CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
DIRECTOR'S OFFICE
POST OFFICE BOX 944209
SACRAMENTO, CA 94244-2090

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT STATUTORY EXEMPTION FOR RESTORATION PROJECTS
CONCURRENCE NO. 21080.56-2026-104-R2

Project: Spring Creek Meadow Restoration

Location: Plumas County

Lead Agency: Feather River Resource Conservation District

Lead Agency Contact: Michael Hall; mhall@frrcd.org

Background

Project Location: The Spring Creek Meadow Restoration (Project) is located at Spring Creek Meadow about six miles northeast of the unincorporated community of Chilcoot, in Plumas County. The Project area is approximately 202 acres in size and is located on land owned by the Feather River Land Trust (FRLT) and surrounded by U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands. The approximate coordinates of the Project are 39.892591, -120.165233.

Project Description: The Feather River Resource Conservation District (Lead Agency), in partnership with Point Blue Conservation Science (Point Blue), proposes to conserve, restore, protect, or enhance, and assist in the recovery of California native fish and wildlife, and the habitat upon which they depend and restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife. The Project is designed to benefit migrating birds, cold water aquatic species, and including three sensitive species: yellow warbler (*Setophaga petechia*), Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), and greater sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis tabida*).

The Project area is currently degraded and incised. This is due to historical overgrazing, the creation of linear surface flow features and channelization, construction of roads across the meadow surface, willow (*Salix sp.*) eradication, and loss of larger trees falling into and remaining within the meadow.

To address the degraded meadow, the Project will stabilize vertical and lateral erosion along Spring Creek and restore meadow hydrologic function. The Project will also include aggradation of the primary channel of Spring Creek using channel fill and headcut treatments. In addition, low-tech process-based restoration structures will be created in the upper reaches where incision is less severe and deciduous trees and shrubs are present. Incised channels on the meadow margins will be filled to restore floodplain hydrology and artificial berms and former ditches will be recontoured to match natural topography. Lastly, larger trees will be placed along the meadow margin to mimic natural wood recruitment

processes and eliminate channels along the meadow margins. The Project will result in up to 202 acres of restored meadow and adjacent upland habitat, including enhancement of approximately 9,892 linear feet of channel/stream.

The Project will use low-tech process-based restoration structures, including beaver dam analogs (BDA), post-assisted log structures (PAL), and large woody debris (LWD), which will be created in the upper reaches where incision is smaller, soil moisture is higher, and deciduous trees and shrubs are present. Additionally, artificial berms and former ditches will be recontoured to match natural topography.

The Project includes the installation of riffle augmentation structures, rock grade control structures, and sod and earthen fill to repair headcutting and prevent future erosion. Approximately ten riffle augmentation structures, containing an unsorted mixture of silt, sand, gravel, and rocks, will be installed. Rock grade control structures will be formed as cross vanes or rock riffles using boulders between one and three feet in diameter. Along the base of the control structures, larger boulders will be embedded into the stream channel to a depth of 24-36 inches. Sod and earthen channel fill material made up of organic material will be placed into headcuts. Additionally, several remnant berms will be filled, removed, or recontoured to match the surrounding topography.

The Project also includes willow and riparian shrub planting following restoration activities, which will help to expedite habitat improvements and increase Project stability. Where possible, native materials will be extracted from borrow areas. Prior to material removal, existing sod and topsoil will be harvested and stockpiled away from excavated areas. After excavation, soils will be lightly scarified and re-seeded with native grass species. Salvaged topsoil and sod will be placed over the affected surface, and woodchips will be spread over remaining bare areas to minimize wind and water erosion and to provide additional organic material to the area. A humic acid mix will be spread over affected borrow areas to accelerate plant growth following disturbance.

Following initial restoration activities, the Project includes adaptive management, which includes potential maintenance until the meadow system has recovered to a self-sustaining state.

Tribal Engagement: The Lead Agency contacted the California Native American Heritage Commission and received a contact list on November 5, 2025. Each contact on the list was mailed a hard copy letter on November 12, 2025, including a map of the Project area. The Lead Agency anticipates coordinating a site visit in the Spring of 2026 to discuss the Project and restoration activities based on follow up communication received, dated December 1, 2025. Additionally, the Lead Agency sent an email to the Maidu Summit Consortium on December 9, 2025, and a follow up call was made on April 6, 2026. The Lead Agency and Point Blue will continue to coordinate with tribes as the Project is implemented.

