

CALFED Bay-Delta 2002 ERP Directed Actions -- Selection Panel Review

Proposal Number: 170

Applicant Organization: The Nature Conservancy

Proposal Title: Restoration of the Confluence Area of the Sacramento River, Big Chico and Mud Creeks

Recommendation: Fund With Conditions

Amount: \$2,603,377

Conditions of approval:

1. As part of the outreach effort, the project proponents are directed to continue coordinating with the Sacramento River Conservation Area Forum Board of Directors and its Technical Advisory Committee.
2. Project proponents are directed to continue working with Butte County officials, especially with regard to the management of flood waters and floodplains, and land use issues.
3. Project proponents are directed to work interactively with the ERP and Science Program as Task 2 products are developed. Specifically, the project proponents should seek review and advice on methodology, work plans, draft and completed reports for the baseline assessment and restoration plans.
4. To the extent feasible, land use of the acquired parcels should not be actively changed prior to the completion of the restoration planning process.
5. Issues raised by the Williamson Act contract on one of the parcels to be purchased shall be addressed and resolved in the restoration planning process, including consultation with the Department of Conservation.

Provide a brief explanation of your rating:

The Selection Panel concurs with the two technical reviewers who recognized the strategic opportunity presented by the location of the project within a tributary-mainstem confluence zone. Since the original application was submitted, one of the parcels has been acquired and its acquisition was dropped from the proposal. The proposal's scientific approach has been strengthened and the panel recommends full funding.

The panel also recommends that the ERP and Science Program establish a standing committee to independently review ERP actions for the Sacramento River System, focusing primarily on projects related to riverine and floodplain functions. The committee should be composed of accomplished restoration planners, scientists, and engineers with expertise and experience in large river systems. The proponents should

work with this committee to develop elements of Task 2, baseline assessment and restoration plans, as noted above under Condition 3.

The owners of the lands to be purchased by this project are willing sellers. Although these lands are used for agriculture, they are flooded frequently, impairing their economic viability. The project conforms to the Sacramento River Conservation Area Handbook and the County general plan. The Williamson Act contract on one of these parcels will not be affected by the purchase, and farm use will be maintained, if feasible, until a restoration plan is complete. The plan should address how The Nature Conservancy will resolve any issues related to the contract.

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Research and Restoration External Review Form
CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program 2002 Proposal Solicitation Package

Proposal Title: Restoration of the Confluence Area of the Sacramento River, Big Chico and Mud Creeks

Review:

1. **Goals.** Are the goals, objectives and hypotheses clearly stated and internally consistent? Is the concept timely and important?

Yes.

2. **Justification.** Is the study justified relative to existing knowledge? Is a conceptual model clearly stated in the proposal and does it explain the underlying basis for the proposed work? Is the selection of research, pilot or demonstration project, or a full-scale implementation project justified?

Yes.

3. **Approach.** Is the approach well designed and appropriate for meeting the objectives of the project? Are results likely to add to the base of knowledge? Is the project likely to generate novel information, methodology or approaches? Will the information ultimately be useful to decision-makers?

Yes.

4. **Feasibility.** Is the approach fully documented and technically feasible?

Yes.

What is the likelihood of success?

Probable.

Is the scale of the project consistent with the objectives?

Yes.

5. **Project-Specific Performance Measures.** Does the project include appropriate performance measures to measure success relative to the project's goals and objectives?

Yes. In general. However, it might be useful in the future to include success criteria.

Is there enough detail as to how the performance measures will be quantified?

Yes, but some discussion of specific measurements and techniques would be useful.

For restoration projects, are monitoring plans explicit and detailed enough to determine if performance measures will be adequately assessed?

Monitoring is mentioned, but there is no detail with respect to methodology.

6. **Products.** Are products of value likely from the project? Specifically for restoration projects, are products of value also likely from the monitoring component? Are interpretative outcomes likely from the project?

Yes.

7. **Capabilities.** What is the track record of applicants in terms of past projects? Is the project team qualified to efficiently and effectively implement the proposed project? Do they have available the infrastructure and other aspects of support necessary to accomplish the project?

Positive/affirmative to all.

8. **Cost/Benefit Comments.** Is the budget reasonable and adequate for the work proposed?

Apparently the fraction (\$408,377) of the total request (\$2,603,377) other than that budgeted for land acquisition (\$2,195,000) amounts to 18.6% if this math is accurate. While as a “rule of thumb” only, that might seem a bit high, the fact that it includes (“draft” or “initial”) restoration and management planning would tend to lead one to conclude that it is probably reasonable. Since there is insufficient detail to further assess the probable congruity of dollars with performance, this conclusion must be considered provisional or conjectural.

From a project management standpoint, and given the history of Phase I, a “hands-on” manager might ask a few questions regarding the extent to which similar work products might already have been promised/delivered in Phase I. There is no reason to conclude that there might necessarily be any duplication or duplicity involved, but a reviewer unfamiliar with the intimate details of the project history, if such detail were within the scope of the review, might want to see some confirmation.

