



Gavin Newsom, Governor
NATURAL RESOURCES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION BOARD
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Final Meeting Agenda

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION BOARD

September 30, 2022, 9:00 a.m.

Natural Resources Building, First Floor Auditorium
715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Board meeting will also be available via Zoom. A recording will be posted after the meeting.

Please click the link below to join the webinar.

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Conference code: 506989

*If you anticipate commenting during the Public Comment period or on a particular agenda item and would like to register your name ahead of time, please complete this [Speaker Card \(Word\)](#) and email to Mary.Ahern@wildlife.ca.gov prior to the day of the meeting.

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PERSONS WITH DISABILITES

Persons with disabilities needing reasonable accommodation to participate in public meetings or other CDFW activities are invited to contact the Department’s EEO Officer at (916) 653-9089 or EEO@wildlife.ca.gov. Accommodation requests for facility and/or meeting accessibility and Requests for American Sign Language Interpreters should be submitted at least two weeks prior to the event. Requests for Real-Time Captioners should be submitted at least four weeks prior to the event. These timeframes are to help ensure that the requested accommodation is met. If a request for an accommodation has been submitted but is no longer needed, please contact the EEO Officer immediately

1. Roll Call

Wildlife Conservation Board Members

Charlton H. Bonham, Chair
Director, Department of Fish and Wildlife
Alina Bokde, Vice Chair, Public Member
Gayle Miller, Member
Chief Deputy Director, Policy, Department of Finance
Damon Nagami, Public Member
Fran Pavley, Public Member
Kathryn Phillips, Public Member
Samantha Murray, President
Fish and Game Commission

Joint Legislative Advisory Committee

Senator Andreas Borgeas
Senator Nancy Skinner
Senator Henry Stern
Assemblymember Luz Rivas
Assemblymember Laura Friedman – Alternate
Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan
Assemblymember Miguel Santiago – Alternate
Assemblymember Steve Bennett
Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia – Alternate

Executive Director

John P. Donnelly

Presentation Items

2. Ackerson Meadow Restoration

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) adopt the written findings and approve this project as proposed; allocate \$2,786,000 from the General Fund, Budget Act of 2021; authorize staff to enter into appropriate agreements necessary to accomplish this project; and authorize staff and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to proceed substantially as planned.

Project Title:	Ackerson Meadow Restoration
Project Type:	Implementation
Applicant/Grantee:	American Rivers
Amount Recommended:	\$2,786,000
Funding Partners:	American Rivers, U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service, CDFW, CAL FIRE, Bonneville Environmental Foundation, Yosemite Conservancy
Landowner(s):	U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service
County:	Tuolumne
Program:	California Forest Conservation
Funding:	General Fund
Strategic Plan:	Goals: B.1 Objectives: SI 1.2, 1.3, 1.4
Disadvantaged Community:	Within a disadvantaged community

LOCATION

The Ackerson Meadow Restoration (Project) area encompasses the 230-acre Ackerson Meadow complex, one of the largest low-elevation montane meadows in public ownership in the Sierra Nevada and an important wildlife corridor. Ackerson Meadow is an important resource for wildlife in the Sierra Nevada, as evidenced by it supporting the highest documented density of breeding great gray owl pairs in the Sierra Nevada. The Project area extends into both Yosemite National Park and Stanislaus National Forest and is situated within the Tuolumne River watershed, approximately 12 miles north of El Portal in Tuolumne County. In 2020, WCB approved a \$275,000 grant to American Rivers for restoration planning (e.g., design, environmental review, permitting) at three meadow sites, one of which was Ackerson Meadow.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Prior to transfer to public ownership in 2016, Ackerson Meadow was largely under private ownership for 140 years and used for grazing and hay production. Associated activities included ditching, road building, logging, and modifications for water supply. As a result of those impacts, more than 150,000 cubic yards of meadow soil have been washed downstream and the meadow's main channel has eroded to a deeply incised channel measuring 15 feet deep and 100 feet wide over a three-mile reach.

Flows through the incised channel are disconnected from the meadow floodplain in all but the most extreme floods (e.g., 500-year flood event). This greatly altered hydrology has reduced groundwater recharge, converted historic wetlands to upland habitat, and degraded willow communities that are critical for focal bird species such as willow flycatcher.

