

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION FROM ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Filed to: Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044
County Clerk of: San Mateo

Project Title: Portola Redwoods Fish Passage and Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

Project Location: Portola Redwoods State Park near La Honda, CA 94020
Latitude: 37.260896, Longitude: -122.214444

City and County: La Honda, San Mateo County

Description of Nature and Purpose of Project:

The Portola Redwoods Fish Passage and Creek Habitat Enhancement Project will restore ancestral migration and improve 1.1 miles of creek habitat to support the recovery of federally endangered coho salmon and federally threatened steelhead, as well as other native aquatic species. The Project will remove three fish passage barriers in the Pescadero Watershed within Portola Redwoods State Park, restoring access to more than 9 miles of creek habitat for migrating fish. These barriers are: 1) a large log jam on Peters Creek that has been in place for over a decade, made up of several large logs and creating an 8-foot vertical jump; 2) a 100-foot-long corrugated metal culvert on Evans Creek, located just upstream of the confluence with Peters Creek under the entrance road to the park; and 3) an abandoned, nearly 100 year old, 13-foot-high concrete dam on Evans Creek that is approximately 2,000 feet upstream of the confluence with Peters Creek. The Project will also strategically place large wood in both Evans and Peters creeks to improve habitat complexity, sort and store sediment, and enhance overall stream function.

Name of Person, Board, Commission or Department Proposing to Carry Out Project:

San Mateo Resource Conservation District
80 Stone Pine Road, Suite 100
Half Moon Bay, CA 94019

Lead Agency
Responsible Agency

Contact Person: Colleen McNally-Murphy Telephone: 650-712-7765 ext. 131

EXEMPT STATUS:

Categorical Exemption Class 33, Section 15333 (Small Habitat Restoration)

Remarks: See next page.

Date of Determination: March 23, 2026

I do hereby certify that the above determination has been made pursuant to State and Local requirements.



Colleen McNally-Murphy, Conservation Project Manager

REMARKS:

As described below, the Project meets the CEQA criteria for exemption from environmental review under Class 33, Section 15333. This section of the guidelines describes Small Habitat Restoration Projects that do not exceed 5 acres in size and are constructed for the purpose of maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, and wildlife.

This Project will restore access for federally endangered coho salmon and federally threatened steelhead to 9.3 miles of creek habitat, including 6.3 miles of critical habitat, by addressing three major fish passage barriers and improving habitat in adjacent areas. The Project is less than 4 acres in size and is for the purpose of habitat improvement for coho salmon, a federally and California endangered species, and steelhead, a federally threatened species and California species of special concern.

Project Description

The Project will restore ancestral migration and improve 1.1 miles of creek habitat to support the recovery of federally endangered coho salmon and federally threatened steelhead, as well as other native aquatic species. The Project will remove three major fish passage barriers in the Pescadero Watershed within Portola Redwoods State Park, restoring access to 9.3 miles of creek habitat for migrating fish. These barriers are 1) a large log jam on Peters Creek, made up of several large logs and creating an 8-foot vertical jump; 2) a 100-foot-long corrugated metal culvert on Evans Creek, located just upstream of the confluence with Peters Creek under the entrance road to the park; and 3) an abandoned 13-foot-high concrete dam on Evans Creek that is approximately 2,000 feet upstream of the confluence of Evans Creek into Peters Creek. All three barriers are noted in the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Passage Assessment Database as total barriers to fish passage.

This project will permanently remove the dam on Evans Creek, replace the culvert with a new crossing that meets CDFW and NOAA fish passage criteria, and dismantle and disperse the logjam. Collectively these three actions will restore fish passage in Peters Creek and Evans Creek, both of which provide high quality priority habitat for coho salmon and steelhead, including 6.3 combined miles of critical salmonid habitat.