Interested Party Coordination: The Lead Agency has been in communication with USFS Region 5 and Plumas National Forest personnel and has held multiple meetings, site visits, and conducted ongoing communication since 2021 regarding the conservation of the site. The District Ranger of the Beckwourth Ranger District toured the Project area, as well. On

January 23, 2025, a site visit was also conducted with the water master for Sierra Valley.

Anticipated Project Implementation Timeframes: Start date: June 2026
Completion date: December 2030

Lead Agency Request for CDFW Concurrence: On April 7, 2026, the Director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW Director) received a concurrence request from the Lead Agency pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (e) (Request). The Request seeks the CDFW Director's concurrence with the Lead Agency's determination on April 7, 2026, that the Project meets certain qualifying criteria set forth in subdivisions (a) to (d), inclusive, of the same section of the Public Resources Code (Lead Agency Determination). The CDFW Director's concurrence is required for the Lead Agency to approve the Project relying on this section of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). (Pub. Resources Code, § 21000 et seq.).

Concurrence Determination

The CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency Determination that the Project meets the qualifying criteria set forth in Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivisions (a) to (d), inclusive (Concurrence).

Specifically, the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project meets all of the following conditions: (A) 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; (B) the Project may have public benefits incidental to the Project's fundamental purpose; (C) 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 (D) Project construction activities are solely related to habitat restoration. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (g), CDFW will post this Concurrence on its CEQA Notices and Documents internet page: https://wildlife.ca.gov/Notices/CEQA.

This Concurrence is based on best available science and supported, as described below, by substantial evidence in CDFW's administrative record of proceedings for the Project.

This Concurrence is also based on a finding that the Project is consistent with and that its implementation will further CDFW's mandate as California's trustee agency for fish and wildlife, including the responsibility to hold and manage these resources in trust for all the people of California.

Discussion

A. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (a), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project will exclusively conserve, restore, protect, or enhance, and assist in the recovery of California native fish and wildlife, and the habitat upon which they depend; or restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife.

   The Project will contribute to the restoration of hydrologic function and improvement of the meadow habitat heterogeneity in Spring Creek meadow. The Project aims to arrest ongoing incision in Spring Creek meadow and recover hydrologic and ecological processes and function. Restoration actions will contribute to lower water turbidity from reduced erosion and cool water temperatures, which will aid in the prevention of future degradation and increased aquatic habitat heterogeneity. Heterogeneous instream and aquatic habitat with complex features will support native amphibians, cold water native fish, and macroinvertebrates. Additionally, high quality wet meadow and riparian habitat will support bird species and productive, healthy soils with high levels of soil organic matter.

B. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (b), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project will not have known incidental public benefits, such as public access and recreation.

   The site is privately owned by FRLT with limited public access. Furthermore, the Project does not include the creation of any additional public access or recreation.

C. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (c), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that 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.

   Long-term Net Benefits to Climate Resiliency: Restoration of floodplain hydrology in montane meadows has been shown to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sequestration at rates comparable to restoration activities in other inland and tidal wetlands, with montane wet meadows storing high concentrations of soil carbon rivaling carbon storage in surrounding forests. The Project is expected to increase the growth of productive hydric and mesic vegetation, which provides fresh carbon inputs to the soil, reestablishes conditions for net soil carbon sequestration, and prevents the disconnection of floodplain hydrology which can adversely impact plant-soil-water relationships.

   Geomorphic restoration techniques proposed in the Project have been widely successful at increasing groundwater levels and storage capacity in montane meadows. Restoration of floodplain hydrology has also been shown to decrease the magnitude of flood peaks during winter and early snowmelt. There is also evidence that increased groundwater storage, as a result of geomorphic restoration, may increase baseflows and cool summer stream temperatures, increasing watershed

resilience to climate change. Higher levels of soil moisture following meadow restoration may also influence wildfire behavior in the surrounding uplands and provide valuable refugia for wildlife during and after wildfires.

Long-term Net Benefits to Biodiversity: The Project will result in long-term net benefits to biodiversity by enhancing and restoring wet meadow and riparian habitat. Sierra Nevada meadows provide habitat for approximately 20% of the region's terrestrial vertebrates dependent on riparian and meadow habitat. Healthy wet meadows in the Sierra Nevada support a high abundance and diversity of breeding birds that form a unique community compared to adjacent upland habitats. During the post-breeding period, meadows can support a high abundance of not only meadow breeding birds, but many other species that breed in adjacent and lower elevation upland habitats. Another goal of the Project is to extend the timing of baseflow and increase riparian shading to benefit aquatic biodiversity, including native cold-water fish. Common bird species likely to benefit include Wilson's snipe (*Gallinago delicata*), song sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*), Virginia rail (*Rallus limicola*), and red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*).