The proposed Project aims to restore hydrologic function, landforms, vegetation, and ecosystem processes in Ackerson Meadow by reconnecting the channel with its floodplain. Project design elements to accomplish this include channel fill and a robust, downstream grade control structure. Due to the scope of work required to restore Ackerson Meadow in its entirety, the meadow will be restored in two phases. The Project constitutes Phase 1: installing the downstream grade control structure and filling roughly half of the incised channel in the meadow. Project activities will also include revegetation, post-implementation monitoring, and outreach. A future Phase 2 will include filling the remaining upstream portion of the incised channel. WCB is not funding any invasive species management as part of this Project.

This Project contributes to the goals of Pathways to 30x30 California by aligning with Pathway 6: Expand and Accelerate Environmental Restoration and Stewardship.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND NEEDS

The U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service have developed a Management Plan that guides management actions for the property, including management of the Project area. If at any time during the 25-year life of the Project, American Rivers does not manage and maintain the project improvements, the Grant Agreement requires that it refund to the state of California an amortized amount of funds based on the number of years left on the Project life.

Yosemite National Park (YNP) controls invasive plant species within the park as directed by the [National Park System Management Policies](#) (Section 4.4.4.2; 2006) and [Executive Order 13112](#). In compliance with these directives, YNP has established and implemented an Invasive Plant Management Plan (IPMP) to detect, inventory, prioritize, control, and monitor invasive plants within the park. All herbicide applications in YNP are guided by the 2010 Yosemite IPMP Update Environmental Assessment (EA). The [IPMP and EA](#) include a full range of control methods, including mechanical, manual, cultural, and chemical practices and YNP carefully considers treatments for each location and species based on the scientific literature on efficacy of the available methods and the environmental context. The IPMP and EA are prepared to specifically protect the diverse natural resources of YNP.

PROJECT FUNDING

The proposed funding breakdown for the Project is as follows:

Project Task	WCB	Non-WCB Funds	Total Cost
Project Management	\$211,000	\$209,500	\$420,500
Restoration	\$2,225,000	\$410,570	\$2,635,570
Monitoring	\$74,000	\$135,800	\$209,800
Indirect Costs	\$26,000	\$30,100	\$56,100
Contingency	\$250,000	---	\$250,000
Total	\$2,786,000	\$785,970	\$3,571,970

Costs associated with WCB funding include:

- Project Management: Project team coordination, stakeholder communications, outreach, and grant administration.
- Restoration: Project implementation per the design plan and oversight of restoration activities.
- Monitoring: Evaluation of Project effects on ecologically relevant indicators like vegetation, wildlife, geomorphology, and hydrology.
- Indirect Costs: Incidental or indirect costs not to exceed 20 percent of the total direct WCB award, minus subcontractor and equipment costs.
- Contingency: Unanticipated project costs associated with WCB-funded tasks only, requires WCB staff approval prior to use.

PROJECT LETTERS OF SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION

Support:

- Cicely Muldoon, Superintendent, Yosemite National Park
- Jason Kuiken, Forest Supervisor, Stanislaus National Forest
- Helen Loffland, Meadow Species Specialist, The Institute for Bird Populations
- Frank Dean, President, Yosemite Conservancy
- John Buckley, Executive Director, Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center
- Chris Graham, Water Operations and Maintenance Manager, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission
- Wes Monier, Chief Hydrologist, Turlock Irrigation District
- Gordon Enas, Interim Civil Engineering Manager, Modesto Irrigation District

