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State of California – Natural Resources Agency
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November 26, 2025

Ben Weise, Agriculture Program Director
Contra Costa Resource Conservation District
5552 Clayton Road
Concord, CA 94521
BWeise@ccrcd.org

Subject: Marsh Creek Restoration Project, Draft Environmental Impact Report, SCH No. 2024091084, Contra Costa County

Dear Mr. Weise:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received a Notice of Availability of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) from the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District (CCRCD) for the Marsh Creek Restoration Project (Project) pursuant the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and CEQA Guidelines.[1]

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations regarding those activities involved in the Project that may affect California fish and wildlife. Likewise, we appreciate the opportunity to provide comments regarding those aspects of the Project that CDFW, by law, may be required to carry out or approve through the exercise of its own regulatory authority under the Fish and Game Code.

CDFW ROLE

CDFW is California's **Trustee Agency** for fish and wildlife resources and holds those resources in trust by statute for all the people of the State. (Fish & G. Code, §§ 711.7, subd. (a) & 1802; Pub. Resources Code, § 21070; CEQA Guidelines § 15386, subd. (a).) CDFW, in its trustee capacity, has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species. (*Id.*, § 1802.) Similarly, for purposes of CEQA, CDFW is charged by law to provide, as available, biological expertise during public agency environmental review efforts, focusing specifically on projects and related activities that have the potential to adversely affect fish and wildlife resources.

CDFW is also submitting comments as a **Responsible Agency** under CEQA. (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; CEQA Guidelines, § 15381.) CDFW expects that it may need to exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code. As proposed, for example, the Project may be subject to CDFW's Lake and Streambed

[1] CEQA is codified in the California Public Resources Code in section 21000 et seq. The "CEQA Guidelines" are found in Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, commencing with section 15000.

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Alteration (LSA) regulatory authority. (Fish & G. Code, § 1600 et seq.) Likewise, to the extent implementation of the Project as proposed may result in "take" as defined by State law of any species protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish & G. Code, § 2050 et seq.), the Project proponent may seek related take authorization as provided by the Fish and Game Code.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

Proponent: Contra Costa Resource Conservation District

Objective: The objective of the Project is to remediate creek and streambed erosion and restore riparian vegetation along a 0.5-mile section of Marsh Creek within the Marsh Creek State Park property in the City of Brentwood and immediately upstream in unincorporated county-owned lands. Primary Project activities include demolition of two historic ranch buildings, regrading and stabilization of creek banks, creation of new floodplains, revegetation with native riparian species, removal of invasive vegetation, and installation of exclusion fencing to bar cattle from the riparian corridor.

Location: The Project site extends along Marsh Creek below the Marsh Creek Reservoir dam downstream to the bridge at Vineyards Parkway. It includes both Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District and California Department of Parks and Recreation property. It is primarily on Accessor's Parcel Numbers (APN) 007-380- 011, 007-380-017, and 007-380-018.

Timeframe: Project construction is estimated to last six to eight months, although there is no proposed start date.

REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Raptors and Other Nesting Birds

CDFW has authority over actions that may result in the disturbance or destruction of active bird nest sites or the unauthorized take of birds. Fish and Game Code sections protecting birds, their eggs, and nests include § 3503 (regarding unlawful take, possession, or needless destruction of the nests or eggs of any bird), § 3503.5 (regarding the take, possession, or destruction of any birds-of-prey or their nests or eggs), and § 3513 (regarding unlawful take of any migratory nongame bird).

California Fully Protected Species

Several Fully Protected Species (Fish & G. Code § 3511 and 4700) have the potential to occur within or adjacent to the Project area, including, but not limited to: golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and white-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*).

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Project activities described in the draft EIR should be designed to completely avoid any fully protected species that have the potential to be present within or adjacent to the Project area. Fully protected species may not be taken or possessed at any time and no licenses or permits may be issued for their take except as follows:

- Take is for necessary scientific research;
- Efforts to recover a fully protected, endangered, or threatened species, live capture and relocation of a bird species for the protection of livestock; or
- They are a covered species whose conservation and management is provided for in a Natural Community Conservation Plan (Fish & G. Code, §§ 3511, 4700, 5050, & 5515).

