PART A. COVER SHEET

A1. Proposal Title: Llano Seco Ranch

2. Lead Applicant or Organization:

Contact Name: Al Wright, Executive Director, Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB)
Address: 1807 13th Street, Suite 103, Sacramento Calif. 95814
Phone Number: (916) 445-0137
Fax Number: (916) 323-0280
E-mail: awright@dfg.ca.gov

A3. Project Manager or Principal Investigator

Wildlife Conservation Board

Contact Name: John Donnelly
Agency/Organization Affiliation: WCB
Address: 1807 13th Street, Suite 103, Sacramento, California 95814
Phone Number: (916) 445-1085
Fax Number: (916) 323-0280
E-mail: jdonnell@dfg.ca.gov

Department of Conservation, Land Resource Protection

Contact Name: Dennis O'Bryant
Agency/Organization Affiliation: DOC
Address: 801 K Street, Sacramento, California 95814
Phone Number: (916) 324-0850
Fax Number: (916) 327-3430
E-mail: dobryant@conservation.ca.gov

A4. Cost of Project:

The Department of General Services has approved the appraised fair market value of the agricultural and conservation easement of $6.5 million. In addition, approximately $45,000 in closing and appraisal review costs will be in-kind contributions by the WCB and the Northern California Regional Land Trust.

A5. Cost Share Partners:

Wildlife Conservation Board contribution:	$2,005,000
Department of Conservation contribution:	1,930,000
Northern California Regional Land Trust:	40,000

A6. List of Subcontractors: Not Applicable

A7. Other Cooperators:

Jim Saake, Project Manager
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA REGIONAL LAND TRUST
167 East Third Avenue
Chico, Calif. 94104

Phone Number: (530) 894-7220
Fax Number: (530) 343-5492
E-mail: saakejim@cmc.net

A8. Project Topic Area*

Primary: Upland Habitat and Wildlife Friendly Agriculture

Secondary: Shallow Water and Marsh Habitat

A9. Project Type*

Primary: Acquisition (easement)

Secondary: Not Applicable

PART B. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

B1. Proposal Title: Llano Seco Ranch

B2. Project Description:

The California Oak Foundation and the Northern California Regional Land Trust have submitted a proposal to the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) and the Department of Conservation (DOC) to purchase a conservation easement on approximately 4,099 acres in Butte County for a total project cost of $6.5 million.

This project exemplifies the importance of encouraging and rewarding landowners that have made a commitment to integrate wildlife friendly farming practices with sustainable farming operations. As proposed, this project will protect the economic operation of prime agricultural land, provide a buffer for habitat critical to a multitude of special status species and facilitate the sustainability of an organic, grass fed beef operation serving local Northern California markets.

Without protection of this land, the proposed easement area has the potential to be converted to non-agricultural uses in the near future. Although there is a Williamson Act contract on the proposed easement area, there is no guarantee that it will remain or prevent future development on the property. The population of Butte County is expected to increase by 74,400 by 2050, particularly around Chico, Oroville, Gridley, Biggs and Durham. The Butte County General Plan Agricultural Element indicates that zoning regulations allow new parcels to be subdivided into parcels more conducive to non-agricultural than agricultural uses, resulting in larger agricultural land holdings being slowly divided.

Recognizing the threats facing this property and the agricultural and habitat benefits at risk, this project reflects an innovative collaborative effort between the private landowner, federal, state and non-profit agencies that share mutual goals of preserving prime agricultural lands and wildlife habitat. The careful stewardship practices employed on the agricultural lands and natural habitats reveal the compatibility of the two functions and may have application to other regions of the state.

The Llano Seco Ranch is an 18,434-acre Mexican Land Grant located in Butte and Glenn Counties. The current owners purchased the property in the early 1990s. Since that time, all but approximately 4,535 acres have been sold in a combination of fee and easement to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Specifically, TNC purchased a conservation easement on 2,951 acres and the USFWS purchased a conservation easement on approximately 6,679 acres. In addition, the USFWS purchased in fee 2,634 acres and the DFG purchased in fee 1,633 acres. Of the remaining 4,535 acres, funds are requested to purchase an agricultural conservation easement on 4,099 acres.

The easement will protect approximately 1,870 acres of intensified agricultural land. Of the remaining acres, 1,715 acres are used for grazing and have never been deep ripped. In addition, approximately 736 acres are covered in lush riparian vegetation and sloughs, including grasslands, seasonal and perennial marsh habitats, Great Valley oak riparian forests, Great Valley mixed riparian forests, Great Valley cottonwood riparian forests and open water habitats. Species that may benefit from this project include special status flora species designated by the California Native Plant Society's Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plant Species, for Butte County.