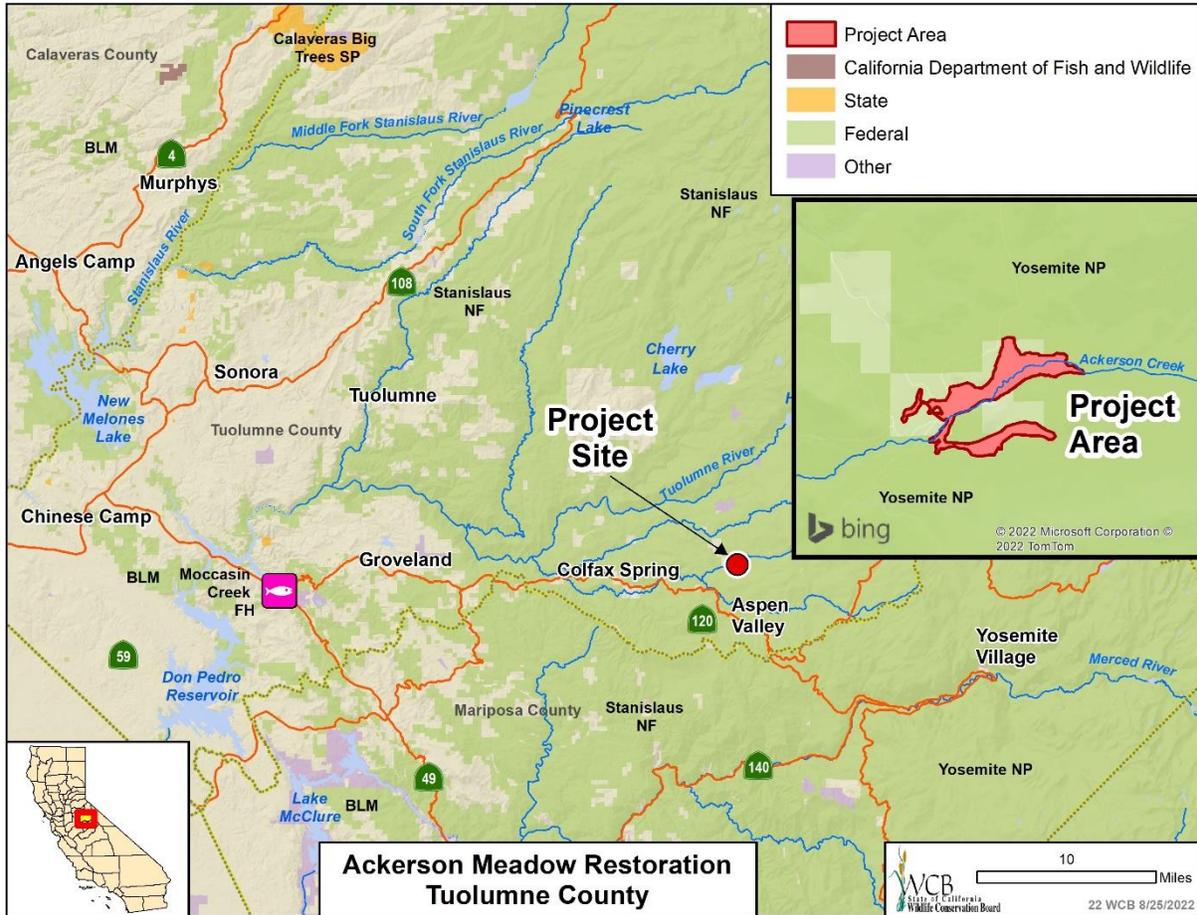
Opposition:

- None received

CEQA REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, as lead agency, prepared an MND for the project pursuant to the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Staff considered the Mitigated Negative Declaration and has prepared proposed, written findings documenting WCB's

compliance with CEQA. Subject to approval of this proposal by WCB, the appropriate Notice of Determination will be filed with the State Clearinghouse.



3. **Climate Smart Restoration at River Garden Farms**

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that WCB approve this project as proposed; allocate \$709,377 from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access For All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68), Public Resources Code Section 80132(c); authorize staff to enter into appropriate agreements necessary to accomplish this project; and authorize staff and CDFW to proceed substantially as planned.

Project Title:	Climate Smart Restoration at River Garden Farms
Project Type:	Implementation
Applicant/Grantee:	Audubon California
Amount Recommended:	\$709,377
Funding Partners:	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Audubon California, River Garden Farms, Center for Land-based Learning, River Partners
Landowner(s):	River Garden Farms
County:	Yolo
Program:	Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Program
Funding:	Proposition 68
Strategic Plan:	Goals: B.1, B.5 Objectives: SI 2.1
Disadvantaged Community:	Within a severely disadvantaged community

LOCATION

The Climate Smart Restoration at River Garden Farms project (Project) is located within a 15,000-acre privately-owned farm (River Garden Farms), along the Sacramento River, four miles north of Knights Landing and 24 miles northwest of Sacramento.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Project will install a diverse suite of native plants along two, 1.6-mile-long linear strips on River Garden Farms, creating riparian habitat connectivity between the Sacramento River and the existing large area of protected wetlands on Roosevelt Ranch, south of the Project. The planting design has been carefully crafted to maximize the climate resiliency of the habitat for the long-term benefit of wildlife. A diverse native vegetation community will be established on either side of Road 98A. On the west side of the road is a 275-foot-wide irrigation canal with little vegetation between it and the road. To the east side of the road are crops and a relatively new, but sparsely planted hedgerow that the Project will substantially enhance to create riparian habitat.