Specified types of infrastructure projects may be eligible for a CESA Incidental Take Permit (ITP) for unavoidable impacts to fully protected species if certain conditions are met (Fish & G. Code §2081.15).

CDFW recommends the draft EIR analyze potential adverse impacts to fully protected species due to habitat modification, loss of foraging habitat, and/or interruption of migratory and breeding behaviors. CDFW recommends that the Lead Agency include in the analysis how appropriate avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures will reduce indirect impacts to fully protected species. Project proponents should consult with CDFW early in the project planning process.

California Endangered Species Act, Natural Community Conservation Plan Act, and Native Plant Protection Act

Coverage under the East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan (ECCC HCP/NCCP) authorizes the take of the covered species as listed in the ECCC HCP/NCCP. A list of the 28 ECCC HCP/NCCP-covered species can be found in the *East Conta Costa County HCP/NCCP Covered Species List, April 2023* (available here: https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=65726&inline).

For listed species that may occur in the area and are not covered under the ECCC HCP/NCCP, an ITP must be obtained from CDFW if the Project has the potential to result in “take” of plants or animals listed under CESA, either during construction or over the life of the Project. Under CESA, “take” means “hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill.” (Fish & G. Code, § 86). CDFW’s issuance of an ITP is subject to CEQA, and to facilitate permit issuance, any project modifications and mitigation measures must be incorporated into the CEQA document analysis, discussion, and mitigation monitoring and reporting program. If the Project will impact CESA-listed species, early consultation is encouraged, as significant

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modification to the Project and mitigation measures may be required in order to obtain an ITP.

CEQA requires a mandatory finding of significance if a project is likely to substantially impact threatened or endangered species. Pub. Resources Code, §§ 21001, subd. (c) & 21083; CEQA Guidelines, §§ 15380, 15064 & 15065.) In addition, pursuant to CEQA, the Lead Agency cannot approve a project unless all impacts to the environment are avoided or mitigated to less-than-significant levels, or the lead agency makes and supports Findings of Overriding Consideration (FOC) for impacts that remain significant despite the implementation of all feasible mitigation. FOC under CEQA, however, do not eliminate the Project proponent's obligation to comply with the Fish and Game Code.

Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement

CDFW requires a Lake and Streambed Alteration (LSA) Notification, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 1600 et seq., for Project activities affecting river, lakes or streams and associated riparian habitat. Notification is required for any activity that may substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow; change or use material from the bed, channel, or bank (including associated riparian or wetland resources); or deposit or dispose of material where it may pass into a river, lake, or stream. Work within ephemeral streams, drainage ditches, washes, watercourses with a subsurface flow, and floodplains is generally subject to notification requirements. In addition, infrastructure installed beneath aquatic features, such as horizontal directional drilling, is also generally subject to notification requirements. Therefore, any impact to the mainstems, tributaries, or floodplains or associated riparian habitat caused by the proposed Project will likely require an LSA Notification. CDFW may not execute a final LSA Agreement until it has considered the EIR and complied with its responsibilities as a responsible agency under CEQA.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CDFW offers the comments and recommendations below to assist CCRCD in adequately identifying and/or mitigating the Project's significant, or potentially significant, direct and indirect impacts on fish and wildlife (biological) resources. Editorial comments or other suggestions may also be included to improve the document.

I. **Project Description and Related Impact Shortcoming**

COMMENT 1: Long-Term Monitoring and Management of Vegetation

Issue: The draft EIR does not provide long-term monitoring, adaptive management, or invasive species control measures as it pertains to the Project's proposed revegetation efforts.

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Specific impact: On page S-2, the draft EIR states that no long-term management will be required because the Project is intended to be self-sustaining. While in-fill planting and irrigation of newly revegetated areas is proposed for three years post-restoration, there is no evidence that three years of maintenance will be sufficient to ensure restoration objectives are met. According to the draft EIR, recent revegetation efforts of Reach C in 2022 were unsuccessful, resulting in a largely denuded area.