In addition to restoring passage to these important tributaries, the project will enhance salmonid habitat quality through increased loading and distribution of strategically placed large wood. Wood removed from the logjam will be distributed downstream of the logjam to ensure that the existing instream wood is allowed to naturally move and aggregate downstream. In addition to distributing this existing instream wood, the project will also include direct felling of up to 32 pieces of additional redwood and Douglas fir trees on Evans Creek and Peters Creek to further enhance instream habitat complexity and promote the distribution, trapping, and sorting of natural sediment currently stored behind the Evans Creek dam and Peters Creek logjam. These added wood elements will be strategically placed and oriented to avoid forming new fish passage barriers, instead promoting habitat complexity, flow diversity, and stable wood accumulations. All new wood placed in Peters Creek will either be downstream of the current logjam site or far enough upstream that if the new wood mobilizes it will likely be caught up on one of the multiple meanders well upstream. It is important to note that the existing jam has formed at the tightest meander on Peters Creek and it contains at least 4 key wood pieces that appear to be significantly larger in terms of diameter and total length than any of the trees we will be felling for this project. In addition to the trees to be felled, one engineered wood structure will be installed on Peters Creek just below the confluence with Evans Creek to capture sediment mobilized by the dam and culvert removals and to help build up a layer of cobble and fines on the exposed bedrock in Peters Creek.

The Pescadero Creek watershed, including the Peters Creek subbasin, has been identified in numerous reports and assessments as being prime habitat for coho salmon and steelhead recovery. The Peters Creek sub-watershed drains approximately 5,900 acres in the Pescadero Creek. The Peters Creek sub-watershed drains approximately 5,900 acres in the Pescadero Creek watershed. Evans Creek is a tributary to Peters Creek, and its sub-watershed comprises 643 acres of that. The 2012 NOAA Fisheries coho salmon recovery plan includes the entire Pescadero watershed but specifically calls out Peters and Evans Creeks as Phase I priority area for coho salmon habitat protection and restoration. Similarly, the 2016 NOAA Fisheries Coastal Multispecies Plan for CCC steelhead lists Pescadero Creek as a top restoration priority (level A) and rates. The plan identifies placement of log/boulder habitat structures as a key recovery action to improve instream habitat quality and quantity.

The project objectives will be accomplished through implementation of the following actions:

Evans Creek Dam

- Clear brush and debris from the historic wagon road used to access the dam site, stabilizing it as needed.
- Wet down dam and adjacent uplands with a pump and fire hose in a 20-yd radius near the dam as fire and dust mitigation.
- Demolish the dam with explosives, restoring an open channel and mobilizing a 260-ft long sediment wedge containing high-value coarse sediment including gravels and cobbles.
- Collect and remove any steel rebar remaining after demolitions, disposing of it off-site.

Evans Creek Culvert

The final design for the new creek crossing is still being determined and will either be a free-span bridge or an expanded culvert that meets passage requirements. The actions here reflect the highest-impact option.

- Fell trees that have grown into the culvert fill prism or that are growing in the path of the temporary access road.
- Dewater the creek and divert flow through a pipe that bypasses construction and re-enters Evans Creek below the culvert.
- Construct a temporary one-lane access road or a temporary bridge to allow traffic through the site during construction.
- Dismantle the existing road crossing and remove fill material from the creek channel, disposing of soil spoils either in approved locations within Portola Redwoods State Park or off-site.
- Construct the permanent bridge or culvert.
- Remove 4-ft diameter, 100-ft-long corrugated metal culvert from the creek channel and dispose of it off-site.
- Construction may need to take place over two summer /fall construction seasons to accommodate marbled murrelet and in-stream work windows. If necessary, the project will be winterized between seasons.

Peters Creek Logjam

- Clear a trail through brush to access logjam location, if large equipment access is necessary.
- Cut large logs forming the jam into movable pieces and distribute them downstream, restoring an open channel and mobilizing a 540-ft long sediment wedge that contains high quality coarse sediment that will provide significant ecological benefits downstream.
- Cover the trail with slash and revegetate as necessary after construction.

