

Farmer and Rancher Assisted Ecosystem Restoration and Watershed Stewardship Projects

James R Moller

Initial Selection Panel Review

0032

Farmer and Rancher Assisted Ecosystem Restoration and Watershed Stewardship Projects

Western Shasta Resource Conservation District

Applicant amount requested: \$350,000

Fund This Amount: \$275,000

The Panel noted that while the work in this proposal was not technically within a priority area, this watershed contributes to Sacramento River which is a priority for the PSP. The Panel further noted that this project has the potential to provide ecological benefits and is strengthened because it brings together a broad coalition of partners.

The Panel recommends reconsidering this proposal at the level of \$275,000 if revisions are made. These include providing greater clarity on: the monitoring plan; demonstrating that EQIP funds are secured; eliminating the \$75,000 for undefined future cost share match.

In addition, the proposal needs to further discuss the potential ecological benefit of the seven projects (e.g. are they isolated projects or is there some synergy to be gained), and the proposal needs to put the projects within the greater watershed context.

Fund With Conditions

Technical Panel Review

Proposal Name: Farmer and Rancher Assisted Ecosystem Restoration and Watershed Stewardship Projects

Applicant Organization: Western Shasta Resource Conservation District

Amount Requested: \$350,000

Panel Rating:

Fair - Lacking in one or more critical aspects

Panel Summary

The panel felt that this proposal had one or more sound or worthy concepts. Based on its technical merits, however, this proposal is lacking in one or more critical aspects and should not be funded in its current form.

The proposed project establishes only a tenuous relationship between the proposed agricultural practices and specific ERP objectives. Seven sites were selected through a large watershed, providing little potential for cumulative effects.

While the proposed activities are feasible (with possible exception of a proposed diversion dam which may impede fish passage), they were based on a conceptual model built on an NRCS matrix of practices as a proxy for habitat benefits targeted by the PSP rather than on a rigorous hypothesis and evaluation framework. The project does not contain adequate descriptions of the monitoring of ecosystem responses and thus provided no opportunity to meaningfully assess costs and benefits. The existing conceptual model was poorly linked to PSP priorities.

The lack of specificity regarding ERP benefits from the project activities is complicated by the fact that firm EQIP agreements for landowner participation have not yet been executed. While one reviewer noted the project proponents' strong record of working with landowners, others noted that the project relied on qualitative assessments in performance

#0032: Farmer and Rancher Assisted Ecosystem Restoration and Watershed Stewar...

Technical Panel Review

evaluation.

One reviewer stated that the proposal was conceptually strong in its approach to linking farm bill dollars to ERP goals, and in increasing landowner participation in conservation practices. Another panel member stated that what the project proponents are proposing can be funded through existing FWS programs.

External Technical Review #1

Proposal Number: 0032

Proposal Name: Farmer and Rancher Assisted Ecosystem Restoration and Watershed Stewardship Projects

Applicant Organization: Western Shasta Resource Conservation District

Amount Requested: \$350,000

Goals

Rating	very good
Comments	This proposal clearly describes the goals of assisting agricultural landowners in the implementation of ERP goals through the completion of a variety of projects. The only improvement I would suggest would be to concisely tie the practices to ERP goals for each property.

Justification And Conceptual Model

Rating	good
Comments	<p>The application appears to indicate that the primary purpose of the project is research. The proposal narrative, however, describes a pilot/demonstration project. If this is primarily a research project, the hypothesis is not clearly stated. Regardless, I believe that this effort will have significant value as a pilot or demonstration. The lack of clarity about this being primarily a research project could be due to the complex nature of the application.</p> <p>Regarding the specific tasks outlined in the proposal, the grant addresses a significant challenge in implementing Environmental Quality Incentives Program projects on private land. Specifically, the 50 percent</p>

External Technical Review #1

	<p>limitation on cost share projects limits the numbers of landowners who participate as well as the numbers of projects completed. Other states do offer matching funds to landowners who qualify for EQIP. As a pilot project, this effort could demonstrate the value of combining federal, state and private funding sources to implement on-the-ground ecosystem improvements. Furthermore, this project can demonstrate the value of actions taken on private land to improve habitat while maintaining or enhancing the economic viability of agricultural operations.</p>
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Approach

