



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

For the meeting of: 4/17/2025

File #: 25-520

To: Zoning Administrator

From: Planning and Building Department

Agenda Section: Consent

SUBJECT:

Sanctuary Forest Special Permit
Assessor Parcel Numbers (APN) 215-162-021 and 215-162-022
Record No.: PLN-2024-19132
Whitethorn area

A Special Permit (SP) for the construction of an approximately 2-million-gallon water storage pond partially within the Streamside Management Area (SMA). The overall project will construct two ponds totaling 6 million gallons of capacity and associated plumbing infrastructure designed to deliver 25 gallons per minute (GPM) of flow augmentation to Vanauken Creek during the four-month dry season for the purpose of improving instream aquatic habitat. These ponds will be off-channel and will be filled exclusively with runoff and direct precipitation and the project includes no stream diversions. The project is anticipated to provide significantly improved habitat for coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) and steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) in Vanauken Creek, an important salmon bearing tributary to the Mattole River.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Zoning Administrator:

1. Adopt the resolution, (Attachment 1) which does the following:
 - a. Adopts Mitigated Negative Declaration prepared for the Sanctuary Forest project pursuant to Section 15074 of the CEQA Guidelines; and
 - b. Finds the proposed project complies with the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance; and
 - c. Approves the Special Permit as recommended by staff, subject to the conditions of approval (Attachment 1A) and subject to the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (Attachment 1B).

DISCUSSION:

Project Location: The project is located in the Whitethorn area, along Vanauken Creek, approximately one mile southeast of the intersection of Briceland-Thorne Road and Shelter Cove Road, on the properties known as APNs 215-162-021 and 215-162-022.

Present General Plan Land Use Designation: (both parcels) Timberland 2017 General Plan; Density: 40-160 acres/unit; Slope Stability: Moderate Instability (2)

Present Zoning: Timberland Production Zone (TPZ)

Environmental Review: An Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration has been prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Statute (Public Resources Code 21000-21189) and Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Sections 15000-15387).

State Appeal: Project is located outside the Coastal Zone and is therefore NOT appealable to the California Coastal Commission.

Major Concerns: None

Monitoring Required:

CEQA Mitigation Monitoring.

Executive Summary: The primary objective for the Mattole Headwaters Drought Relief Project is to construct two ponds with approximately 6 million gallons of off-stream water storage that are intended to deliver approximately 25 gallons per minute (gpm) of flow augmentation to Vanauken Creek and the Mattole River mainstem during the four-month dry season.

Sanctuary Forest (SFI) will oversee the construction of two off-channel ponds that will include excavation and placement of earthen berms and spillways built into the natural topography. Construction will include removal of topsoil from the reservoir area. The topsoil will be saved and spread around the reservoir area along with mulch after construction. All critical fill placement will be subject to compaction standards to ensure appropriate compaction. Cut/fill is expected to be balanced onsite with current earthwork estimates at approximately 21,000 cubic yards.

These project design features are described in detail in the Basis of Design (BOD) Report and 65% Design Plans included as Attachment A of the Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND).

The preferred alternative is comprised of two HDPE-lined ponds, each equipped with an underlying French drain system to control groundwater levels under the pond liner. The HDPE liner will be under- and over-laid by woven geotextile fabric and a gravel topping. Each pond will have a dedicated flow augmentation location, will be hydraulically isolated from each other, and be independently operated.

Both ponds have rock-lined spillways sized for the 100-year storm discharge as shown on the design plans.

The West Pond is designed to store approximately 4 million gallons and has a maximum water depth of 25 ft. The East Pond is designed for 2 million gallons of storage with a maximum depth of 19 ft.

A solar array, battery bank, inverter, transfer pump, valving and small control center shed will provide power to operate a sump pump under the West Pond liner and the pumped flow release from the West Pond to cooling/filtration galleries.

After construction has been completed, extensive post-project operations, monitoring and adaptive management will be conducted to ensure that the project is functioning as designed. This will be conducted by the project team (Sanctuary Forest, Stillwater Sciences and Lost Coast Forestlands) and with continued involvement of the Project's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) including representatives from multiple state and federal agencies including California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (NCRWQCB).

Site Access

The proposed Project is located along Vanauken Creek, a tributary of the Mattole River, north of the community of Whitethorn. The 1320-acre property, owned by Lost Coast Forestlands, is located approximately 16.0 road miles from Garberville and Highway 101. The project is located on two terraces above Vanauken Creek at approximately 3,000 ft and 6,000 ft upstream of the Mattole confluence.

The project can be accessed from Vanauken Creek Road via Briceland-Thorn Road, approximately one mile southeast of the intersection of Briceland-Thorn Road and Shelter Cove Road.

Environmental Review

Environmental review for the proposed project included the preparation of an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Statute (Public Resources Code 21000-21189) and Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Sections 15000-15387). The IS/MND was circulated from March 7, 2025 through April 6, 2025 at the State Clearinghouse. No comments were received during the circulation period. A total of 39 mitigation measures are included to mitigate potential environmental impacts to a less than significant level. The IS/MND and technical document are included as Attachment 3 to the staff report.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The project was referred to responsible agencies and all responding agencies have either responded with no comment or recommended approval or conditional approval. (Attachment 4)

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Zoning Administrator could elect to add or delete conditions of approval. The Zoning Administrator could elect not to approve the project, or to require the applicant to submit further evidence, or to refer the application to the Planning Commission.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Resolution
 - A. Conditions of Approval
 - B. Mitigation and Monitoring Report
 - C. Site Plan
2. Location Map
3. Draft Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration
 - A. IS/MND Attachments
4. Referral Agency Comments and Recommendations

Applicant: Sanctuary Forest Inc.

c/o Walker Wise

P.O. Box 166

Whitethorn, CA 95589

Owner: Same as Applicant

Agent: Lost Coast Forestlands, LLC

c/o Ter Services LLC

2229 San Felipe St., Suite 1150

Houston, TX 77019

Please contact Trevor Estlow, Senior Planner, at testlow@co.humboldt.ca.us or 707-268-3740 if you have questions about this item.