On the basis of the proposal, no clear basis is apparent for any conclusion other than adequacy. In the future, if a less ambiguous response to this question is considered necessary, applicants might be asked to go a bit beyond alluding to work products in general and to describe the work more specifically. However, the proposal is not unusual in this regard, and the degree of specificity requested is a decision to be made at the time of the preparation of the Request for Proposals.

Miscellaneous comments:

The applicant's "track record" would seem to be a reasonable guide to a decision in the absence of a given level of detail.

Please provide an overall evaluation summary rating: Excellent: outstanding in all respects; Good: quality but some deficiencies; Poor: serious deficiencies.

Overall Evaluation Summary Rating	Provide a brief explanation of your summary rating
- Excellent	The applicant appears to have responded in good faith but failed to complete several items (e.g., I-6,12,13,17d,18,20,21; III-4b; IV-1c,) and the level of detail provided was insufficient to determine with reasonable accuracy (beyond educated guessing) the degree to which the budget is "reasonable and adequate for the work proposed." (The level of detail need not be highly detailed and accurate, and even can/should be flexible.) If these deficiencies can be considered trifling, then this rating could be upgraded.
X Good	
- Poor	

Research and Restoration External Review Form
CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program 2002 Proposal Solicitation Package

Proposal Title: Restoration of the Confluence Area of the Sacramento River, Big Chico and Mud Creeks

Review:

1. **Goals.** Are the goals, objectives and hypotheses clearly stated and internally consistent? Is the concept timely and important?

The goals, objectives and hypotheses are clearly stated and consistent. The concept is timely and important.

2. **Justification.** Is the study justified relative to existing knowledge? Is a conceptual model clearly stated in the proposal and does it explain the underlying basis for the proposed work? Is the selection of research, pilot or demonstration project, or a full-scale implementation project justified?

The proposal is for land-acquisition and baseline data only, but is part of a larger effort with a clear conceptual model that is the basis for the proposed work. Sufficient justification is provided within the proposal.

3. **Approach.** Is the approach well designed and appropriate for meeting the objectives of the project? Are results likely to add to the base of knowledge? Is the project likely to generate novel information, methodology or approaches? Will the information ultimately be useful to decision-makers?

The approach is well designed and should meet the objectives. The baseline data gathered with this project will add to the base of knowledge, using previously developed methodology and approaches. This information should be very important in the later phases of this effort, but it will also provide useful information for other restoration efforts.

4. **Feasibility.** Is the approach fully documented and technically feasible? What is the likelihood of success? Is the scale of the project consistent with the objectives?

The approach is well documented and technically feasible with a high likelihood of success. The scale of the project is consistent with its objectives.

5. **Project-Specific Performance Measures.** Does the project include appropriate performance measures to measure success relative to the project's goals and objectives? Is there enough detail as to how the performance measures will be quantified? For restoration projects, are monitoring plans explicit and detailed enough to determine if performance measures will be adequately assessed?

The project includes very good performance measures for project success.

6. **Products.** Are products of value likely from the project? Specifically for restoration projects, are products of value also likely from the monitoring component? Are interpretative outcomes likely from the project?

The acquisition of the three properties is very likely. The baseline data acquired should improve the ability to monitor and adaptively manage the project as future phases are funded.

7. **Capabilities.** What is the track record of applicants in terms of past projects? Is the project team qualified to efficiently and effectively implement the proposed project? Do they have available the infrastructure and other aspects of support necessary to accomplish the project?

The track record of the applicants is excellent. They have subcontracts that will improve the usefulness of the products. Therefore, the project team should have no problem to efficiently and effectively implement the work.

8. **Cost/Benefit Comments.** Is the budget reasonable and adequate for the work proposed?

The budget is adequate for the proposed work.

Miscellaneous comments:

Please provide an overall evaluation summary rating: Excellent: outstanding in all respects; Good: quality but some deficiencies; Poor: serious deficiencies.

Overall Evaluation Summary Rating	Provide a brief explanation of your summary rating
X Excellent	The project proposes the acquisition of 311 acres adjacent to other public land and a baseline assessment. The location of the site at the confluence of two tributaries and the Sacramento River make it a strategic land acquisition with important ecological, hydrological, and geomorphological implications. Should restoration be funded in the future, this site will add to the range of conditions over which TNC has performed and studied floodplain restoration, and thus will add new information. TNC's track record on restoration is strong, and restoration of this site would add to the portfolio of sites being restored, managed, and studied by TNC on the Sacramento River. However, many of these benefits will only be realized if the other phases of this project (implementation of restoration, and research and monitoring) are funded in the future.
- Good	
- Poor	

***CALFED Bay-Delta Directed Action
Administrative Review
Budget Evaluation***

Proposal number: 170 DA

Proposal title: *Restoration of the Confluence Area of the Sacramento River, Big Chico and Mud Creeks*

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

Yes

If no, please explain:

2. Does the proposal include a detailed budget for each task identified?

Yes

If no, please explain:

3. Does the proposal clearly state the type of expenses encompassed in indirect rates or overhead costs?

Yes

If no, please explain:

4. Are appropriate project management costs clearly identified?

No

If no, please explain: They call for 1,171 hours for project management activities but they do not specify how many hours each position will expend. The problem being that the three positions identified have hourly rates ranging from \$22 to \$39, so the project management costs could range from a minimum of \$25,762 to a maximum of \$45,669 over the three years. Since all their time and costs are constrained by a formal total budget, my

comments may be a mute point.