Large Wood Installation

- Direct fell up to 12 pieces of redwood and fir trees into Evans Creek and up to 14 pieces into Peters Creek, helping to capture sediment mobilized by the dam removal, logjam removal, and other sources to collectively address channel incision resulting from historic logging activities and wood removal that has left the low gradient, high salmonid intrinsic potential reaches of Evans and Peters creek with exposed bedrock conditions.
- Relocate wood pieces from the Peters Creek logjam downstream around the tight bend in the creek and place them in strategic locations to capture high quality sediment mobilized by the logjam dispersal.
- Install 6 pieces of redwood and fir at engineered wood structure located on Peters Creek just below the confluence with Evans Creek. The structure will be anchored by embedding the base of key logs into the right bank and using hardware to fortify boulder/log and log/log connections. A trail will be cleared down from the road to the structure and covered with slash afterwards to prevent erosion.

Construction will occur within established environmental work windows and may span multiple seasons. All temporarily disturbed areas, including access routes, will be restored following construction. Construction best management practices and avoidance and minimization measures will be followed to reduce impacts to sensitive species and habitats. The project will result in greatly enhanced habitat connectivity and function.

Class 33 (CEQA State Guidelines, Section 15333) Small Habitat Restoration Projects

Class 33 consists of projects not to exceed five acres in size to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife. The following four bullets list the criteria for projects to meet Categorical Exemption 15333 as described in the CEQA Statute and Guidelines.

(a) There would be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 15065.

The proposed Project is specifically designed to benefit threatened fish and other native aquatic species. The Project will restore ancestral migration access to 7.2 miles of habitat, including 5.9 miles of critical habitat, and provide the diversity of habitat fish need to forage, take refuge, rest, rear, and spawn. The Project will implement fish passage and creek enhancement designs that address priorities in various recovery and management plans, including the NOAA Fisheries Coastal Multispecies Recovery Plan and actions for the Evolutionary Significant Unit of Central California Coast coho salmon, the

CDFW Updated Statewide Task List for Steelhead Restoration and Management Plan for California (2013), and the State Wildlife Action Plan. Designs will incorporate methods in the CDFW California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual (2010) and NMFS Guidelines for Salmonid Passage at Stream Crossings (2010). The Project will also implement a key recommendation from the Water Board's 2019 Pescadero-Butano Watershed Sediment TMDL through large wood installation. The RCD has completed similar fish passage projects in the region and will utilize successful design and construction techniques to plan and implement this project.

To the maximum extent possible, temporary and localized impacts to sensitive habitats will be minimized by implementing avoidance and minimization measures and construction-related best management practices. Construction within the creek will occur during the dry season, minimizing the potential for any construction-related effects on aquatic species. The area around the dam will be wetted down before demolition to reduce the chance of fire. Disturbed areas will be winterized and re-vegetated as needed following construction. The project will not degrade the quality of the environment and would not substantially reduce the habitat or threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community; substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of any endangered, rare or threatened species; or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory.

(b) There are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed.

There are no known hazardous materials at the site or project vicinity based on site investigations.

(c) The project will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.

The proposed project will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with effects of past, current, and probable future projects. Overall, the project will improve fish habitat in the creek. There are no known or planned overlapping projects in the vicinity that would have environmental impacts to which the proposed project would add cumulatively.

(d) The primary purpose of this project is ecological restoration, fish passage, and habitat complexity.

The project would be exempt under the above-cited classifications as it involves restoration of Peters Creek and Evans Creek for the primary purpose of habitat improvement for native fish through remediation of two passage barriers and enhancement of 1.1 miles of creek. The goals of this project are to restore fish passage to 9.3 miles of creek habitat and enhance creek habitat.

CEQA State Guidelines Section 15300.2 states that a categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances. As described above, there are no unusual circumstances surrounding the proposed project that would suggest a reasonable possibility for a significant environmental effect.