

American River Ranch Habitat Restoration

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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

Project Title:	American River Ranch Habitat Restoration
Project Type:	Implementation
Applicant/Grantee:	Soil Born Farms
Amount Requested:	\$297,948
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:	88.06

LOCATION

The American River Ranch Habitat Restoration (Project) is approximately one mile northwest of the center of the city of Rancho Cordova and within the River Bend area of the American River Parkway (Parkway). The Project area is part of the 55-acre organic farm and education center at the historic American River Ranch (Ranch) on a 3-acre plot that is currently irrigated perennial pasture. The plot is highly accessible and centrally located on the Ranch and bordered by the Cordova Creek riparian area to the west, the Parkway multi-use trail to the north, organic vegetation crops to the east, and diversified fruit orchards to the south. The Ranch is the last working ranch on the Lower American River with a history of agricultural activity dating back to the 1840's and is also the ancestral territory of the Nisenan tribe.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Project will establish a 3-acre oak woodland forest adjacent to the restored Cordova Creek riparian area modeling an interdisciplinary approach to conservation. The Project will serve multiple purposes including creating important wildlife habitat, providing community education, enhanced public access, and producing nutritious food and medicinal crops.

Blue elderberry, valley oak, and interior live oak will be the focal species because of their ecological significance, with complementary native understory species. The restored habitat will be integrated into Soil Born Farms' (SBF) education programs as a learning ground for environmental stewardship and cultural exploration. Interpretive signage will identify plant and wildlife species, highlight ethnobotanical practices of Native Americans, and explain the space as an agroecological system. The Project site will offer experiences that blend recreation, nature studies, physical activity, community connection, and healthy food production while supporting critical wildlife habitat. Classes and volunteer work-and-learn days will

allow participants to experience nature while tending native plantings and harvesting wild crops.

The Project will develop a detailed Habitat Restoration and Management Plan (HRMP) for the 3-acre restoration site. Native American representatives will be consulted on cultural considerations and to inform the understory plant palette, and USFWS will be consulted on elderberry management guidelines for the federally threatened valley elderberry longhorn beetle. A transitional zone between the Project area and Cordova Creek will allow for planting of riparian species to connect the ecosystem from the creek's edge to upland habitat. An elderberry and acorn harvest/processing plan will also be developed to support production of the site and demonstrate agroecology principles using native plants.

Site preparation will include tilling, occultation tarping, invasive plant control, fertility testing, irrigation retrofits, and installing funder signage. Plants will be installed in the fall using a local California Conservation Corps (CCC) crew. Plant protection will include protective cages, mulch, and temporary irrigation. Maintenance activities will include organic weed control (grazing, weed whipping, and hand pulling), tapering irrigation to supplemental watering during drought periods, pest management, and plant replacement as needed. Maintenance activities in years 2 and 3 will be supported by the CCC. Ongoing monitoring and management will occur as outlined in the HRMP.

Interpretive signage and educational curriculum will be developed for the restored habitat in collaboration with regional tribes and incorporated into SBF's existing youth and adult education programs. Two to three interpretive signs will be installed around the restored habitat that teach indigenous uses of native plants and traditional ecological knowledge developed by native tribes. A partnership will be developed with regional tribes for shared maintenance/harvest activities and tribal skill building, ceremonies, and youth field trips.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND NEEDS

The HRMP being developed as part of the Project will detail the short-term and long-term maintenance and monitoring activities for the restored habitat and interpretive panels. Regular maintenance activities and annual monitoring protocols will be described to support performance measures for plant survivorship, percent canopy cover, invasive species cover, and additional ecosystem functions to be determined.

PROJECT FUNDING

The proposed funding breakdown for the Project is as follows:

Project Task	WCB	Non-WCB Funds	Total Cost
Project Management	\$20,413	\$20,413	\$40,826
HRMP, Education and Interpretation Program, and Permits	\$96,000	\$20,061	\$116,061
Habitat Restoration	\$168,472	\$20,239	\$188,711
Indirect	\$13,063	\$9,107	\$22,170
Total	297,948	\$69,820	\$367,768

Costs associated with WCB funding include:

- Project Management: Grant administration, invoicing, reporting, coordinating with project team and consultants, and overseeing all aspects of project.
- HRMP, Education and Interpretation Program, and Permits: Consult on habitat restoration design, plant palette, management and monitoring, and reporting, secure flood board permit, and develop hands-on interpretive and skills building activities in collaboration with a tribal representative.
- Habitat Restoration: Site preparation, irrigation install, weed control, plant procurement and supplies, plant installation, and ongoing site maintenance and monitoring.
- Indirect: Incidental or indirect costs not to exceed 20 percent of the total direct WCB award, minus subcontractor and equipment costs.

CEQA REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

Restoring upland woodland and mixed riparian habitat is called for 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. The Addendum will be completed by Oct 2021.

CONSISTENCY WITH AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY PLAN

Restoring upland woodland and mixed riparian habitat is called for in the Master Plan. 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.