A series of three hands-on field days will be held to help students develop knowledge and skills in science, habitat restoration, environmental stewardship, and basic tool use. The Student and Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship Program serves high school students ages 14-18 that reside in the Sacramento Valley region, including Sacramento, Yolo, and Solano counties.

Many of the participating schools are located in disadvantaged communities in Sacramento and rural agricultural communities.

This Project is one of seven restoration sites identified in a comprehensive Farm Restoration Plan developed by American Rivers and funded by the Delta Conservancy to advance practices at River Garden Farms that would enhance the conservation value of the farm and contribute to the habitat objectives of the Central Valley Joint Venture. The Plan includes restoration design plans for 550 acres of floodplain, wetland, and riparian habitat. This Project will build upon previous state investment in planning to take 19 acres to on-the-ground implementation.

In order to meet climate resilience and biodiversity habitat goals, the Project implementation team will:

- Establish a diverse native vegetation community.
- Treat noxious weed species.
- Conduct ecological monitoring of vegetation and bird response.
- Complete three years of maintenance, including re-treatment of target species, supplemental watering, and replacement of native planting, as needed.

The Project will employ a science-based integrated pest management approach that includes manual, mechanical, and chemical treatment of weeds, such as milk thistle, Russian thistle, yellow star thistle, poison hemlock, mustard, and Johnson grass. Steps will be taken to reduce the intensity of herbicide application, and the most targeted, effective, efficient products and techniques will be implemented. A team of experts from River Partners, Yolo County Resource Conservation District, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and River Garden Farms will guide, implement, and monitor the integrated pest management actions. A licensed California Pest Control Advisor who is experienced in recommending safe herbicides to use in restoration projects will oversee herbicide selection when chemical treatment is necessary to achieve restoration goals. All herbicide applicators are trained and supervised by a state licensed Qualified Applicator. No WCB grant funds will be used to purchase herbicides. The project team has determined that successful implementation of this Project is not feasible by only using manual or mechanical treatments.

This Project contributes to the goals of the Pathways to 30x30 California by aligning with Pathway 6: Expand and Accelerate Environmental Restoration and Stewardship.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND NEEDS

Audubon California has adopted a Management Plan that guides management actions for the property, including management of the property. If at any time during the 25-year life of the Project, Audubon California does not manage and maintain the project improvements, the Grant Agreement requires that it refund to

the state of California an amortized amount of funds based on the number of years left on the Project life.

PROJECT FUNDING

The proposed funding breakdown for the Project is as follows:

Project Task	WCB	Non-WCB Funds	Total Cost
Project Management	\$122,102	\$4,375	\$126,477
Implementation	\$228,347	\$92,473	\$320,820
Monitoring	\$107,716	\$7,876	\$115,592
Maintenance	\$154,171	---	\$154,171
Community Engagement	\$9,360	\$5,580	\$14,940
Indirect Costs	\$23,181	---	\$23,181
Contingency	\$64,500	---	\$64,500
Total	\$709,377	\$110,304	\$819,681

Costs associated with WCB funding include:

- Project Management: Project scheduling, budgeting, invoicing, contracting, reporting, coordination, and data management.
- Implementation: Site preparation, irrigation installation, plantings, and training for volunteer workdays.
- Monitoring: Vegetation monitoring including weed monitoring, mowing, and weed control.
- Community Engagement: Three field days with Student and Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship Program participants.
- Indirect Costs: 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:

