



Legislation Text

File #: 2024-0536, **Version:** 1

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 significant environmental projects.

Executive Summary:

Following the Board's authorization in December 2023 to execute an agreement with Wetlands Research Associates, Inc. (WRA), and subsequent approval of a First Amendment in March 2024, 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 3-6 months.

Discussion:

Background:

The concept of a Mitigation Bank emerged from the need to balance development with environmental conservation. Sonoma County, like many regions, faces the challenge of advancing infrastructure projects while preserving natural habitats and species. The Mecham Road Mitigation Bank is envisioned as a proactive solution, allowing the County to offset environmental impacts from development by restoring, creating, or enhancing natural habitats elsewhere. This strategic approach not only meets regulatory requirements for environmental mitigation but also contributes to the preservation of biodiversity and the enhancement of ecological functions across the County. The Bank focuses on providing habitats for key species such as the California tiger salamander (CTS) and the California red-legged frog, ensuring their survival and proliferation in Sonoma County. By consolidating mitigation efforts, the Bank aims to achieve greater ecological outcomes than isolated, project-specific mitigation efforts could. This initiative aligns with the Board's broader commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship, laying a foundation for a more resilient and ecologically rich Sonoma County.

Current Status:

Review and Engagement: The team, which includes specialists from WRA, conducted thorough reviews of

initial design plans for the Mitigation Bank. During site visits, WRA evaluated modifications, particularly focusing on feedback from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, regarding breeding ponds for CTS.

Environmental Modeling: We have initiated complex hydraulic models for evaluating how restoration actions might change water flow and quality, aiming to enhance the habitat's ecological function. This effort includes looking into necessary adjustments to infrastructure, such as culverts to better support the environment.

Breeding Pond Analysis: Special attention is being given to creating additional CTS breeding ponds. By analyzing current water monitoring data, the team is working to ensure these new ponds will meet the requirements for successful CTS breeding.

Data Gathering and Analysis: To refine our restoration plans, Hogan Land Services has conducted detailed surveys of key locations, including culvert areas. This data is crucial for updating our designs and models to ensure the success of the restoration efforts.

Expert Consultations: Our ongoing dialogue with regional experts on the CTS and consultations with regulatory staff are critical. These conversations help refine the approach to safely relocating CTS to the bank site, a task that requires careful planning and expertise.

Next Steps:

In the coming months, the Department of Public Infrastructure (SPI), in collaboration with its consultants, will prioritize completing the majority of the draft Bank Enabling Instrument along with its accompanying documents. Additionally, efforts will be directed towards advancing hydraulic and hydrologic models, as well as finalizing restoration designs. Most of these studies should be completed within the next 3-5 months. SPI will continue engaging with both local experts and regulatory agencies to ensure plans meet both ecological and regulatory requirements.

This winter, SPI will conduct an upland trapping survey for California Tiger Salamander (CTS), the results of which will influence the content of the BEI submittal. The draft BEI is anticipated to be presented to the board first, with a tentative submission to regulatory agencies expected sometime in 2025. Preparations for a meeting with the Interagency Review Team are underway to discuss the CTS credit releases and gather any additional information needed for submission.

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:

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 (BEI) 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:

None. There are no fiscal impacts associated with the acceptance of this biannual update.

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