APPENDIX D

Procedure for the Programmatic Evaluation of Paleontological Resources for the 2026 Fisheries Restoration Grant Program Mitigated Negative Declaration Project

There shall be three phases to the process of investigating paleontological resources: 1) project initiation where basic data will be compiled, reviewed, and sorted to determine the next steps that need to be taken on any given project; 2) evaluation of individual projects that may encounter paleontological resources; and 3) mitigation planning to develop mitigation strategies for projects that have identified paleontological resources. The three phases are summarized below.

Project Initiation

The logistics and time needed for conducting paleontological evaluations shall be assessed in the project initiation phase. The guidelines outlined below will facilitate rapid evaluation of individual projects and ensure cooperation among evaluators, pertinent agencies, and landowners. Landowner cooperation is through property access and local area information. The evaluation procedure generally follows standards implemented by other agencies conducting ground disturbance activities such as CalTrans.

Evaluation of the likelihood of encountering paleontological resources and land management issues shall be assessed by adhering to the following guidelines and the corresponding actions:

1. If the project does not involve ground disturbing work, then a negative declaration report shall be prepared.

2. If the project involves ground disturbing work and there is no likelihood of encountering paleontological resources, then a negative declaration report shall be prepared. However, if there is a likelihood of encountering paleontological resources at the project site, then the evaluator schedules a field investigation by contacting the CDFW grant manager and having them arrange landowner access for the paleontological resource field staff; and if necessary, arrange a meeting with the landowners and the paleontological resources investigation field staff.

3. If the project involves land administered by the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, the US Army Corps of Engineers, the Native American tribal lands, or the California Department of Parks and Recreation, then the paleontology report containing site forms, site significance, and mitigation measures shall be coordinated with the involved entities. However, if those agencies are not involved, then the paleontology report with all pertinent information (site forms, site significance, mitigation measures or negative declarations) shall be provided to the CDFW and to the CDFW grant manager.

Individual Project Evaluation

The appropriate regional archaeological information center shall be contacted for a record search and the Native American Heritage Commission shall also be contacted for a Sacred Lands File Check. If paleontological resources are likely to be present, then qualified staff shall evaluate the paleontological resources in coordination with any affected agencies including any affected Native American tribe. If paleontological resources are present, then the evaluator will (1) delineate the extent and type of resources present, (2) discuss any issues with pertinent agencies, Native American tribes, project managers, and local experts with regards to potential mitigation planning, and (3) develop a mitigation plan designed to protect sensitive paleontological resources. However, if no resources are present, then a negative declaration report shall be prepared.

Mitigation Planning

Mitigation plans shall be developed to avoid or lessen impacts to the resource if paleontological resources are discovered at any project site. These mitigation plans shall be consistent with current mitigation strategies employed by other entities conducting CEQA investigations. The initial investigation report, along with mitigation recommendations, shall be compiled and delivered to the appropriate CDFW grant/contract manager and the project manager of the proposed project in question. Minimum report elements shall include:

1. Project description and location.
2. Results of the investigation.
3. Mitigation recommendations and plans.
4. Maps depicting project location and paleontological resource locations.