The project will benefit special status species as designated by the federal Endangered Species Act and the California Endangered Species Act such as the Valley elderberry longhorn beetle, wintering sandhill cranes, Central Valley steelhead, Central Valley spring and winter run chinook salmon, giant garter snake, northwestern pond turtle, Swainson's hawk, western yellow-billed cuckoo, tricolored black bird, American bittern and several other migrating species. With the exception of the 1,633 acres managed by the DFG, the entire Llano Seco Ranch is utilized for grazing and supports approximately 800 pairs. In addition, there are a multitude of benefits associated with this project that will improve habitat for fish and wildlife special status species. Further, this project is a classic example of how productive agricultural lands can be managed and maintained in a manner that is both beneficial to wildlife and sustainable agriculture.

This project meets many of the goals and objectives of the California Bay Delta Authority (Authority), Ecosystem Restoration Program. To ensure the long-term protection of these goals and objectives, this proposal requests $2,570,000. Combined with matching funds of $1.93 million from the DOC and $2.0 million from WCB, $6.5 million will be available to purchase an agricultural and conservation easement on the remaining 4,099 acres.

PART C. WORK PLAN

C1. Project Background and Information:

The California Bay Delta Authority (Authority) Ecosystem Restoration Program's (ERP) Working Landscapes Program is seeking to integrate agricultural activities with ecosystem restoration. The priority projects will assist farmers in addressing the goals of the ERP, specifically the goals identified in the CALFED Multi-Species Conservation Strategy (MSCS). The proposed easement meets several priority requirements set forth in the Summary of Priorities, and is located in Butte County, one of the Priority Areas. First, this project will continue to improve habitat for fish and wildlife special status species, while maintaining agricultural production. Further, this project is an extraordinary example of how productive agricultural lands are managed and maintained in a manner that is both beneficial to wildlife and sustainable agriculture. Securing long-term protection of the Ranch by establishing an easement on the acreage that remains unprotected will ensure that the Ranch will remain viable and not be vulnerable to the pressures of urban development from the Chico area.

The California Oak Foundation and the Northern California Regional Land Trust have submitted a proposal to the Wildlife Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation to purchase a conservation easement on approximately 4,099 acres in Butte County for a total project cost of $6.5 million.

Llano Seco is an 18,434-acre Mexican Land Grant located in Butte and Glenn Counties. All but approximately 4,535 acres have been sold in a combination of fee and easement to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Specifically, TNC purchased a conservation easement on 2,951 acres and the USFWS purchased a conservation easement on approximately 6,679 acres. In addition, the USFWS purchased in fee 2,634 acres and the DFG purchased in fee 1,633 acres. Of the remaining 4,535 acres, funds are requested to purchase an agricultural conservation easement on 4,099 acres. Within this acreage, the easement is designed to protect approximately 1,870 acres of intensely managed agricultural land. Funding for this portion of the easement ($1.93 million from the California Farmland Conservancy Program, authorized under the Agricultural Land Stewardship Program Act of 1995) has been requested from the DOC.

Of the remaining acres, the easement will also protect 1,715 acres used for grazing, and seasonal marshes, ponds and riparian areas. Approximately 736 acres are covered in lush riparian vegetation and sloughs, including grasslands, seasonal and perennial marsh habitats, Great Valley oak riparian forests, Great Valley mixed riparian forests, Great Valley cottonwood riparian forests and open water habitats. Funding for this portion of the easement ($4.5 million) has been requested from the WCB.

The Ranch owners have taken great care to protect and maintain the riparian areas on the property by leaving the areas virtually undisturbed, except for very limited grazing (once every 2 to 3 years). Species that may benefit include special status flora species designated by the California Native Plant Society's Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plant Species, for Butte County. In addition, the project will benefit the following special status species as designated by the federal Endangered Species Act and the California Endangered Species Act: Valley elderberry longhorn beetle, wintering sandhill cranes, Central Valley steelhead, Central Valley spring and winter run chinook salmon, giant garter snake, northwestern pond turtle, Swainson's hawk, western yellow-billed cuckoo, tricolored black bird, American bittern and several other migrating species.

With the exception of the 1,633 acres managed by the DFG and the 1870 acres of intensively managed croplands, the entire Llano Seco Ranch is utilized for grazing and supports approximately 800 pairs. Half the herd is certified organic. As the Ranch continues to work collaboratively with the USFWS, the cattle graze on the USFWS's acreage planted in native grass and on the Ranch's natural grasses. Some of this grassland will become certified organic in several years as the vegetative community becomes established and matures. The grazing regime includes an early spring rotation onto USFWS's native grassland. This activity serves to control weeds and invasive herbaceous species such as pepperweed, yellow star thistle and medusa head, when the plants are palatable and somewhat tender. Such grazing also serves as fuel management, reducing risk of wildfire during the summer fire season.

Historically, the farmed acreage on the Ranch has been used for the production of orchard crops, irrigated and non-irrigated row crops, dry beans, irrigated and non-irrigated forage crops and small grains. Current crops include walnuts and almonds, garbanzo beans, sunflowers, alfalfa, wheat, corn, and vine crops such as squashes and cucumbers. No tailwater leaves the Ranch. While the head ditches and siphons are maintained to ensure water delivery, most of the tail ditches and non-concrete lined irrigation ditches have been allowed to revegetate and provide habitat for giant garter snakes.

