

Tuolumne River Land Protection, Riparian Restoration and Working Landscape Project

NaLani Ford

Initial Selection Panel Review

0056

Tuolumne River Land Protection, Riparian Restoration and Working Landscape Project

Tuolumne River Preservation Trust

Applicant amount requested: \$1,500,000

Fund This Amount: \$500,000

This proposal builds upon a larger restoration effort that is currently underway. The proposal has two separate components, an easement acquisition and restoration of the Dos Rios property downstream (the Dos Rios and Big Bend projects). The proposal proponents have a good track record and strong public support.

The strongest nexus this proposal has to the agriculture restoration interface is with the acquisition of the Dos Rios property - a flood prone area in the San Joaquin River system. The adjacent San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge has been keystone to delisting of the Aleutian Canada goose and restoration of the riparian brush rabbit and the Dos Rios Property would add significant floodplain function to the system, while maintaining agricultural uses on the most productive lands. However, the proposal requests only 1/10th of the necessary funds to acquire the property; there is no assurance that the additional funds for the acquisition will be forthcoming. Therefore, the Panel does not recommend funding the Dos Rios element of this proposal.

The Panel, however, does support funding the Big Bend element of the proposal, provided the following conditions are met: (1) the funding level not exceed \$500,000 and (2) demonstration that the monitoring plan being developed under a different project includes measures of the ecological benefit of the restoration.

Initial Selection Panel Review

Fund

#0056: Tuolumne River Land Protection, Riparian Restoration and Working Lands...

Technical Panel Review

Proposal Name: Tuolumne River Land Protection, Riparian Restoration and Working Landscape Project

Applicant Organization: Tuolumne River Preservation Trust

Amount Requested: \$1,500,000

Panel Rating:

Good - Quality but some deficiencies

Panel Summary

This proposed project had the potential to support the highly endangered riparian brush rabbit and other MSCS species but lacked adequate details regarding restoration and monitoring as well as budget information needed to critically evaluate the proposal. In terms of funding, the proposal requested \$1.5 million for two separate actions, restoration and easement acquisition. An additional \$8 million is needed to complete the acquisition of the easement on the Dos Rios parcel and it is unclear what would happen to the easement funds if the remainder of the required funding is not raised. Actual revegetation details and monitoring protocols are not provided in the proposal. Connections with regional farming practices, and long-term management strategies for the restoration areas and the easement property are not adequately addressed. The linkage to production agriculture is not clear. In spite of these deficiencies, the project has great potential to directly benefit ecosystems that support highly threatened species.

External Technical Review #1

Proposal Number: 0056

Proposal Name: Tuolumne River Land Protection, Riparian Restoration and Working Landscape Project

Applicant Organization: Tuolumne River Preservation Trust

Amount Requested: \$1,500,000

Goals

Rating	excellent
Comments	Goals and objectives are excellent and at an appropriate level of detail for this phase of the project.

Justification And Conceptual Model

Rating	very good
Comments	Justification is very good, however the conceptual model is not that well articulated. I believe the Big Bend project is a good pilot project, although not conceived that way. It will ultimately serve that purpose and should be used as such.

Approach

Rating	very good
Comments	The overall approach is clearly outlined through each phase of both projects. Thank you for providing the future phases of the Dos Rios project to "complete the picture" of where you are headed overall. The results of these two efforts may contribute to base knowledge, however I beleive a stronger outreach and educational program should be incorporatated into both efforts to truly share knowledge learned with other landowners

External Technical Review #1

participating in restoration projects throughout the Central Valley.
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Feasibility

Rating	very good
Comments	The overall success of these projects appears to be very high. I am a little concerned about the possibility of not receiving the \$10 million grant from the California River Parkways Grants Program. I sincerely hope this potential funding is already earmarked for this project.

Performance Evaluation

Rating	very good
Comments	Already have a monitoring plan in place for the Big Bend project and the Dos Rios project will likely be based on this effort. The project does not specifically outline how the monitoring will take place or what partners will be involved in the actual data collection, but I believe since easement acquisition is the primary focus of this proposal - it is a little early for this level of detail.

Proposed Outcomes

Rating	very good
Comments	I believe the information and experience derived from these two efforts is worthy of sharing more broadly than described in the proposal. The projects should incorporate a broader outreach program to share lessons learned and project success with other agricultural and habitat land managers throughout the Central Valley.

