board has approved a total of \$1,309,793 for various contracted services, including: the preparation of the mitigation bank prospectus, \$318,647; preparation of the Bank Enabling Instrument, including environmental design, regulatory coordination, and land use consultation services, \$774,704; and California Tiger Salamander translocation, monitoring, fencing, and inspection services, \$216,442.

These costs have been fully funded through the Former Rural Landfill Fund (Fund 41122), which is designated for solid waste obligations and related environmental projects. No General Fund contributions are being used for this effort. Additional County staff time from Public Infrastructure and Sonoma Water has supported the project and is covered within existing budgets.

Long-term, the project is anticipated to yield significant cost savings by reducing the need for project-specific mitigation and providing more affordable credits compared to the private market. Internal credit use for County infrastructure projects, particularly road improvements and waste facility compliance, will generate avoided costs projected in the range of \$20 million to \$126 million, based on recent market comparisons for species mitigation credits.

Agenda Date: 6/3/2025

The Mecham Road Mitigation Bank remains a strategic, self-funding investment that supports regulatory compliance, environmental stewardship, and long-term cost containment across multiple County departments.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

None.

Attachments:

None.

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:

Agreement with WRA Environmental Consultants

First Amendment to the Agreement with WRA Environmental Consultants