

Cordova Creek Phase II Planning

City of Rancho Cordova

\$248,000.00

This proposal is to consider the allocation for a grant to the City-County Office of Metropolitan Water Planning, known as The Water Forum (Forum), for fish and wildlife habitat restoration planning on Cordova Creek as well as improved interpretation and access planning for the east side of Cordova Creek in Sacramento County (Project).

LOCATION

Historically known as Clifton's Drainage, Cordova Creek is a drainage channel for remediated groundwater from the Aerojet General Corporation Superfund site as well as stormwater runoff from surrounding park and residential areas. The creek flows south to north through the River Bend Area Plan of the American River Parkway (Parkway) and directly into the American River. The land surrounding the creek was historically used for agriculture and currently is used for recreation and habitat.

Anecdotal evidence indicates adult salmon are seasonally present in Cordova Creek, but it is unknown whether these fish reproduce and whether their offspring successfully emerge and out-migrate. Since there is evidence of both spawning and rearing habitat limitation in the lower American River in general, any area that can provide spawning or rearing habitat will enhance salmonid production, provided it does not create an ecological trap for spawning adults or rearing juveniles. The extent to which various salmonid life stages are successful in Cordova Creek will primarily depend upon water year type (i.e., wet or dry), water temperature, and flow management.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids on the lower American River is severely limited. Restoration work within the Parkway would provide high-quality habitat that will improve production of threatened salmonids under the right conditions.

In 2016, the Cordova Creek Naturalization Project (Phase I) restored nine acres of riparian habitat and over eight acres of upland habitat. The project also completed an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant walking trail and interpretive signage on the west side of the creek. Phase I only completed the upper portions of the creek restoration and did not fund naturalization of the lowest and most complex approximately 420 feet of the drainage. This lower portion of the creek is potentially the most vital as it contains the confluence with the American River. This site can either invite or deter fish use of the naturalized creek, depending on ecological site conditions.

The Project will develop 65 percent designs for naturalization of the lowest 420 feet of Cordova Creek, which will include restoring its concrete-lined channel to an earthen bottom channel, protecting existing native plants, and potentially altering the creek course, as well as development of plans and designs for access and interpretation improvements for the east side of Cordova Creek, which neighbors Soil Born Farms.

Scientific studies will be conducted of the aquatic conditions of Cordova Creek and the suitability of the creek for salmonids. Data collected on adult and juvenile utilization and habitat quality will guide restoration design by identifying factors that limit the success of specific life stages.

Design alternatives for Cordova Creek naturalization will be developed as part of this project and will be informed by the baseline aquatic study. Baseline monitoring results will be reported as a pre-project monitoring report and limiting factors identified in the report will be incorporated into the restoration design.

Plans for the naturalization of Cordova Creek’s confluence with the American River will also include design for quality habitat for native plants and wildlife. In addition to threatened salmonids, special status species that may benefit from the naturalization include Western pond turtle, giant garter snake, yellow-legged frog and Western spadefoot toad. The design planning process will consider existing mature trees and sensitive species at the creek’s confluence as part of the future best design alternatives.

Additionally, the Project would include designs for an improved multi-use bridge over Cordova Creek. The current bridge is unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists due to line of sight constraints and its current width. Bridge improvements would be a necessary step in naturalization of the lower portion of the creek.

Improving access and interpretation in the space between Phase II of the Cordova Creek Naturalization and the Soil Born Farms site at American River Ranch is an additional goal of this project. Soil Born Farms currently brings students and other visitors to Cordova Creek through their Roots and Wings experiential learning program, nature walks, field trips, and volunteer opportunities. Currently, visitors must access the creek using a gate which must be kept locked to exclude animals from the farm. Beyond the gate there is not a clearly marked and well-constructed trail to the creek, which excludes disabled individuals from accessing the creek from the farm.

In recent years visioning for improved access on the east side of the creek has been undertaken by the Sacramento County Regional Parks Department, Soil Born Farms and other community members and organizations. The Project would build on these efforts and help solidify and seek approval for these plans.

Lastly, the Project would enhance the interpretive resources at the Cordova Creek Naturalization site through development of new signage for the east side of Cordova Creek.

Scientific studies conducted as a part of the Project will include spawning and rearing surveys, substrate mapping and temperature monitoring. In addition, field data collection efforts will utilize Soil Born Farm staff and/or Cordova High School student volunteers and interns and will create a foundation for student participation in a long-term monitoring program. Water Forum staff with expertise in salmonid monitoring will work with Cramer Fish Sciences to provide field support.

PROJECT FUNDING

Project Task	WCB Funds	Non-WCB Funds*	Total Cost
Project Management	\$0	\$20,000	\$20,000
Data Collection	\$50,000	\$8,000	\$58,000
Concept Development & Outreach	\$16,000	\$15,000	\$31,000
Design Plans	\$182,000	\$44,000	\$226,000
Totals	\$248,000	\$87,000	\$335,000

Project costs will be for data collection, conceptual alternatives, and 30% and 65% designs.

*Non-WCB funds include cash match and in-kind services from the Forum.

CONSISTENCY WITH AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY PLAN

In accordance with Public Resources Code section 5845.5, the American River Parkway Compliance Analysis will be completed for the Project at the November 2019 Recreation and Parks Commission meeting.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Advisory Committee of the Lower American River Conservancy Program recommend this project as proposed and recommend that WCB staff present this project to the Wildlife Conservation Board for approval at a 2020 Board meeting.