Additionally, initial removal of invasive vegetation such as yellow star thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), perennial pepperweed (*Lepidium latifolium*), and black mustard (*Brassica nigra*) may not result in full eradication. Recolonization of invasive vegetation may occur, especially if additional populations are present within the Project vicinity. Without ongoing management and invasive species control, there is a continued risk of reinvasion and subsequent loss of native vegetation over time (Glennemeier et al. 2020, Xing et al. 2025) and complete failure of the native plant restoration effort.

Why impact would occur: Irrigation of newly restored areas may support initial establishment of native vegetation, but continued persistence is not guaranteed and may be threatened by incursion of invasive plant species. Ground-disturbing Project activities such as clearing and grubbing may create open spaces that are particularly vulnerable to colonization of invasive plant species (Brooks et al. 2004).

Evidence impact would be significant: Invasive plant species pose a challenge to restoration of native ecosystems (D'Antonio & Meyerson, 2002). Invasive plant species are highly competitive and may displace and reduce establishment of native plants by altering soil composition and stability, nutrient cycling, and hydrology (Levine et al. 2003, Vilà et al. 2011, Castro-Diez et al. 2019). Without long-term monitoring and management, this Project will be susceptible to habitat degradation and reduced habitat suitability for native species.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Mitigation Measure(s) (Regarding Project Description and Related Impact Shortcoming)

To reduce impacts to less-than-significant: Prior to initiation of Project activities, CDFW recommends establishment of success criteria to ensure restoration objectives are met, and that annual monitoring and adaptive management for all habitat types within the Project site continue post-Project completion. This includes the following:

> **Invasive Species Management.** In addition to implementing Standard Project Requirement (SPR)-1 as it pertains to preventing the spread of noxious weeds, CDFW recommends conducting pre-Project invasive species surveys and risk

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assessments; developing response protocols for invasive species detected post-Project; and mandatory reporting of invasive species sightings to Cal-IPC and California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB).

Riparian Vegetation Monitoring. CDFW recommends monitoring riparian restoration areas during the initial and intermediate stages of establishment and community development. Prior to initiation of Project activities, the proponent should adapt guidelines such as those presented in the Harris et al. 2005 report *Monitoring the Effectiveness of Riparian Vegetation Restoration* to develop a long-term riparian monitoring plan. The report can be accessed here: https://filelib.wildlife.ca.gov/public/FRGP/Qualitative_Monitoring_Forms/Monitoring%20Protocols/Quantitative%20Effectiveness%20Monitoring%20Protocol/Monitoring%20Effectiveness%20of%20Riparian%20Vegetation%20Rest.pdf.

In addition, for structures that have the potential to entrap wildlife, such as water tanks, CDFW recommends the draft EIR also incorporate the following mitigation measure:

Wildlife-Friendly Water Infrastructure Designs. Water tanks shall be designed to have an impenetrable cover so as to prevent entrapment and mortality of wildlife. Alternatively, water tanks shall be fitted with escape ramps or ladders that will allow wildlife to volitionally escape. Ramps and/or ladders shall be placed along a wall of the water tank and must span the distance from the lowest point in the tank to the covering, should it exist. Ramps and/or ladders shall be placed at a slope no steeper than 45 degrees. Escape ramps or ladders shall be fashioned from perforated metal sheeting covered with an open structured synthetic matting material that will allow for sufficient traction for wildlife to volitionally escape from the catchment basin if entrained.

COMMENT 2: Impacts to Wildlife Movement

Issue: The draft EIR proposes installation of exclusion fencing to remove cattle from the riparian corridor and support revegetation efforts. However, it does not assess the potential impacts fencing may have on the movement and mortality of other wildlife.

Specific impact: Implementation of exclusion fencing could prevent, result in a decline, or otherwise alter the use of an existing wildlife movement corridor. Project activities including the construction and maintenance of approximately 0.5 miles of cattle exclusion fencing that can disrupt connectivity, restrict access to a water source, and pose hazards to wildlife such as entanglement and mortality.