Dryland – farmed (non-irrigated) fields surround the irrigated cropland and are located between the riparian corridor and grazed acreage, serving as a buffer between the natural areas and managed acreage. Non-irrigated crops include safflower, wheat, and dry beans, and in the near future will include alfalfa, which will attract additional Swainson's hawks. Pesticide use is kept to a minimum in accordance with requirements set forth by Integrated Pest Management. No routine spraying regime is incorporated into the management of the Ranch. Natural biological control methods are utilized wherever feasible in orchards and feedlots to control pests via non-chemical means and to maintain a natural balance.

C2. Project Goals and Objectives:

This project is designed to address ERP Goal No. 4, Habitats and corresponding Objectives 2, 3 and 4.

Purchasing the agricultural and conservation easement will permanently protect and restrict the conversion of large tracts of high quality riparian habitat, sloughs, perennial and seasonal wetland habitat and watercourses. The land in the easement area is part of the Central Valley floodplains of the Sacramento and Little Butte Creek. Much of the historic floodplain of these waterways and associated wetlands were flooded periodically with a portion of the flooded area wet much of the year.

The Great Valley oak woodlands, which spread across the undulating swale and channel bisected fields of grazing land, comprise some of the best remaining oak woodlands in the Central Valley. The portion of Angel Slough that occurs on Llano Seco Ranch is one of the last remaining and most intact stretches of the Sacramento River paleo-channel.

Managers of the Llano Seco Ranch practice careful stewardship of the riparian and slough areas through fencing and careful attention to grazing levels. Rotational dry land crops are used to combat noxious weeds, enhance the quality of the grazing land and provide favorable nesting and breeding habitat to birds and other wildlife. In addition, semi-permanent wetland and shallow areas are seasonally flooded to benefit wetland dependent species and integrated pest management practices are employed to reduce toxic water levels and improve water quality. Because of these practices, the ranch is able to graze cattle year round. In addition, steps are underway to convert the entire cattle operation to an organic cattle ranch that will supply grass fed beef to the local markets in Northern California.

There are approximately 736 acres of sloughs and riparian habitats founds on the proposed project site. The broad range of riparian habitats includes grasslands, seasonal and perennial marsh habitats, Great Valley oak riparian forests, Great Valley mixed riparian forests, Great Valley cottonwood riparian forest and open water habitat. Further, because of the ecological diversity of this rich habitat, the following special status flora species as designated by the California Native Plant Society's Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plant Species, for Butte County are:

Ferris milk-vetch *(Astragalus tener var.ferrisae)*
rose mallow *(Hibiscus lasiocarpus)*
fox sedge *(Carex vulpinoidea)*
four-angled spikerush (*Eleocharis quadrangulata)*
Columbian watermeal *(Wolffi brasilinesis)*
Sanford's arrowhead (*Sagittaria sanfordii)*

Habitat on the site will also benefit the following special status fauna species as designated by the federal Endangered Species Act, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, or the California Endangered Species Act:

Valley elderberry longhorn beetle (*Desmocerus californicus diamorphus)*
wintering sandhill cranes *(Grus Canadensis)*
Central Valley steelhead *(Oncorhyncuc mykiss)*
Central Valley spring run chinook salmon *(Onnorhyncus tshawytscha)*
Central Valley winter run chinook salmon *(Onnorhyncus tshawytscha)*
giant garter snake *(Thamnophis couchi gigas)*
northwestern pond turtle *(Clemmys marmorata marmorata)*
bank swallow *(Riparia riparia)*
great blue heron *(Ardea herodias)*
Swainson's hawk *(Buteo Swainsoni)*
tricolored black bird *(Agelaiuss tricolor)*
western burrowing owl *(Athene cunicularia hypugea)*
western yellow-billed cukoo *(coccyzus americanus occidentalis)*
bald eagle *(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)*
American bittern *(Botaurus lentiginosus)*
Aleutian cackling goose *(Branta hutchinsii leucopareia)*
white-faced ibis *(plegadis chihi)*
loggerhead shrike *(Lanius ludovicianus)*

As demonstrated by the number and diverse plant and wildlife species, the size of the Llano Seco Ranch promotes ecological integrity. The diverse grassland and riparian ecosystems on the 4,099 acres of the proposed conservation easement area promotes a high level of ecological integrity and wildlife habitats. The ecological integrity is further enhanced by the protected status of the remaining portions of the ranch from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife, the California Department of Fish and Game and The Nature Conservancy on the remaining 13,897 acres of the total 18,434 acres of the Llano Seco Ranch.