Capabilities

Rating	excellent
Comments	The Tuolumne River Preservation Trust appears to have strong partners among other agencies and within the private local community. They also have a strong track record of completing projects and land acquisitions. I am pleased to see involvement of the landowners. I understand the Big Bend landowner has substantial experience with habitat restoration techniques, there will need to be strong knowledge transfer with the landowner of the Dos Rios project to ensure that project has equal or greater success. There are many opportunities for this and they should be articulated.

Cost-Benefits

Rating	very good
Comments	Yes.

Overall Evaluation Summary Rating

Rating	excellent
Comments	I believe this is a very worthy and exciting project. The potential contribution to riparian habitat along the Tuolumne and San Joaquin Rivers is admirable. I hope some day we can achieve this along every river in the Central Valley.

External Technical Review #2

Proposal Number: 0056

Proposal Name: Tuolumne River Land Protection, Riparian Restoration and Working Landscape Project

Applicant Organization: Tuolumne River Preservation Trust

Amount Requested: \$1,500,000

Goals

Rating	very good
Comments	The project goals are well stated and reflect ERP goals. Monitoring of the riparian restoration for a three-year period will allow measurement of the project objectives and feedback on the project's success in meeting the objectives. The project does not adequately describe how it will assist farmers in integrating ag activities with riparian restoration, but it appears that conflicts should be minimal as the local property owners are participating in the project.

Justification And Conceptual Model

Rating	very good
Comments	The proposal presents a clear picture how the existing land conditions do not support a contiguous riparian corridor for fish and wildlife along the Tuolumne River and how this project will address this problem. The conceptual model is not testing a hypothesis but is more focused on full-scale implementation of a plan. The implementation builds on previous projects.

External Technical Review #2

Approach

Rating	very good
Comments	The specifics of the restoration approach are not included in the proposal, but are apparently described in previously developed project plans. The results and the monitoring of the ecosystem will add to the knowledge base in terms of the successfulness to reintroduce wildlife into the riparian corridor along the Tuolumne River. The success (or failure) of the reintroduction of wildlife should be useful information for other land owners and cooperating agencies.

Feasibility

Rating	excellent
Comments	The proposed project's approach appears to be both technically feasible and administratively feasible. The likelihood of success should be high; permits are in place and agency approval granted. As noted, the proposal addresses environmental compliance and permitting requirements. No specific contingencies are described regarding timing of natural or operational conditions.

Performance Evaluation

Rating	very good
Comments	The proposal includes a monitoring plan to evaluate the success of the project in terms of reintroducing wildlife to the riparian corridor. No specific monitoring criteria are described. The performance evaluation should demonstrate the efficacy of the restoration actions.

Proposed Outcomes

Rating	very good
Comments	This project will produce a restored riparian corridor along the Tuolumne River and replace a disconnected system with a continuous wildlife corridor. This restoration will contribute to the river's ecosystem health and demonstrate how ag practices and riparian corridors complement each other. The project's success will encourage other farmers and agencies to consider implementation of riparian restorations.

Capabilities

Rating	very good
Comments	The resumes of the project team show experience in implementing this type of restoration project. The inclusion of the property owner on the project team should help in providing the needed on-site expertise in implementing the restoration work. The team does not show a strong environmental science/engineering background, but this may not be a significant issue as the planning and design of the restoration plan has already been completed. It is assumed that professionals with those backgrounds were involved in the development of the restoration plan. Based on this assumption, it appears that the team is qualified to carry out the project.

Cost-Benefits

Rating	excellent
Comments	The budget is reasonable and is not totally dependent on this single source of financing for the project. The proposal identifies other funding sources and presents a strategy for leveraging the CALFED funds to obtain additional funding.

External Technical Review #2

Overall Evaluation Summary Rating

Rating	very good
Comments	In summary, I think that this proposed project can provide significant ecological benefits by restoring the Tuolumne River riparian corridor on the two properties (Big Bend and Dos Rios). Riparian restoration is expensive, but additional sources of funding have been identified and will be sought to help leverage the requested \$1.5 million in funding. Monitoring of the project following completion of the restoration work will provide good feedback on the potential success of this type of project.

External Technical Review #3

Proposal Number: 0056

Proposal Name: Tuolumne River Land Protection, Riparian Restoration and Working Landscape Project

Applicant Organization: Tuolumne River Preservation Trust

Amount Requested: \$1,500,000

Goals

Rating	excellent
Comments	Yes to all of the above. The goals are specified, and their links to ERP goals are made explicit. Benefits in terms of farm practices are spelled out.