Rating	good
Comments	<p>Generally, the approach of working with private landowners to implement projects that address ecosystem needs as well as economic viability offers significant benefits. However, the proposal narrative could more clearly describe the specific on-the-ground projects that would receive CALFED funds versus those that will be or have been implemented entirely with federal and/or private funds.</p>

Feasibility

Rating	excellent
Comments	<p>The tasks outlined in the proposal, combined with the Western Shasta RCD's past track record, indicate that this project has a high likelihood of success. The approach outlined in the EQIP program ensures project success. Furthermore, by utilizing an existing cooperative program, this project will thoroughly address environmental compliance and permitting issues. As with all on-the-ground projects, weather and other issues beyond the control of landowners and the project team may delay implementation. However, the project seems to build in sufficient timeframes to ensure successful completion.</p>

External Technical Review #1

Performance Evaluation

Rating	excellent
Comments	The proposal successfully combines quantifiable on-the-ground measurements of success as well as qualitative evaluation of project benefits. I especially like the proposal to measure success by the increase in landowner participation in future cost-share programs.

Proposed Outcomes

Rating	very good
Comments	EQIP cost-share projects have proven to be effective tools for addressing both ecological and agricultural goals. Since this project will provide non-federal matching funds for pre-qualified landowners, it will provide greater implementation of on-the-ground projects. This project will provide a model for other resource conservation districts who wish to help the Natural Resources Conservation Service stretch its EQIP investment to greater numbers of private landowners.

Capabilities

Rating	excellent
Comments	The Western Shasta RCD demonstrates clear success in its past performance on similar projects. The project team is obviously well-qualified both technically and in terms of its ability to work cooperatively with landowners and agencies. Furthermore, the project partners (specifically the Natural Resource Conservation Service and UC Cooperative Extension) have proven their ability to work successfully with private landowners.

External Technical Review #1

Cost-Benefits

Rating	very good
Comments	The budget is reasonable for the work proposed. Furthermore, the budget reflects substantial leveraging of state funds through the use of federal and private monies and in-kind contributions.

Overall Evaluation Summary Rating

Rating	very good
Comments	This project appears to be well-designed and very cost effective. By matching federal cost-share dollars, this project will facilitate the completion of a greater number of on-the-ground EQIP projects than the Natural Resources Conservation Service could complete on its own. Furthermore, by using an established program, this project will ensure ecosystem as well as agricultural benefits.

External Technical Review #2

Proposal Number: 0032

Proposal Name: Farmer and Rancher Assisted Ecosystem Restoration and Watershed Stewardship Projects

Applicant Organization: Western Shasta Resource Conservation District

Amount Requested: \$350,000

Goals

Rating	poor
Comments	The goals and objectives are very vague and lack detail. It is uncertain as to how the five specific objectives relate to the overall objectives and goals.

Justification And Conceptual Model

Rating	poor
Comments	The justification for the project is unclear. It is further unclear how this project directly relates to the overall goals and objectives of the Bay-Delta Authority. It is further unclear how the various project components and subprojects contribute to an overall goal or vision.

Approach

Rating	poor
Comments	Seven major projects (subprojects) are identified. In the description of all of these, a clear presentation of research and other methods is lacking. It is uncertain how all of these relate to each other and benefit the overall project goals. Without such information, it is impossible to assess the reliability and validity of the data/methods and how

External Technical Review #2

it might benefit decision makers.

Feasibility

Rating	poor
Comments	Without a clarification of the data and collection methods, it is impossible to determine the likelihood of success/feasibility. The proposal lacks the documentation, technical structures, and detailed methodology to adequately assess the feasibility of the project.

Performance Evaluation

Rating	poor
Comments	It is unclear what program evaluation will take place and how such evaluations would be used to guide the project and future program/policy.

Proposed Outcomes

Rating	poor
Comments	The products, public outreach, and other outputs from this project are limited. Those that are presented are poorly defined and unclear as to their impacts.

Capabilities

Rating	very good
Comments	The authors have a sufficient background, experience, and professional success to design and implement this project. They have available the infrastructure and other aspects of support necessary to accomplish the project.

External Technical Review #2

Cost-Benefits

Rating	poor
Comments	Based on the scope of the project the budget appears to be sufficient. However since so much of the approach and methods are undefined, it is impossible to determine the actual needs and costs of the project. Based on the information presented, it does not appear that solid deliverables would result.