C3. Approach/Methodology:

The Llano Seco Ranch is protected (with the exception of approximately 4,099 acres) in perpetuity with conservation easements held by the DFG, the USFWS and TNC. Grant funds are requested from DOC and WCB to purchase an agricultural and conservation easement on the remaining 4,099 acres, thus protecting the entire 18,434-acre ranch. Based upon an appraisal approved by the State Department of General Services, the fair market value of the easement has been identified at $6.5 million. The DOC proposes to contribute $1.93 million and the WCB proposes to contribute $2.0 million toward the purchase of the easement.

To complete the transaction, DOC and WCB are requesting $2.570 million from the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, Ecosystem Restoration Program. The WCB intends to present this project to the Board for further consideration at the November 17, 2005, WCB Board meeting.

C4. Tasks and Deliverables:

Task 1: Coordinate with the DOC, the land trust and the landowner the development of the conservation easement.

Completion Date: September 30, 2005

Task 2: Present proposed project to the WCB on November 17, 2005.

Completion Date: November 17, 2005

Task 3: Land Trust to provide necessary closing documents (escrow instructions, executed grant deed, purchase agreement, disbursement letter, preliminary title report with explanation of exceptions, title insurance, etc,) for review and approval by DOC and WCB.

Completion Date: October 31, 2005

Task 4: WCB and DOC request disbursement of $6.5 million into escrow account.

Completion Date: December 31, 2005

C5. Subcontractors:

This is an easement acquisition project; as such, there are no subcontractors involved.

C6. Work Schedule

All work will be completed and funds disbursed into an escrow account no later than December 31, 2005 (please see C4, Tasks and Deliverables).

C7. Special Equipment and Supplies Required:

There is no special equipment or supplies needed for this acquisition.

C8. Project Impacts (beneficial or adverse):

There are no adverse impacts associated with this project. Purchasing a conservation easement on the remaining 4,099-acres will insure permanent protection of the entire 18,434-acre historic Llano Seco Ranch. Further, the easement will ensure the

protection and preservation of prime agricultural land, prevent the conversion of this land into non-agricultural uses (i.e., houses from the expanding Chico area), provide critical connectivity and species migration corridors between the rangeland and riparian forest and buffer the critical habitat from the intensive agricultural areas.

C9. Stakeholders and Interested Parties:

Interested stakeholders include the adjacent property owners, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Department of Fish and Game, and The Nature Conservancy. Other interested parties include the California Oaks Foundation and the Northern California Regional Land Trust, the Butte County Resource Conservation District, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the California Farm Bureau. The Butte County Board of Supervisors passed Resolution No. 04-269 approving the application for grant funds to establish an agricultural conservation easement on 4,099 acres on the Llano Seco Ranch. Numerous letters of support have been sent to WCB and DOC.

C10. Consistency with CALFED ERP Goals:*

1). Identify Project Applicability to Eco-Elements

Primary: Agricultural Lands

Secondary: Natural Floodplains and Flood Processes, Riparian and Riverine Aquatic Habitats, Seasonal Wetlands, Freshwater Fish Habitats, Perennial Grasslands

2). Identify Project Applicability to ERP Goals and Objectives:

Protection of the lands within the proposed easement area is consistent with Goals 1, 2, 4, and 6 in CALFED's Ecosystem Restoration Program. The project acreage is comprised of irrigated and non-irrigated cropland and grazing lands, and is defined as Agricultural Lands under the two Multi-Species Conservation Strategy 2000 categories: upland cropland and seasonally flooded agricultural land. The proposed easement is consistent with the Local Partnership Planning Process' Goal of Supporting a Working Landscape Approach, and the Selection of Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Projects that Minimize Impacts to Agricultural Lands.

Some landowners and local communities are concerned they may be prevented from continuing to farm, ranch, provide flood control on, near lands preserved, or enhanced for habitat conservation purposes. The proposed project provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate how through private ownership, agricultural operations can be successfully integrated into the preservation of wildlife habitat. Further, this project will demonstrate how preserved habitat facilitates local flood control efforts while allowing farming and ranching operations to continue in a manner that harmonizes with the surrounding protected lands.

The proposed project is also consistent with the mitigation measures set forth in Section 7.1 of Appendix A of the CALFED Environmental Impact Report/Statement in supporting the California Farmland Conservancy Program, among other mitigation measures listed in the section.

The Multi-Species Conservation Strategy contains two types of conservation measures for achieving its species goals:

- Measures to avoid, minimize and compensate for CALFED's adverse effects on NCCP communities and evaluated species; and
- Measures to enhance NCCP communities and evaluated species that are not directly linked to CALFED's adverse effects.

The proposed project will support current conservation efforts in surrounding areas by protecting the easement area from conversion to other uses.

Goal 1: Endangered and Other At Risk Species and Native Biotic Communities

The proposed easement meets Objectives 1, 2 and 3.