Why impact would occur: The Project area consists of a largely contiguous landscape of grassland and riparian woodland habitats, fragmented only by

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Vineyards Parkway in the east and Marsh Creek, which flows through the center of the site. Numerous species that utilize upland and riparian habitats may transit or reside within the Project area, and some may rely on both habitat types at various life stages. Depending on the type, exclusion fencing may create an impenetrable barrier to movement through the landscape or between upland and riparian habitats. It may also restrict access to the creek, which likely provides a drinking water source for wildlife.

Evidence impact would be significant: Habitat fragmentation is a significant threat to biodiversity, reducing the ability of species to migrate, disperse, and maintain viable populations (Beier & Noss, 1998; Crooks & Sanjayan, 2006). It is especially detrimental to wide-ranging species such as mountain lions (*Puma concolor*), bobcats (*Lynx rufus*), and American badgers (*Taxidea taxus*), which require intact landscape linkages for foraging and reproduction. Maintaining connectivity though these linkages is critical to ensure current and future wildlife populations' abilities to move and adapt to a changing climate and habitat conditions.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Mitigation Measure(s) (Regarding Project Description and Related Impact Shortcoming)

To reduce impacts to less-than-significant: CDFW recommends the following measures be incorporated in the EIR:

> **Wildlife-Friendly Fencing.** The Project shall adhere to principles of wildlife-friendly fencing when installing fencing associated with the Project. This includes avoiding use of woven wire and allowance for wildlife of all sizes to pass safely. Guidance such as *A Landowner's Guide to Wildlife Friendly Fences: How to Build Fence with Wildlife in Mind*, accessible here:
>
> https://fwp.mt.gov/binaries/content/assets/fwp/conservation/land-owner-wildlife-resources/a_landowners_guide_to_wildlife_friendly_fences.pdf shall be incorporated into the Project.

II. Mitigation Measure or Alternative and Related Impact Shortcoming

COMMENT 3: Nesting Birds

Issue: Mitigation Measure BIO-5 may not be sufficient to reduce impacts to nesting birds to less-than-significant levels.

Specific impact: Nesting birds are particularly sensitive to human disturbance. If nests within the area of disturbance are either undetected during surveys or unassessed for signs of distress, impacts to nesting birds as a result of Project activities may still be potentially significant.

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Why impact would occur: Project activities including ground disturbance, operation of heavy machinery, and the movement of workers may generate noise or visual disturbances which may in turn result in nest abandonment, reduced reproductive success, or loss or reduced health or vigor of eggs or young. Chronic stress can also result in immune system repression or reduced reproductive success (Ortega, 2012). Project activities including pruning, grubbing, tree removal, and vegetation removal may inadvertently crush, destroy, or remove active nests if nesting birds occur within the Project site and are undetected during surveys.

Evidence impact would be significant: Take of nesting birds, birds in the orders Falconiformes or Strigiformes, and migratory nongame bird as designated in the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act is a violation of Fish and Game Code §§ 3503, 3503.5, and 3513.

To Reduce Impacts to a Less-Than-Significant Level: CDFW recommends the following modifications to Mitigation Measure BIO-5:

Nesting Bird Surveys. CDFW recommends that preconstruction nesting bird surveys be conducted during the nesting bird season, defined as February 15 through September 15. Additionally, CDFW recommends that if a lapse in project-related activities of seven days or longer occurs, another focused survey is required before project activities can be reinitiated.

Survey Radii. CDFW recommends the following minimum survey radii: (1) 250 feet for passerines, (2) 1,000 feet for raptors, and (3) 1 mile for golden eagle.

Active Nest Buffers. CDFW recommends the following protective buffers for nesting birds: 1) 250 feet for passerines non-raptors, 2) 1,000 feet for raptors, and 3) one mile for golden eagle. No Project personnel or equipment shall be allowed to enter the protective buffer until the Qualified Biologist determines that the young have fully fledged and will no longer be adversely affected by the Project.