5. Do the total funds requested (Form I, Question 17A) equal the combined total annual costs in the budget summary?

Yes

If no, please explain (for example, are costs to be reimbursed by cost share funds included in budget summary).

6. Does the budget justification adequately explain major expenses?

Yes

If no, please explain:

7. Are there other budget issues that warrant consideration?

No

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Ecosystem Restoration Program –Directed Action: Land Acquisition

Project No: 170DA

Applicant: The Nature Conservancy.

Title: *Restoration of the Confluence Area of the Sacramento River, Big Chico and Mud Creeks*

1. Is the site's ecological importance documented in the proposal? If yes, please import relevant text and citations here

YES

“Following the principles and guidelines of the SRCA Handbook, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) proposes to protect and restore 311 acres in an ecologically valuable area on the Sacramento River floodplain. The high ecological value of the proposed project location is, in part, a function of the complex and dynamic hydrogeomorphic processes that characterize the area. Although some of these geophysical processes are still intact, the project area is, in general, highly degraded compared to its historical condition. Alterations have caused the streams to become deeply incised and simplified in their stream morphology. As such, they provide less habitat value to native riparian and aquatic species than they did in historical times when they were structurally more complex.

Acquisition and restoration planning activities in this proposal include conserving floodprone properties, protecting remnant riparian forest, and planning future restoration activities. The work proposed provides an opportunity for understanding how tributary streams with varying physical and biological attributes respond to restoration activities. This restoration project presents unique and important research and monitoring opportunities.”

2. Is the owner's willingness to sell the site documented in the proposal? If no, please explain:

Yes. Supportive letters from two of the 3 affected landowners were received. The 3rd site has already been purchased by TNC, and it is now seeking reimbursement for its purchase.

3. Is evidence of local government support for the purchase included in the proposal? If yes, please explain:

A letter from the Sacramento River Conservation Area Forum board, which includes Butte County representatives, confirms the projects consistency with the SRCA

handbook, but recommends ongoing consultation with the County concerning “ongoing upstream flood issues”. I called the County and was informed the SCRAF letter represented the county’s views.

4. Is the use proposed for the site after its purchase clearly consistent with the site's general plan designation and zoning? If no, please explain:

The use seems consistent with the site’s general plan, but perhaps not its zoning.

Butte County General Plan classifies the properties as orchard and field crops. Secondary uses in this classification include hunting and water-related recreation facilities, environmental preservation activities and public and quasi-public uses. The Butte County General Plan does not contain a separate classification for riparian habitat. Along with General Plan policies to protect agricultural land, Butte County also promotes policies to facilitate the survival of identified rare and endangered plants and animals, and encourage the creation and expansion of natural and wilderness areas. The intended use of the properties under this project fits within Butte County’s General Plan policies and uses for environmental preservation, public uses, facilitation of the survival of identified rare and endangered plants and animals, and creation and expansion of natural areas.

The properties are zoned Agricultural with a 40 acre minimum area required. Butte County Agricultural Zones do not specifically mention the fallowing of agricultural land, habitat or restoration of habitat, however, seasonal hunting and fishing camps, and recreational uses are allowed only when they do not require permanent improvements and do not interfere materially with agricultural operations, The application’s Environmental compliance checklist does not identify a local use permit as being required..

5. Is the land mapped as prime farmland, farmland of statewide significance, unique farmland, or farmland of local importance? If yes, please explain the classification:

The site isn’t covered by DOC’s farmland maps, but it does contain Class II irrigated soils. The majority of the proposed project area has a flood recurrence interval of 2.5 years or less, and the entire area lies within an area projected to flood every four years (California Department of Water Resources 2001) despite the presence of an extensive system of private and federal levees.

- Is the site under a Williamson Act contract? The Nicholaus property is under a Williamson Act contract
- Will use of the site change from agriculture after its purchase? The properties would remain in agriculture until restoration planning is complete and restoration funding is obtained. Then they will be restored to native wildlife and fish habitats.

6 Is this a time-sensitive acquisition opportunity, according to the proposal? If yes, please import relevant text here:

These properties are currently for sale. If acquisition funds are not approved, the landowners risk further erosion and flood damage.

Other Comments:

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