Objective 1. *Achieve recovery and sustain populations of at-risk species.*

Species that have high probability to occur in the Sacramento River and its tributaries that flow adjacent to the Llano Seco Ranch property include the Central Valley steelhead, Central Valley spring-run Chinook salmon, Central Valley winter-run Chinook salmon, and Central Valley fall/late fall-run Chinook salmon. Evidence of the incidence of the Valley elderberry longhorn beetle has been detected on blue elderberry shrubs near the banks of the Sacramento River in the region.

The proposed project would contribute to the recovery and sustainability of the species listed above. The riparian corridors have been essentially undisturbed along this portion of the Sacramento River and Angel Slough and the braided channels throughout the easement area, and are minimally grazed to control invasive plant species. The rancher utilizes pesticides on an as needed basis and uses biological controls wherever possible. By continuing current careful stewardship practices along sloughs and in swales, erosion will be reduced; water quality could be expected to improve due to minimal use of pesticides and a decrease in turbidity. These practices will sustain or increase current populations of at-risk species. Additionally, as the habitat value continues to improve, the diversity and connectivity of the habitats between the easement area and the adjacent protected areas can be expected to improve. The entire protected area is comprised of over 28 square miles.

Objective 2. *Contribute to the recovery of at-risk species.*

The proposed project would contribute to the recovery of the following at-risk species: Giant Garter Snake, Swainson 's hawk, Western yellow-billed cuckoo, and Greater Sand Hill Crane, by continuing the stewardship practices and the agricultural and ranching uses of the easement area.

Giant Garter Snake

The Giant garter snake's habitat is primarily in marshes, sloughs and irrigation ditches. The rancher has allowed many of the irrigation ditches to revegetate, and the numerous sloughs and marshes on the easement area provide excellent habitat.

Swainson 's hawk, Western yellow-billed cuckoo, and Greater Sand Hill Crane

Habitat is present on the easement area for Swainson's hawk, Western yellow-billed cuckoo, and Greater Sand Hill Crane. The easement area provides suitable nesting, foraging, rookery habitat for avian species in riparian areas, freshwater marsh, flooded agricultural fields. The ranch manager plans to incorporate non-irrigated alfalfa into the cropping regime, which would provide excellent Swainson's hawk habitat. Sand Hill Cranes utilize the irrigated pasture, grain fields and wetlands in the easement area. In the 1980's the DFG and USFWS recognized the value of the Ranch as an important component of waterfowl and sandhill crane habitat in the Central Valley. A majority of the Ranch surrounding the easement area has already been protected through easements or sale of fee title to these agencies. The proposed easement would serve to provide important connectivity factors in providing forage and habitat to the avian species mentioned above.

Objective 3: *Enhance/conserve native biotic communities*

The proposed project would allow the current stewardship practices to continue in conserving and protecting the following native biotic communities: freshwater marsh plant communities and riparian plant communities.

Marsh and Plant Communities

Well-developed marsh habitat occurs in the easement area along channels and depressions within the dense riparian corridors on the west side of the easement area, and the northern part of Perkins Lake. These areas may provide habitat for the following special-status species: Fox sedge, Columbian watermeal, Sanford's arrowhead, Four-angled spike bush, and Rose mallow. Rose mallow has been found on the easement area. Seasonal and perennial marsh, including narrow stretches of open water provides diverse habitat composition. These areas are ideal for wildlife, as they provide good foraging and nesting areas for avian species, and movement corridors for other species, such as giant garter snakes and mammals.

Riparian Plant Communities

The proposed project will protect the following tracts of riparian habitat types that are present in the easement area:

146 acres of valley oak riparian forest
240 acres of mixed Great Valley mixed riparian habitat
12 acres of cottonwood mixed riparian forest
99 acres of valley oak woodland.

The habitat in and surrounding the channels associated with Angel Slough are reminiscent of highly functional oak riparian corridors and seasonal marsh habitats in the remnant braided channels. The conservation values of the easement area will increase as management practices of the Ranch continue to encourage the reestablishment of these riparian areas. The increasing cover will provide shelter and expanded movement corridors, and will likely increase wildlife use in the northeast portion of the Easement Area. As the habitat improves in and surrounding the sloughs, water velocities would be reduced during flooding events, thereby increasing groundwater recharge and improving local water quality.

There are four main sloughs and one swale identified on the easement area. These sloughs flow south from Ord Ferry Road and join into two main riparian corridors in the southern third of the easement area; the three western sloughs flow into Perkins Lake prior to flowing out of the easement area. The Ranch manager may put up a fence to encourage existing riparian communities and allow recruitment of natural species to colonize the protected areas within the fenced areas, an activity that is a routine management decision for maintaining optimal range conditions. Fencing these areas with only infrequent gaps to facilitate cattle crossings would allow for effective passive restoration of these areas with minimal human intervention.

Goal 2. Ecological Processes

Rehabilitate natural processes and its watershed to fully support, with minimal ongoing human intervention, natural aquatic and associated terrestrial biotic communities and habitats, in ways that favor native members of those communities.

