



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

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February 4, 2020

Doug Bosco, Chair
California State Coastal Conservancy
1515 Clay Street, 10th Floor
Oakland, CA 94612
Attention: Su Corbaley

Subject: Letter of Support for State Coastal Conservancy Project: *Cochran Creek
(Humboldt Bay) Fish Passage and Habitat Rehabilitation Implementation Project*

Dear Chair Bosco:

The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors strongly supports this project to enhance fish access and restore channel conditions in Cochran Creek, a sub-watershed of Freshwater Creek, and an anadromous tributary to Humboldt Bay.

The Cochran Creek (Humboldt Bay) Fish Passage and Habitat Rehabilitation Implementation Project (Project) is set within former tidal wetlands ("farmed wetlands") on the fringe of Humboldt Bay and will support local populations of ESA-listed salmonids, especially Coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) and steelhead (*O. mykiss*). Cochran Creek's connection to Humboldt Bay has been severely degraded by anthropogenic activities over the past 165 years, reducing the quantity and quality of the tidal freshwater and estuarine salmonid rearing habitats. This project provides shovel-ready restoration designs to restore hydrologic connectivity of Cochran Creek and Quail Slough to Humboldt Bay, and to address key limiting factors for ESA-listed salmonids. Specifically, the Project will enhance/restore:

- Fish Passage: The existing top-hinged tide gate will be replaced with a fish-friendly side-hinged tide gate with an adjustable opening to increase migration opportunity for adult and juvenile fish;
- Tidal Marsh: A muted tidal cycle will result in tidal inundation of 3.0 acres of tidal marsh, 860 ft of Cochran Creek, and 2,000 ft of Quail Slough;
- Instream and Floodplain Habitat: The Project will restore 930 ft of new stream channel/backwater habitats, 0.6 acres of floodplain, and 0.4 acres of riparian habitat on Cochran Creek. Quail Slough will be widened to 25 ft with inset floodplain to provide tidal/brackish wetland habitats;

- Overbank Flooding: The restored Cochran Creek channel will contain larger flood events within the channel, allow out-of-bank flood flows to reconnect to Cochran Creek or Quail Slough, and reduce the potential for fish stranding;
- Agricultural Areas: Collectively the tide gate, expanded channels and floodplains, and construction of tidal berms will enhance and protect agricultural lands.

Implementation of this Project's designs will complete previously-funded State Coastal Conservancy/CDFW planning efforts to restore anadromous habitats in Cochran Creek and Quail Slough, while addressing multiple "priority recovery actions" identified for SONCC Coho salmon in Humboldt Bay tributaries (NMFS 2014).

Implemented Project designs will provide important benefits supporting SONCC Coho recovery, including (NMFS 2014):

- Restore estuary and tidal wetland habitat;
- Increase tidal exchange of water; Remove or replace tide gates;
- Increase channel complexity; Increase LWD, boulders, or other instream structures;
- Reconnect the channel to the floodplain; Construct off channel habitats, alcoves, backwater habitats;
- Implement restoration projects that improve off channel habitats to create refugia habitat;
- Restore riparian vegetation in tidal zones;
- Restore tidal marshlands, shrublands, and forestlands;
- Improve fish access; Reduce invasive species;
- Eradicate reed canary grass.

We also recognize the demonstration value of this project for fostering working relationships with resource agencies and agricultural landowners to advance essential work on private lands in historic estuarine areas around Humboldt Bay.

Thank you for your serious consideration.

Sincerely,

Estelle Fennell, Chair
Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

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