Justification And Conceptual Model

Rating	excellent
Comments	Yes, there is a clear model, presented graphically. It is a good basis for the proposed work.

Approach

Rating	very good
Comments	Much of the approach is spelled out in detail. I would like to see more detail on the target riparian plant communities. What kind of riparian vegetation is to be established? What species? The only mention of vegetation type (beyond "riparian" is a brief mention of "oak savannah" where groundwater is deep. Since the proponents have been restoring riparian vegetation along the Tuolumne for some time, they probably know a lot about vegetation types.

External Technical Review #3

	The experience of this project will provide a good demonstration for other farmers.
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Feasibility

Rating	excellent
Comments	<p>This certainly seems feasible; if the hydrology is right, establishing riparian vegetation is not very difficult.</p> <p>The feasibility of raising enough money to acquire the desired easements for Dos Rios is an open question, but the proponents seem to have a good track record, and good connections.</p>

Performance Evaluation

Rating	very good
Comments	<p>Yes, a monitoring plan is included in the project, and has already been developed for the Big Bend unit. For Dos Rios, ecological goals but not the monitoring plan details have been developed.</p> <p>It would have been useful to see the Big Bend Monitoring Plan.</p>

Proposed Outcomes

Rating	excellent
Comments	<p>Yes, products of value are likely to emerge. These will include 1) restoration of riparian corridors; 2) protection of "keystone" riparian site at the Tuolumne-San Joaquin confluence; 3) diffusion of knowledge among farmers about ecologically-friendly farming methods.</p>

Capabilities

Rating	excellent
Comments	The Tuolumne River Preservation Trust seems to have the experience and background to pull this off. Patrick Koepele has good technical credentials and experience. The resume of Tamara Sperber (restoration ecologist) was not included, so I don't know about her. They have in the past drawn on other knowledgeable experts in hydraulics and ecology.

Cost-Benefits

Rating	good
Comments	The budget for Task Two (Installation of plant materials at Big Bend) does not include supporting detail. There is only a single line in the budget for this item, for "Tim Venn" (landowner/farmer). The cost per acre is about \$3100, which according to my sources is very reasonable for restoring riparian vegetation. The Trust has already restored about 60 acres, so they must have a pretty good idea of the costs. I just would have liked to see more detail.

Overall Evaluation Summary Rating

Rating	excellent
Comments	<p>This is exactly the kind of project that the ERP (as I understand the program) is looking for. (My overall rating is "Very Good to Excellent"</p> <p>The strong points of the proposal are: land-owner and agency involvement; feasible restoration in an ecologically-important area; good background and experience of proponents.</p> <p>The weak points are lack of budget detail for planting riparian vegetation at Big Bend, and lack of detail</p>

External Technical Review #3

about what kind of riparian vegetation would result.

I note that the Big Bend and Dos Rios projects can each stand alone; it would be possible to fund one and not the other. It seems that the Dos Rios site is an "ecological keystone" area at the confluence of two rivers. It is in the path of development, so acquiring conservation easements seems like a high priority.

My recommendation is to fund both the Big Bend and Dos Rios projects; the opportunity to protect the Dos Rios area from development may be lost if it doesn't come under easement soon. For the Big Bend project, I would grant the funding request pending submission of additional budget detail for revegetation.

San Joaquin Regional Panel Review

Proposal Number: 0056

Proposal Name: Tuolumne River Land Protection, Riparian Restoration and Working Landscape Project

Applicant Organization: Tuolumne River Preservation Trust

1. Applicability to ERP goals and regional priorities.

This is actually 2 proposals. Big Bend project would restore floodplain habitat for VELB and riparian wood rat. Claims to aid riparian brush rabbit may not be appropriate as this sub-species is not known to occur in the Tuolumne drainage. It is doubtful that salmon or steelhead spawning would be improved. There is a possibility that survivorship of salmon smolts might be enhanced through shading and cooling of the water. It is also possible that smolts could be entrapped in pools if there is no connection to the river.

The acreage from figure 2 does not match the amount stated to be planted in the proposal. The maximum acreage in the Venn property according to the figure is 188.9. They propose the restoration of 184 acres, with 60 acres already planted. Task ID identifies 120 acres of restored riparian habitat. While the language in the proposal is confusing, it appears that what is actually being proposed is to restore 120 acres, not 239 as stated in the project description.