Biological Monitoring. A Qualified Biologist shall conduct two surveys for active nests within 14 days prior to the beginning of Project construction, with a final survey conducted within 48 hours prior to construction. Prior to construction, the Qualified Biologist shall also conduct baseline monitoring to characterize “normal” bird behavior. The qualified biologist will monitor the nesting birds daily during construction activities and increase the nest buffer if the birds show signs of unusual or distressed behavior (e.g., defensive flights and vocalizations, standing up from a brooding position, and/or flying away from the nest).

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COMMENT 4: Roosting Bats

Issue: Mitigation Measure BIO-6 may not be sufficient to reduce impacts to roosting bats to less-than-significant levels.

Specific impact: Bats utilize trees and other structures for roosting. If roosting bats are undetected during surveys and/or if minimization measures are not taken, then impacts from Project activities may still be potentially significant.

Why impact would occur: Project activities including pruning, tree removal, and building demolition may disturb, injure, or kill roosting bats if they occur within the Project site and are undetected during surveys.

Evidence impact would be significant: Project activities that result in the mortality of bats, such as the removal of occupied bat roosts or disturbance that causes the loss of a maternity colony or hibernating colony, may be considered "take" under California Fish and Game Code (Fish & G. Code, § 86). Bats are considered non-game mammals and are afforded protection by State law from take and/or harassment (Fish & G. Code, § 4150; Cal. Code of Regs, § 251.1). Furthermore, pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*) and western red bat (*Lasiurus blossevillii*) are California State Species of Special Concern (SSC), a status which qualifies each as rare, threatened, or endangered species under CEQA (CEQA Guidelines, § 15380).

To Reduce Impacts to a Less-Than-Significant Level: CDFW recommends the following modifications to Mitigation Measure BIO-6:

Bats and Tree Removal. Trees shall be removed only if:

1. Presence of bats is presumed or documented during habitat surveys, and removal using the two-step removal process detailed below and shall occur only during seasonal periods of bat activity, from approximately March 1 through April 15, and September 1 through October 15; or

2. After a qualified biologist conducts night emergence surveys to establish absence of roosting bats.

Two-step tree removal shall be conducted over two consecutive days. On the first day (in the afternoon), under the direct supervision and instruction by a qualified biologist with experience conducting two-step tree removal, limbs and branches shall be removed by a tree cutter using chainsaws only. Limbs with cavities, crevices, or deep bark fissures shall be avoided. On the second day the remainder of the tree shall be removed.

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Bats and Building Modifications. For modification of buildings, a qualified biologist shall conduct a survey for roosting bats within the Project proposed radius. If roosting bats are detected, a bat avoidance and exclusion plan shall be implemented. The plan shall recognize that both maternity and winter roosting seasons are vulnerable times for bats and require exclusion outside of these times, generally between March 1 and April 15, or September 1 and October 15 when temperatures are sufficiently warm. Work operations shall cease if bats are found roosting within the Project area, and CDFW shall be consulted.

ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

CEQA requires that information developed in environmental impact reports and negative declarations be incorporated into a database which may be used to make subsequent or supplemental environmental determinations. (Pub. Resources Code, § 21003, subd. (e).) Accordingly, please report any special-status species and natural communities detected during Project surveys to the CNDDB. The CNNDB field survey form can be filled out and submitted online at the following link: https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDB/Submitting-Data. The types of information reported to CNDDB can be found at the following link: https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDB/Plants-and-Animals.

CONCLUSION

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft EIR to assist CCRCD in identifying and mitigating Project impacts on biological resources. CDFW recommends the draft EIR be revised to incorporate the feasible recommended mitigation measures provided.

Questions regarding this letter or further coordination should be directed to Kristin Brandon, Environmental Scientist (Specialist), at (707) 428-2069 or Kristin.Brandon@wildlife.ca.gov; or Sara Kern, Senior Environmental Scientist, (Supervisory), at (916) 531-4465 or Sara.Kern@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:
Erin Chappell
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Erin Chappell
Regional Manager
Bay Delta Region

ec: Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (SCH No. 2024091084)
Melissa Farinha, CDFW Bay Delta Region - Melissa.Farinha@wildlife.ca.gov

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