The establishment of an easement will continue to allow the stewardship of the Ranch to sustain its agricultural productivity while continuing to increase conservation values on the easement. The easement area is part of the Central Valley floodplains of the Sacramento River and Little Butte Creek. The Ranch sloughs, drainages, swale areas have not been altered since the Ranch was established in the 1850's, a unique feature in the area. The easement would meet Objectives 6 and 8.

Objective 6*. Reestablish floodplain*

Reestablish floodplain inundation and channel-floodplain connectivity of sufficient frequency, timing, duration and magnitude to support the restoration and maintenance of functional natural floodplain, riparian and riverine habitats.

Objective 8*. Increase meandering reaches*

Increase the extent of freely meandering reaches and other pre-1850 river channel forms to support the restoration and maintenance of functional natural riverine habitats.

The Ranch is within an historic floodplain area, and the waterways, drainages, sloughs and associated wetlands are prone to periodic flooding. There is no federal levee system protecting the Ranch from inundation, so portions of the easement area flood occasionally. Lower flood levels do not inundate the entire property, however, enough water crosses the property to the west to fill historic oxbows in the easement areas that became isolated from the river. Heavier flooding drains into Angel Slough, which connects with Eddy Lake and subsequently connects with Butte Creek and Butte Sink. Floodwaters also enter and leave the Ranch on Little Chico Creek and Angel Slough. Wetland and riparian communities along the banks of these channels slow the flows and reduce erosion of soils. Extensive accumulation of vegetation in drainages or artificial channels and irrigation ditches is usually removed to minimize over banking during flood season, however, minimal human interaction is implemented to impede the passive restoration of the riparian corridors along the Sacramento River and the drainages flowing into Angel Slough.

The channel and floodplain connectivity is being allowed to continue to reestablish itself naturally through the current Ranch stewardship practices.

Goal 3: Harvested Species -- Not applicable

Goal 4: **Protect and or restore functional habitat types**

Protect and or restore functional habitat types in the Bay Delta estuary and its watershed for ecological and public values such as supporting species and biotic communities, ecological processes, recreation, scientific research and aesthetics.

The proposed easement meets Objectives 3 and 4.

Objective 3: *Protect high quality major aquatic, wetland and riparian habitat types*

The proposed easement will protect the existing tracts of functional habitat types while retaining the current uses on the acreage.

- 146 acres of valley oak riparian forest
- 10 acres of seasonal and perennial marsh habitats
- 240 acres of mixed Great Valley mixed riparian habitat
- 12 acres of cottonwood mixed riparian forest
- 99 acres of valley oak woodland
- 38 acres of open water habitat

The easement area is surrounded by lands held by USFWS, The Nature Conservancy and by WCB/DFG. Habitat connectivity will increase as restoration efforts by the surrounding entities proceed.

Objective 4: *Protect high quality major aquatic, wetland and riparian habitat types*

The proposed project will prevent the conversion of the valuable agricultural and natural resource habitat types. The proposed easement combines funds from DOC's California Farmland Conservancy Program for protection 1,870 acres of intensely managed farmland, and the WCB's California Grazing, Grasslands and Ranchlands Program protecting the remainder. By acquiring the development rights of the easement area the agricultural and open space values will be protected. While not prone to urbanization, the property is vulnerable to the proliferation of 40-acre ranchettes based on current zoning. The property is flood prone and the county is on record of issuing building permits if the foundation is greater than one foot above mean flood levels.

Goal 5: **Nonnative Invasive Species -- Not applicable**

Goal 6: Water and Sediment Quality

The proposed easement meets Objective 1.

Objective 1. Reduce the loadings and concentrations of toxic contaminants in all aquatic environments to levels that do not adversely affect aquatic organisms, wildlife and people.

The proposed project will result in the continuance of current careful stewardship practices in the easement area. The rancher periodically grazes the areas along sloughs and in swales, and has allowed many of the irrigation ditches in the irrigated portions of the easement area to revegetate. This practice reduces soil erosion, resulting in a reduction in turbidity and sediments in water, thereby improving water quality. Pesticide use is kept to a minimum on the easement area. No routine spraying regime is incorporated into the management of the Ranch. Natural biological control methods are utilized wherever feasible on the Ranch. They are used in orchards and feedlots as the Ranch manager strives to control pests via non-chemical means and to maintain a natural balance.

3). Identify Project Applicability to Environmental Water Quality Constituents:

Primary: Pesticides

The proposed easement will result in the continuance of current careful stewardship practices in the easement area. The rancher periodically grazes the areas along sloughs and in swales, and has allowed many of the irrigation ditches in the irrigated portions of the easement area to revegetate. This practice reduces soil erosion, resulting in a reduction in turbidity and sediments in water, thereby improving water quality. Pesticide use is kept to a minimum on the easement area. No routine spraying regime is incorporated into the management of the Ranch. Natural biological control methods are utilized wherever feasible on the Ranch. They are used in orchards and feedlots as the Ranch manager strives to control pests via non-chemical means and to maintain a natural balance.