This does restore riparian and floodplain habitat in an agricultural landscape, and could provide marginal benefit to aquatic species. It would provide habitat for riparian wood rat, VELB and riparian bird species.

The Dos Rios proposal is a little more nebulous as to actual or the final cost. This is primarily seed money to aid in leveraging the money for riparian and agricultural easements. As such, with full funding as proposed, it would result in a status quo project rather than enhancement.

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San Joaquin Regional Panel Review

notes:

The protection of farm bufferlands is one of the PSP Project Priorities. The acreage totals of this project are universally confusing and convoluted.

2. Links with other restoration actions.

Big Bend portion of the proposal continues work already started and would help insure the success of the revegetation of the site.

The Dos Rios project is adjacent to the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge and has the potential to enhance the resource values of that refuge.

notes:

3. Local circumstances.

The Big Bend project is feasible and appropriate to the site.

The Dos Rios project is feasible if all funds are secured and the amount they are asking is only 10% of the total need by their estimate. I'm not sure what happens if they don't meet their goal. At this juncture they appear to have It could be they intend to acquire easements on as much as they can from the money they acquire, but there is no statement of this or prioritization of acquisition.

notes:

The review panel raised several questions about the

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feasibility of the conservation easements proposed. The price of the easements is not well defined, nor is the condition of lands proposed for acquisition.

There are some technical questions including the permitting requirements of potentially significant earth-moving activities in the proposal.

4. Local involvement.

The project applicant has already engaged in public outreach and continues to participate in public forums.

The Dos Rios project is very preliminary and will need more involvement.

notes:

5. Local value.

The Big Bend has value to the area.

The Dos Rios project is hard to predict.

notes:

6. Applicant history.

To my knowledge the Tuolumne River Preservation Trust has completed other projects adequately.

notes:

San Joaquin Regional Panel Review

7. Summary of Overall Panel Discussion and Review

This proposal outlines two very different parcels slated for improvement. These projects could be considered as stand-alone projects. If only a portion is funded, the panel feels the Big Bend project should be a higher priority as completing the revegetation element of the project could provide more immediate habitat benefits. However, the stated benefits to PSP target species may be overstated.

Dos Rios is more speculative but worth pursuing, but the funding sources and prioritization priorities remain unclear. The funding requests in proposal only covers a small percentage of required acquisition funds. More information is needed to fully assess both projects.

The funding for the Dos Rios project would serve to leverage for additional funds, but it is not clear what happens if the proposers are not able to secure the proposed easements.

8. Panel Quality Ranking

Good

notes:

9. Regional Priority Ranking

High

notes:

Environmental Compliance Review

Proposal Number: 0056

Proposal Name: Tuolumne River Land Protection, Riparian Restoration and Working Landscape Project

Applicant Organization: Tuolumne River Preservation Trust

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?

No.

Comments

This project has two parts. One (Big Bend) will require NEPA and CEQA compliance. The other (Dos Rios) is only acquisition in this phase, and won't require any environmental documentation, although that is not entirely clear. At times the project description refers to restoration on the Dos Rios site, which is not part of this project.

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

Yes.

Comments

see comment above.

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

Yes.

Environmental Compliance Review

6. Has the CEQA/NEPA document been completed?

Yes.

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?

Does not apply.

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

Yes.

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:

Proposal states that permission has been obtained, and the landowner is someone with whom the project proponents have worked before, but there is no written permission included in the proposal.

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.

Budget Review

Proposal Number: 0056

Proposal Name: Tuolumne River Land Protection, Riparian Restoration and Working Landscape Project

Applicant Organization: Tuolumne River Preservation Trust

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?

Yes.

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?

Yes.

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

Yes.

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Budget Review

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

Yes.

If yes, what is the exact percentage to be performed by subcontractors?

Tim Venn - Venn Farms- Task 2 - \$31.8% - \$477,420. Recommend budget detail from pre-selected subcontractor.

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.

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

No.

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 represented.

No.

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?

Budget Review

Yes.

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

**\$ 477,420 NOAA \$1,000,000 BOR \$ 152,000 DWR 72,000 FW
Foundation ----- \$1,701,420 Total**

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:

Easment Acquisition - \$987,757.00 WCB support may be needed