Overall Evaluation Summary Rating

Rating	poor
Comments	This project presents an important topic that is likely of direct importance to the Bay Delta authority. Substantial secondary data is provided to justify the project. However much of the proposal narrative is lacking the detail needed to determine the feasibility, scope, methods, and outcomes of the project. Without such information, it is impossible to determine the utility of this project.

External Technical Review #3

Proposal Number: 0032

Proposal Name: Farmer and Rancher Assisted Ecosystem Restoration and Watershed Stewardship Projects

Applicant Organization: Western Shasta Resource Conservation District

Amount Requested: \$350,000

Goals

Rating	fair
Comments	<p>The problem is well described. However, the project's goals are simply a relisting of ERP goals and are not specific to the proposal's components.</p> <p>Two different lists of project objectives were given, so I didn't know which one the proposers meant. What was listed wasn't very tangible or measurable. The</p>

Justification And Conceptual Model

Rating	good
Comments	<p>The ecosystem and agricultural operations in the area were well described, but the conceptual model was difficult to understand. No connection was made between the practices proposed and the outcome.</p> <p>Also, no hypothesis was mentioned, and the monitoring activities described were not scientifically based and probably would provide little information as to the efficacy of the actions proposed.</p>

Approach

Rating	fair
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External Technical Review #3

<p>Comments</p>	<p>It was difficult to match the work to be done within the "practices" ("projects?") to the deliverables listed under the project tasks. There seemed to be 22 (although only 21 were given) separate practices to be finished, presumably mostly within Task 6, but the authors did not make it clear how these fit into the work tasks. Also, the task list is incorrect in that Task 1 does not include funds for project management.</p> <p>As it was, no study design or methods were specified. The approach seemed to be to just finish EQIP projects the way the NRCS wanted them done. Little information could probably be derived from this for cooperating agencies or non-governmental organizations and decision makers.</p>
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Feasibility

<p>Rating</p>	<p>very good</p>
<p>Comments</p>	<p>The projects seemed feasible within the timefram given, and there was probably adequate time for permitting and landowner acceptance. History indicates that successful projects have been completed in the past.</p>

Performance Evaluation

<p>Rating</p>	<p>fair</p>
<p>Comments</p>	<p>Performance evaluation was extremely weak. Methods weren't described, and what was listed did not seem scientifically based or appropriate. Most evaluations were qualitative, not quantitative. No statistical comparisons were proposed. Mostly the authors proposed to use NRCS requirements to measure their work, but these are quite different from what the ERP program required.</p>

Proposed Outcomes

Rating	fair
Comments	The proposed projects probably would improve ecosystem function, and some would be valuable BMPs for agriculture and grazing management. The proposers seem to have an appropriate schedule of field trips and workshops to transfer information, and reports will be available on a website. I doubt that a great deal of information will be generated, and less will be available to farmers and agencies, because the proposers didn't seem to recognize the value of this activity and likely wouldn't give it much attention.

Capabilities

Rating	good
Comments	<p>The project team is suitably qualified, although there were some weaknesses, as was evidenced by the lack of technical detail in their monitoring plan, which made me think they didn't understand the importance of QA/QC and statistical sampling methods. They seem to have a good track record on recent projects.</p> <p>I couldn't assess capacity because no description was provided.</p>

Cost-Benefits

Rating	good
Comments	<p>Although \$350,000 is the official proposal total, the cost tables and elsewhere in the narrative give \$456,428.91 as the requested amount.</p> <p>The narrative states that \$75,000 is being requested for as yet unnamed projects, but these were not described.</p>

External Technical Review #3

Assuming tht \$456,428.91 is the correct amount, it seems a little high for the proposed work. Salaries and benefits seem to be in line, but I could not assess the costs for materials because no breakdown was provided, even though these "operating expenses" were the largest cost (Task 6, \$224,435).
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Overall Evaluation Summary Rating

Rating	fair
Comments	The proposal generally lacked cohesiveness. The authors wanted money to finish EQIP projects that were already planned, but didn't successfully convince me that they really understood and could accomplish the requirements of the ERP funding. They were instead using an NRCS model for everything they proposed.