Secondary: Not Applicable

C11. Related Projects*

1). If this project is related to another restoration project, identify other projects by number and program (e.g. CALFED, CVPIA), and if CALFED, identify that relationship by category:

Of the total 18,434 acres, associated with the ranch, 4,270 acres have been sold to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game to be maintained as refuges or wildlife sanctuaries. The remainder, with the exception of a 238-acre parcel in the southwest corner of the property and a few in holdings in the northwest portion of the property is protected with a conservation easement. The Nature Conservancy holds conservation easements covering 6,680 acres. Placement of the proposed conservation easement will ensure that virtually all of the 18,434 acres of Llano Seco are protected from development and will remain a working landscape.

PART D. BUDGET SUMMARY

D1. Budget

Major Capital Outlay Expenditures

WCB Expenses

Contribution toward easement	$2,000,000
DGS Appraisal Review	5,000
Total WCB Costs:	**$2,005,000**

DOC Expenses

Contribution toward easement (up to)	$1,930,000
Total DOC Costs:	**$1,930,000**

Land Trust Expenses

Appraisal	$15,000
Closing Costs	20,000
Environmental Studies	5,000
Total Land Trust Costs:	**$40,000**
Total Development Costs:	**$45,000**

ERP CALFED Expenses:

Contribution toward easement:	$2,570,000
Total Easement Costs:	**$6,500,000**

PART E. PROJECT LOCATION INFORMATION

E1. Project Location:

The Llano Seco Ranch is located in Butte County, 10 air miles southwest of the City of Chico, south of Ord Ferry Road and east of the Sacramento River.

E2. County or Counties Project is Located In:

Butte County

E3. ERP Eco-Region, Eco-Zone, and Eco-Unit Project is Located In:*

ERP Eco-Region: Sacramento Valley
ERP Eco-Zone: Butte Basin
ERP Eco-Unit: Butte Creek, 7.6

E4. Project Centroid:

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

121°57’ 45.65 W 39° 36’8.12”N

E5. Project Map:

See attached maps

E6. Digital Geographic File:*

See attached zip file

E7. Congressional District:

Congressional Representative:	Honorable Wally Herger	District 2
California State Assembly:	Assemblyman Rick Keene	District 3
California State Senate:	Senator Sam Aanestad	District 4

PART F. ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

F1. CEQA/NEPA Compliance

1). Will this project require compliance with CEQA, NEPA, both, or neither:*

This project is categorically exempt from CEQA and the requirements of NEPA.

2). Is your project covered by either a Statutory or Categorical Exemption under CEQA or a Categorical Exclusion under NEPA:*

This project is exempt from the CEQA under Section 15313, Class 13, as an acquisition of land for wildlife conservation purposes and Section 15325, Class 25, as the transfer of ownership of an interest in land to preserve open space.

3). If your project requires additional CEQA/NEPA analysis, please indicate which type of documents will be prepared: No Analysis is Required

- Initial Study/Negative Declaration
- Environmental Assessment/FONSI
- EIR/CEQA Findings of Fact
- EIS/ Record of Decision

4). If the project will require CEQA and/or NEPA compliance, identify the lead agency(ies).

- CEQA Lead Agency:
- NEPA Lead Agency (Must be a Federal Agency):

  Not Applicable

5). If your project is not covered under items 2 or 3, and you checked no to question 1, please explain why compliance is not required for the actions in this proposal:

6). If the CEQA/NEPA process is not complete, please describe the estimated timelines for the process and the expected date of completion: Not Applicable

7). If the CEQA/NEPA document has been completed, what is the name of the document: Not Applicable

F2. Environmental Permitting and Approvals

Please indicate what permits or other approvals may be required for the activities contained in your proposal and which have already been obtained. Please indicate all that 1) are needed, and 2) if needed, have been obtained:

There are no permits needed for this project to complete the purchase of the conservation easement.

PART G. LAND USE QUESTIONNAIRE

G1. Land Use Changes

1). Do the actions in the proposal involve physical changes in the land use, or potential future changes in land use (Yes/No):

- If yes, describe what actions will occur on the land involved in the proposal.
- If no, explain what type of actions are involved in the proposal (i.e., research only, planning only).

No. The land use over the Llano Seco Ranch will not substantially change because of this acquisition. Historically, cropping patterns on the ranch have consisted of an Intensified Agricultural Area and what is referred to as a Maintenance Area.

The Intensified Agricultural Area consists of orchard crops, irrigated and non-irrigated row crops, dry beans, irrigated and non-irrigated forage crops and other small grains; crops grown since 1976 have included rice, tomatoes, vine seeds, corn, cotton, milo, sorghum, alfalfa, sugar beets, sunflowers, dry beans, almonds and walnuts. Current crop production in this area includes sunflowers, alfalfa, wheat, corn, walnuts and almonds. The landowner plans to replace the existing almond orchard with walnuts over the next few years to take advantage of favorable market prices.