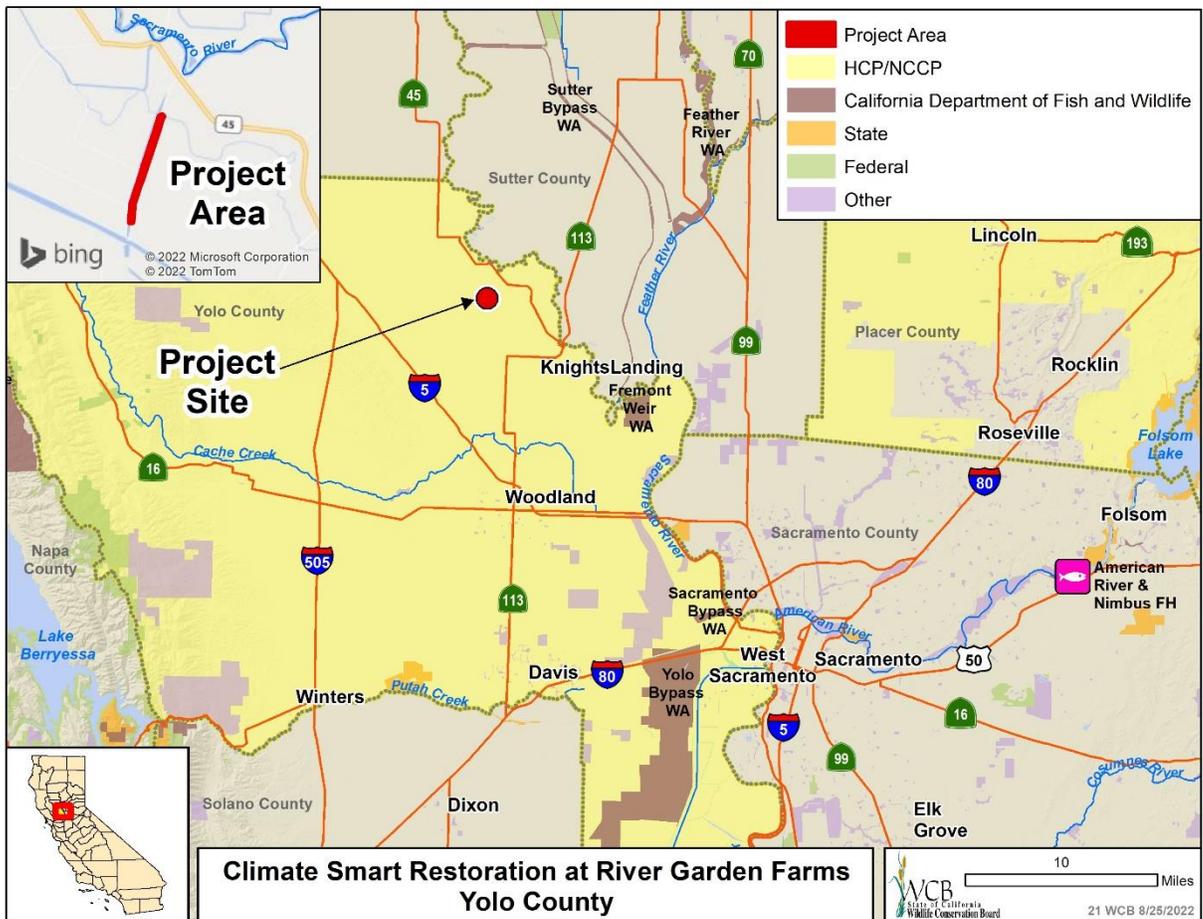
- James Cogswell, Coordinator, Central Valley Joint Venture
- Jeffrey McCreary, Director of Operations, Western Region, Ducks Unlimited
- Lewis Bair, General Manager, Reclamation District 108
- Mike Davis, Associate Director of Central Valley River Restoration, American Rivers
- Mary Kimball, Chief Executive Officer, Center for Land-Based Learning
- Curtis McCasland, Project Leader, Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Dominic Bruno, Assistant General Manager, River Garden Farms
- Julie Renner, President, River Partners

Opposition:

- None received

CEQA REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

The Project is statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to the Statutory Exemption for Restoration Projects (SERP), Public Resources Code section 21080.56, as a project that meets all of the following conditions: (1) the Project is exclusively to conserve, restore, protect, or enhance, and assist in the recovery of California native fish and wildlife, and the habitat upon which they depend; or is exclusively to restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife; (2) the Project may have public benefits incidental to the Project's fundamental purpose; (3) the Project will result in long-term net benefits to climate resiliency, biodiversity, and sensitive species recovery; and includes procedures and ongoing management for the protection of the environment; and (4) Project construction activities are solely related to habitat restoration. Subject to approval of this proposal by WCB, the appropriate Notice of Exemption will be filed with the State Clearinghouse.



4. Scoping Discussion for Herbicide Use in Restoration Projects

The Board will discuss how it will approach the issue of herbicide use in restoration projects. The Board may discuss a longer-term process, which will include other agencies and interested groups. The [Herbicide Questionnaire](#) is attached that applicants fill out to provide additional details on use of herbicide in the project.

Public comments for this item will be limited to two minutes per person.

Adjourn