

American River Ranch Animal Program

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 future Board meeting.

Project Title:	American River Ranch Animal Program
Project Type:	Planning
Applicant/Grantee:	Soil Born Farms
Amount Requested:	\$142,545
Funding Partners:	Soil Born Farms
Landowner(s):	Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks
Funding:	Proposition 68
Primary Program Goals:	Habitat, Education
Disadvantaged Community:	Within a severely disadvantaged community
Average Score:	83.75

LOCATION

The American River Ranch Animal Program (Project) is approximately one mile northwest of the center of the city of Rancho Cordova within the River Bend Area Plan of the American River Parkway (Parkway). The Project area is located at the historic American River Ranch (Ranch) which is the last working ranch on the lower American River with a history of agricultural activity dating back to the 1840s. The Ranch is permanently protected open space in a dense urban area and immediately adjacent to Cordova High School. Current land uses include a 7-acre developed area with structures for education, agriculture operations, a native plant nursery, and Soil Born Farm (SBF) offices. This footprint is surrounded by 48 acres of organic farm and wild lands, including vegetable fields, fruit orchards, pasture, habitat plantings, and the 10-acre restored Cordova Creek which bisects the property.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

As caretakers of the Ranch, SBF is fulfilling the site's potential as a dynamic center for hands-on learning, land stewardship, and community connection. The Project will lay the groundwork for bringing livestock to the Ranch landscape, for the dual purposes of holistic land management and experiential education. Planning for a new Animal Barn facility and an education partnership with Cordova High School will be completed under this proposal.

Livestock is a crucial tool for holistic management of the Ranch and Parkway lands and will advance ecosystem benefits such as improved soil fertility and water holding capacity and address priorities of the American River Parkway Natural Resources Management Plan for reducing the prevalence of invasive, nonnative plant species. Additionally, SBF will be taking responsibility for maintenance of the Cordova Creek riparian area and plans to use livestock as organic alternatives to herbicides to control weeds and support native plantings. The return of animals to the Ranch is an opportunity to deepen SBF's relationship with Cordova High

School into a one-of-a-kind experiential education partnership. The school has a dynamic agriculture career track yet lacks the space to keep animals. Using the Ranch as a living laboratory will create impactful learning for youth, while advancing sustainable agriculture and land stewardship.

The Project will complete the final planning work for bringing livestock to the Ranch by preparing 90% design and construction documents for an animal barn facility, obtaining all necessary design and building approvals and permits from local and state agencies, and finalizing an Animal Management Plan that is underway in partnership with a UC Davis Capstone Course and details specific land management goals by field/area and a rotational grazing plan to meet the goals.

In collaboration with Cordova High School Agriculture Academy, SBF's youth education manager will develop a program plan that details a school day field experience schedule, curriculum outlines, afterschool program plans, Future Farmers of America schedule, project budget and funding plan, and job description for a shared Animal Program Coordination position. A Memorandum of Understanding will be executed between SBF and Cordova High School Agriculture Academy to formalize this enhanced education partnership and utilization of the animal barn facility.

PROJECT FUNDING

The proposed funding breakdown for the Project is as follows:

Project Task	WCB	Non-WCB Funds	Total Cost
Project Management	\$10,039	\$10,039	\$20,078
Program Development	---	\$18,544	\$18,544
Barn Design, Construction Documents, and Approvals	\$129,500	---	\$129,500
Indirect	\$3,006	\$4,287	\$7,293
Total	\$142,545	\$32,870	\$175,415

Costs associated with WCB funding include:

- Project Management: Grant administration, invoicing, reporting, coordinating with project team and consultants, and overseeing all work for barn design and program development.
- Barn Design, Construction Documents, and Approvals: Complete geotechnical analysis and design and materials reviews, prepare City planning review application, attend meetings and hearings with City and County staff, submit City plan check fees, complete plan check and design changes as required, finalize design specifications and construction documents, and obtain final approval and permitting from local and State departments.
- Indirect: Incidental or indirect costs not to exceed 20 percent of the total direct WCB award, minus subcontractor and equipment costs.

PROJECT LETTERS OF SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION

Support:

- Don Nottoli, Supervisor, Fifth District, Board of Supervisor, County of Sacramento
- Cyrus Abhar, City Manager, City of Rancho Cordova
- Jerad A. Hyden, Principal, Cordova High School

Opposition:

- None received

CEQA REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

A new Animal Barn is designated as a proposed facility in the American River Ranch Master Plan (Master Plan). The Master Plan was approved by the Recreation and Park Commission and amended into the American River Parkway Plan, River Bend Area Map. SBF consulted with Sacramento County Planning and Environmental Review and an addendum to the American River Parkway Plan Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) will be filed to satisfy environmental compliance. The addendum is a statement from the CEQA lead agency confirming that the project was contemplated under the FEIR and no additional review is necessary.

CONSISTENCY WITH AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY PLAN

A new Animal Barn is designated as a proposed facility in the Master Plan. The Master Plan was approved by the Recreation and Park Commission and amended into the American River Parkway Plan, River Bend Area Map. An American River Parkway Plan analysis for the Master Plan was completed in August 2014 as part of approval by the Board of Supervisors. If this analysis is not sufficient, in accordance with Public Resources Code section 5845.5, the American River Parkway Compliance Analysis will be completed for the project at the October 2021 Recreation and Parks Commission meeting.