Sacramento Regional Panel Review

Proposal Number: 0032

Proposal Name: Farmer and Rancher Assisted Ecosystem Restoration and Watershed Stewardship Projects

Applicant Organization: Western Shasta Resource Conservation District

1. Applicability to ERP goals and regional priorities.

The project will probably benefit fall/late fall chinook populations but just how and how much is not clear. Principal project benefits will be realized within the Cow Cr. watershed, not in downstream ecosystems (including the Bay/Delta). Project is consistent with the overriding statement of PSP priorities.

notes:

This project will generally improve rangelands, wetlands, and riparian habitat through components such as livestock fencing for rotation grazing, repair of leaky water transport systems, dam maintenance, and enhancement of tailwater collection ponds.

2. Links with other restoration actions.

Basic premise is to use of public grant \$ to match EQIP \$ in order to maximize ecosystem restoration. This seems somewhat innovative. There have been previous restoration investments in the watershed and this project would continue those efforts.

notes:

#0032: Farmer and Rancher Assisted Ecosystem Restoration and Watershed Stewar...

Sacramento Regional Panel Review

The panel discussed concerns that this proposal seeks additional public funds to address deficiency in funds from another public program, the EQIP (Environmental Quality Improvement Program, which receives money from the Farm Bill through USDA and NRCS). Concern was expressed that this cost-share was perhaps intended by the EQIP to increase project buy-in by the land stewards. In cases where the land steward is the beneficiary of the improvements made (ex. in terms of increased production), perhaps they should provide a major share of the costs. On the other hand, additional funding from this project seems appropriate where the public is to benefit. On the positive side, one of the priorities of the PSP is to provide matching funds, so funding may be appropriate in this case (i.e. leverage other funding sources).

3. Local circumstances.

Projects have been identified and pre-approved (under the EQIP program) so there do not seem to be any local constraints. An exception would be where a particular agency had concerns about the work proposed. This would be addressed by the TAC.

notes:

The proposal was lacking in specific details of the 22 sites involved and the panel found it difficult to judge the benefits without this information.

4. Local involvement.

The answer is yes, with the possible concern that providing additional funding to the landowner for their cost share would lessen landowner commitment to the long-term viability of the project.

Sacramento Regional Panel Review

notes:

5. Local value.

If by "region", it's meant the Cow Cr watershed, the answer would be yes.

notes:

Principal benefits will be within the Cow Creek watershed. In one case, work on an eroding streambank near the Sacramento River would likely improve downstream habitat for salmonids, if the sediment in the eroding bank is fine material.

There was concern about the salmonid benefits from the EQIP program. The state of salmonid populations in the area is unknown and therefore the amount that these EQIP projects would alleviate salmonid decline cannot be identified.

6. Applicant history.

The applicant has successfully implemented several watershed improvement projects in this watershed. The same could be said for NRCS.

notes:

7. Summary of Overall Panel Discussion and Review

The panel discussed reservations about the lack of site specific details. The local benefit to Cow Creek would be great and beneficial to the region as Cow Creek represents high quality habitat. There was concern about technical and

Sacramento Regional Panel Review

engineering facets such as a proposal for a flashboard dam that could be a barrier and would need DFG review at a minimum. The panel was concerned about the proposed slush fund (i.e. funds set aside for undefined projects). Given the uncertainty over the specific reasons for salmon/steelhead decline in Cow Creek, it is unclear as to the extent of project benefits to anadromous species.

8. Panel Quality Ranking

Good

notes:

9. Regional Priority Ranking

High

notes:

Environmental Compliance Review

Proposal Number: 0032

Proposal Name: Farmer and Rancher Assisted Ecosystem Restoration and Watershed Stewardship Projects

Applicant Organization: Western Shasta Resource Conservation District

1. Is compliance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) required for this project?

Yes.

2. Is compliance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) required for this project?

Yes.

3. Does this project qualify for an Exemption or Exclusion under CEQA and NEPA, respectively?

Yes.

4. Did the applicant correctly identify if CEQA/NEPA compliance was required?

Yes.

5. Did the applicant correctly identify the correct CEQA/NEPA document required for the project?

Yes.

6. Has the CEQA/NEPA document been completed?

No.

7. If the document has not been completed, did the applicant allot enough time to complete the document before the project start date?

Yes.