The Maintenance areas have not been subjected to intensive ground disturbing activities and the land has maintained a natural rolling profile. Land utilization has included a rotation of grazing, dry land cropping (i.e., wheat, barley, oats, safflower, and garbanzo beans) and irrigated cropping (i.e., beans and oats).

2). How many acres of land will be subject to a land use change under the proposal:

The historical use of the land will remain intact under the terms and conditions of this conservation and agricultural easement. The Intensified Agricultural Area consists of approximately 1,870 acres and the Maintenance areas consists of approximately 2,229 acres, of which approximately 736 acres consists of sloughs and riparian areas, including grasslands, seasonal and perennial marsh habitats, Great Valley valley oak riparian forests, Great Valley mixed forests, Great Valley cottonwood riparian forests and open water habitats.

3). Is the land subject to a land use change in the proposal currently under a Williamson Act contract (Yes/No):

Yes. The Llano Seco Ranch is currently enrolled under the Williamson Act program.

4). For all lands subject to a land use change under the proposal, describe what entity or organization will manage the property and provide operations and maintenance services.

The operation and maintenance of the Llano Seco Ranch will remain under the current ownership. The terms and conditions of the conservation and agricultural easement will be monitored on an annual basis by the Northern California Regional Land Trust, the WCB and the DOC.

5). Does the applicant propose any modifications to the water right or change in the delivery of the water (Yes/No):

- If yes, please describe the modifications or changes:

No. The landowner does not anticipate any modifications to the water right or change in the delivery of the water necessary to maintain the Intensified Agricultural Area and the Maintenance Area.

G2. Current Land Use and Zoning

1). What is the current land use of the area subject to a land use change under the proposal:

The current land use of the area will not change because of this proposal.

2). What is the current zoning and general plan designation(s) for the property:

The acreage in the proposed conservation easement is zoned A-40, which is General Agricultural with 40 acre minimum parcel size. The property is also subject to a Williamson Act Contract, which increases the minimum parcel size to 160 acres.

3). How is the land categorized on the Important Farmland Series (IFL) maps (published by the California Department of Conservation):

- Current land use:

  Agriculture, Prime = 3800 acres

- Current zoning: A40

- Current general plan designation:

  Butte County General Plan, Ag element: (1) orchard and field crops and (2) grazing and open lands

- Mapping Category on the IFL Series Map: Prime

G3. Land Acquisition

1). Will the applicant acquire any land under the proposal, either in fee or through a conservation easement (Yes/No):

- If yes, describe the number of acres that will be acquired and whether the acquisition will be of fee title or a conservation easement:
- Total number of acres to be acquired under proposal:
- Number of acres to be acquired in fee:
- Number of acres to be subject to conservation easement:

The proposed project will acquire an agricultural easement on approximately 1,870 acres of intensified agricultural land and a conservation easement on approximately 2,228 acres of undulating crop grazing land, riparian habitat, grasslands, seasonal and perennial marsh habitats and open water habitats.

2). For land acquisitions (fee title or easements), will existing water rights be acquired (Yes/No):

No. The water rights will remain with the landowner.

G4. Land Access

1). Will the applicant require access across public or private property that the applicant does not own to accomplish the activities in the proposal (Yes/No):

- If yes, attach written permission for access from the relevant property owner(s).

No. Purchasing the agricultural and conservation easement does not require access from adjacent property or permission from a relevant property owner.

PART H. QUALIFICATIONS

H1. Qualifications

(List professional qualifications of all participating researchers).

The WCB and the DOC have a long history of purchasing interests in real property. The DOC specializes is the purchase of easements and protecting agricultural land. The WCB has extensive experience in purchasing land in fee and easement for purposes of benefiting fish and wildlife species.

PART I. MONITORING

I1. WCB/DOC Monitoring

WCB and DOC will conduct annual monitoring in conjunction with the Land Trust to assure compliance with the terms and conditions of Easement, assure that the identified conservation values continue to be protected, and to document any changes that occur in the field. In addition, as required by WCB's and DOC's respective statutes, and in the Easement, the Land Trust will be responsible for submittal of an annual report describing the conditions of the identified conservation values and the intensively managed agricultural areas to the WCB and DOC.

By June 30 of each year, the Trust shall submit a report to the Department of Conservation and the Wildlife Conservation Board after an annual monitoring visit, that describes method of monitoring, condition of the property, indicates whether any violations were found during the period, describes any corrective actions taken, the resolution of any violation, and any transfer of interest in the property. The monitoring shall include analysis of soil erosion, percentage of noxious weeds, and an update of the rangeland health assessment to be contained in a report, and, at least once every five (5) years, a species composition assessment. The monitoring will be supported through a prepared report that would be used to determine baseline conditions, using photographs and narrative descriptions, among other evaluation tools. Monitoring will also consider issues as site potential, weather conditions, unusual economic circumstances, vegetative variety and quality and trends in resource conditions.