

Final Selection Panel Review

0049

American Basin Working Landscapes Project
Placer County Resource Conservation District

Applicant amount requested: \$1,860,898

Fund This Amount: \$100,000

The proposed project would develop a GIS-based “American Basin Working Landscape Strategy”, implement three specific riparian and wetland restoration projects, and prepare the applicants to purchase up to four wildlife-friendly agricultural easements. These efforts would complement similar efforts in the American Basin funded for more than \$8 million in private, state, and federal grants. Although the Regional Panel gave this proposal an excellent rating, the Technical Review Panel gave the proposal only a fair rating. The Technical Panel felt the proposal lacked detail concerning the methods used to develop the strategy and evidence that the projects would help species of concern. This proposal does have the potential to benefit target species (including giant garter snakes), would develop a strategy designed to be consistent with the needs of several potential cost-share partners (including Farm Bill sources), and works directly with farmers to preserve farmland as habitat.

The Selection Panel felt that the strategy would be especially useful and recommended funding adequate to support developing the strategy (likely between \$100,000 and \$150,000, including portions of Tasks 1,5, and 6 and all of Task 2). The Panel did not recommend funding the restoration projects or easement development as there were too many concerns associated with these efforts because it was not clear how durable the restoration projects would be given the threat of development in this area. For example, the proposal listed several parcels for restoration but did not list any parcels proposed for easements. Funds are proposed for mere execution of option agreements, legal review and due diligence revisions, with the expectation of subsequent easement funding from other sources. Therefore, the Panel does not support funding that component of the proposal.

As noted above, the Panel recognizes that developing an American River Basin Working Landscape Strategy, as identified in Task Two, would be a useful tool, and recommended funding of \$100,000. One comment letter was received from a co-applicant that recognized the value the \$100,000 would bring to the proposed efforts, but noted that the funding "will do little to ensure a long-term guarantee that will protect habitat... or secure (habitat-friendly) farming practices". The comment letter addressed a number of other issues, repeatedly identifying the need for \$600,000 for easement acquisition to be matched with \$8,000,000 in pending funding from other sources.

The Panel recognizes that the project proponent acknowledged the progress it could make with the amount recommended. However, it concluded the applicant did not adequately demonstrate that matching funds would be available and able to be specifically committed for acquisition of easements protecting multiple resource values. The Selection Panel stands by its initial findings on this proposal.