8. If the document has not been completed, did the applicant allot enough funds to complete it?

Yes.

9. Did the applicant adequately identify other legal or regulatory compliance issues (Incidental Take permits, Scientific Collecting permits, etc.) that may affect the project?

No.

#0032: Farmer and Rancher Assisted Ecosystem Restoration and Watershed Stewar...

Environmental Compliance Review

Comments:

They correctly identified all applicable permits except ESA compliance

Identify those additional permits that may be needed by this project:

ESA Section 7 consultation

10. Does the proposal include written permission from the owners of any private property on which project activities are proposed or, if specific locations for project activities are not yet determined, is it likely that permission for access can be obtained?

Yes.

Comments:

They did not mark that landowner permission had been obtained but indicate that the 7 landowners are already engaged in the process.

11. Do any of these issues affect the project's feasibility due to significant deficiencies in planning and/or budgeting for legal and regulatory compliance or access to property?

No.

Comments:

It is unclear how much time is allotted to complete their permits. Page 19 of the application states that 16 months have been allotted which is enough time for the permits they need. On page 7 of the project description, they state that 4 months have been allotted to obtain permits. Four months is enough time for CEQA/NEPA Cat. Ex's but is not enough time to obtain all other permits.

Budget Review

Proposal Number: 0032

Proposal Name: Farmer and Rancher Assisted Ecosystem Restoration and Watershed Stewardship Projects

Applicant Organization: Western Shasta Resource Conservation District

1. Does the proposal include a detailed budget for each year of the requested support?

Yes.

2. Does the Budget Form include a detailed budget for each task identified on the Task and Deliverables Form and in the proposal text?

No.

If no, please explain:

The budget detail did not clearly indicate the task for each deliverable. "Project management" is indicated on each task. Recommend indicating task to be completed and hours required for each employee.

3. Are the costs associated with each task and deliverable reasonable costs for performing the services?

Yes.

4. Is each person (employee, consultant, subcontractor, etc.) identified on the Personnel Form also included on the Budget Form?

Yes.

5. Are there estimated hours and an associated hourly rate of compensation for each person identified on the Personnel, Tasks and Deliverables, and Budget forms?

Yes.

6. Does the budget include the benefit rate for all personnel identified on the Personnel and Budget forms?

#0032: Farmer and Rancher Assisted Ecosystem Restoration and Watershed Stewar...

Budget Review

Yes.

7. Are the proposed labor rates comparable to state rates?

Yes.

8. Is more than 25% of the work proposed to be performed by subcontractors?

No.

9. Are project management expenses appropriately budgeted?

Yes.

10. Does the proposal clearly state the type of expenses encompassed in indirect rates or overhead costs? Are indirect rates, if used, appropriately applied?

No.

If no, please explain:

No detail was provided. However, overhead rate is reasonable - 15%

11. Does the proposal adequately explain major expenses? Are the labor rates and other charges proposed reasonable in relation to current state rates?

No.

If no, please explain:

No Major equipment indicated in proposal.

12. For equipment \geq \$5,000, was a separate worksheet filled out?

Please note: No overhead or indirect rate charges are allowed on the equipment purchases

No.

13. Is the purpose for all travel clearly represented in either the proposal itself, or in the Tasks and Deliverable Form?

Please note: Recurring travel costs for a specific task or subtask may be combined into one entry on the Budget Form, but the number of trips and cost for each trip must be clearly

Budget Review

represented.

Yes.

14. Are travel and per diem at rates specified by the California Department of Personnel Administration for similar employees?

Yes.

15. Are other agencies contributing or likely to contribute a share of the projects? costs?

Yes.

If yes, when sufficient information is available, please total the amount of matching funds likely to be provided:

Total Cost Share is \$777,924

16. If the applicant identified cost share or matching funds, are they also described in the text of the proposal?

Yes.

17. Does the applicant take exception to the standard grant agreement's terms and conditions? If yes, are the approaches the applicant proposes to address these issues a reasonable starting point for negotiation a grant agreement?

Yes.

18. Are there other budget issues or "red flags" that warrant consideration?

No.

19. Provide revised amount requested based upon your review:

\$

Other comments:

Cost share amounts were indicated. However, more detailed information is recommended regarding cost share since the total cost share make up 41% of the entire project budget. Complete budget narrative was not provided.