McClenagan, Laura

From: Tasha McKee <tasha@sanctuaryforest.org>
Sent: Sunday, November 21, 2021 5:03 PM
To: Planning Clerk
Cc: April Newlander
Subject: Marshall Ranch Flow Enhancement Project; PLN-2019-15661 letter attached
Attachments: Sanctuary Forest support letter for PLN-2019-15661.pdf

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

Dear planning staff,
Please see attached Sanctuary Forest Inc. letter regarding the Marshall Ranch Flow Enhancement Project; PLN-2019-15661 and let us know that you received it.
Thank you!
Tasha

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Re: Marshall Ranch Streamflow Enhancement Project; PLN-2019-15661

November 21, 2021

Dear Humboldt County Planning and Building Department,

I am writing to provide background and support for the goals of the Marshall Ranch Flow Enhancement Project, drawn from my experience as Water Program Director at Sanctuary Forest Inc. and our flow enhancement work in the Mattole headwaters over the last 15 years. Additionally, I am a fourth generation resident of the Mattole headwaters, and grew up learning about solutions for water scarcity from my Dad, Bob McKee.

Similar to Redwood Creek, the Mattole headwaters has experienced extreme summer low flow conditions over the last 2 decades, impacting fish and wildlife as well as the human community. Low flows were recognized by CDFW and NOAA fisheries as the greatest threat to the survival of juvenile coho salmon over a decade ago. Juvenile steelhead are also impacted, with thousands of fish perishing as pools disconnect and dry up in drought years- 18 out of the last 22 years. In our rural communities, people rely on springs, creeks and rivers for their water supply and many families have had to truck in water or go without. The threat of catastrophic wild fire has also increased, and water supplies for fighting fire are scarce.

Sanctuary Forest, along with many collaborating restoration groups, agencies, and the Mattole community, is working to develop strategies for enhancing flows, which include storage and forbearance, forest thinning (to reduce evapotranspiration and improve forest health), infiltration of runoff from road systems, wetland enhancement, off-channel storage/infiltration, and instream restoration. We have developed and implemented several pilot projects, and have learned through careful monitoring and assessment that the strategy proposed by the Marshall Ranch Flow Enhancement Project is critically necessary for improving mid to late summer flows, particularly in extreme drought years. This strategy utilizes large-capacity pond storage with piping to the creek to directly augment flows during the low flow months. This approach differs very much from groundwater recharge projects in that the timing of flow enhancements can be controlled to convey water to the stream when it is most needed. Groundwater recharge projects can increase the amount of groundwater storage available to the stream, but in our experience, most of the groundwater drains by mid-summer and the streams still dry up in late summer.

We have participated in discussions with the Redwood Creek community, Salmonid Restoration Federation and Stillwater Sciences over the past 2 years with the aim of building a shared understanding of low flow problems and the importance of working together to address these problems. We are very impressed by the commitment and hard work demonstrated by the project proponents and the Redwood Creek community to develop effective design alternatives that address the potential risks of the original design. The evolution of the project is an example of how we can work together to address climate change and drought and create a dialogue that supports culture change and a shared commitment to restoring our watersheds. We are very supportive of the current design approach and are now developing similar flow augmentation projects in the Mattole headwaters.

Climate change and longer hotter dry seasons, land use impacts and water diversions are all significant factors contributing to extreme water scarcity and fire hazard throughout our state. With the urgent need for streamflow enhancement projects, we hope for increased collaboration with state and local governments and our communities. The Marshall Ranch project proposal has already been very effective at increasing community participation in the low flow issue and we hope that it will lead to increased community and county support for implementation projects needed to improve flows.

Sincerely,

Tasha McKee, Water Program Director, Sanctuary Forest Inc.