Long-term Net Benefits to Sensitive Species Recovery: Three sensitive species found within the vicinity will likely benefit from the Project, including: greater sandhill crane, a species listed as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA); yellow warbler, a CDFW Species of Special Concern (SSC); and Townsend's big-eared bat, a CDFW SSC.

Wet meadows are the primary breeding habitat for greater sandhill crane and yellow warbler in the Sierra Nevada. Greater sandhill crane are not known to occur in the Project area but do occur in nearby Sierra Valley, and improved habitat quality may incentivize area use by the species. Yellow warbler occur in the upper extent of the Project area. The Project is intended to improve conditions for both species by increasing the extent of available surface water and revegetating willows in the downstream end of the Project area.

A roost site for Townsend's big-eared bat is located about 0.5 miles upstream of the Project area along Spring Creek. These bats are known to forage in mesic areas and may forage in Spring Creek Meadow. The Project could improve foraging conditions for this species by enhancing and restoring wet meadow habitat, increasing food source diversity and availability.

Procedures for the Protection of the Environment: The Project includes procedures for conducting Project activities and measures to protect sensitive resources. Avoidance and conservation measures include, but are not limited to:

- The primary Project implementation and construction work will occur during the dry season (typically August 1 through October 30) when flows are low.
- Existing vegetation (meadow sod and riparian shrubs) in disturbance areas will be salvaged and replanted throughout the Project area.

- Heavy equipment and crews will travel in drier areas east of the meadow. Crews transporting materials will avoid trailing in wet areas and dispersed paths will be utilized when these areas must be accessed.
- Within 30 days of the onset of the use of heavy equipment or excavation, a qualified biologist will conduct focused surveys for American badger (*Taxidea taxus*) and their requisite habitat features (dens) in the Project's proposed borrow pits and upland access routes. If a badger-occupied den is found, the den will be protected by a 50-foot no-disturbance buffer until it is determined through non-invasive means that individuals occupying the den have dispersed.
- Sierra Valley mousetail (*Ivesia aperta*) populations with a 30-foot buffer of the Project will be flagged and avoided.

Ongoing Management for the Protection of the Environment: The Lead Agency and Point Blue are developing an effectiveness monitoring plan. The plan will reference the 2025 baseline data set which integrates bird, vegetation, and soil carbon flux and stocks data into success metrics. After initial restoration activities are complete, for at least the first three years post-restoration, annual site visits will be conducted to ensure the Project is performing as expected and achieving objectives. Adaptive management will be employed to ensure that success criteria are met. Additionally, visual inspections will be conducted on the entire length of channel in the Project area with photo documentation of BDAs, PALs, channel fill, and grade control structures. Where feasible, any structures degraded beyond their intentional functionality will be repaired.

Point Blue and FRLT are dedicated to ensuring the long-term success of this Project and will work together to seek additional funds as needed to adaptively manage the Project.

The property is held in fee title by the FRLT, whose mission includes conserving lands and waters of the Feather River region and stewarding their ecological, cultural, and educational values for current and future generations.

D. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (d), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project does not include any construction activities, except those solely related to habitat restoration.

Heavy equipment will be used to implement the Project's restoration activities. This includes: placement of sod and earthen channel fill material to form headcuts; transport fill material to the channel, place it, and shape the final surface to match the desired finished grade and floodplain slope; and transport boulder materials from nearby borrow areas to the treatment location.

Scope and Reservation of Concurrence

This Concurrence is based on the proposed Project as described by the Lead Agency Determination and the Request. If there are any subsequent changes to the Project that affect or otherwise change the Lead Agency Determination, the Lead Agency, or any other

public agency that proposes to carry out or approve the Project, shall submit a new lead agency determination and request for concurrence from CDFW pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56. If any other public agency proposes to carry out or approve the Project subsequent to the effective date of this Concurrence, this Concurrence shall remain in effect and no separate concurrence from CDFW shall be required so long as the other public agency is carrying out or approving the Project as described by the Lead Agency Determination and the Request.

Other Legal Obligations

The Project shall remain subject to all other applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and this Concurrence shall not weaken or violate any applicable environmental or public health standards. (Pub. Resources Code, § 21080.56, subd. (f).)

CDFW Director's Certification

By: Signed by: 19042A1B72454D8... Date: 5/18/2026

Meghan Hertel, Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife