

SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESTORATION AUTHORITY

Staff Recommendation
June 18, 2021

COYOTE HILLS RESTORATION AND PUBLIC ACCESS PROJECT

Project No. RA-012
Project Manager: Shalini Kannan

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$3,500,000 to the East Bay Regional Park District to implement habitat restoration and public access improvements on a 205-acre portion of the Coyote Hills Regional Park expansion in the City of Fremont, Alameda County.

LOCATION: Coyote Hills Regional Park, City of Fremont, Alameda County; Measure AA Region: East Bay

MEASURE AA PROGRAM CATEGORY: Vital Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program; Shoreline Public Access Program.

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [December 6, 2019 SFBRA Staff Recommendation](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Project Designs and Photographs](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [Site Layout Map](#)
 - Exhibit 5: [Project Letters](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority adopt the following resolution and findings:

Resolution:

The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed three million, five hundred thousand dollars (\$3,500,000) to East Bay Regional Park District to implement the Coyote Hills Restoration and Public Access Project, which includes restoration of wet meadow, willow thicket, mixed riparian forest, oak savanna,

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grasslands, and seasonal wetland habitats, as well as installation of public access facilities on the new portion of Coyote Hills Regional Park, in the City of Fremont, Alameda County. Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Authority the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Authority funding.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
5. Evidence that the grantee has entered into a project labor agreement consistent with San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Resolution 22.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Act, Gov. Code Sections 66700-66706.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with The San Francisco Bay Clean Water, Pollution Prevention and Habitat Restoration Measure (Measure AA).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority (Authority) disburse up to \$3,500,000 to the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) to implement the Coyote Hills Restoration and Public Access Project (“the project”) in Coyote Hills Regional Park in the City of Fremont (Exhibit 1). This project will implement the design and planning work funded by the Authority on December 6, 2019 (Exhibit 2). The proposed construction will increase the area and habitat quality of wet meadow, seasonal wetland, willow thicket and mixed riparian forest, and establish oak savannah grasslands habitat, riparian forest, and seasonal wetlands. The project will also install over 4 miles of trails, wildlife overlooks, parking, restrooms, picnic areas, interpretive exhibits, and an outdoor classroom for environmental education and naturalist programs as well as volunteer opportunities (Exhibit 3).

Coyote Hills Regional Park presents a combination of habitats that is now rare along the San Francisco Bay shoreline. At its western boundary along San Francisco Bay, are salt ponds and open waters immediately adjacent to hills which provide upland habitats, stunning views, and recreational trails. Moving inland from the hills, the Park provides a flatter plain with a mosaic of brackish, fresh, and seasonal wetlands and willow groves as well as an extensive trail network. EBRPD acquired the former agricultural area adjacent to the Park’s eastern boundary and is planning for habitat enhancement and restoration, as well as recreational features to be integrated into the existing Park, as described in Exhibit 2. The project will enlarge and protect the Park’s diverse habitat, restoring some of the ecological features that were historically part of the Bay

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shore. The project will also provide community benefits including increased and improved recreational opportunities, public access, and safety.

The project will take place on approximately 205 acres north and south of Patterson Ranch Road, demarcated by areas A, B, C, E in Exhibit 4. Approximately 11 acres will be used for parking, picnic areas, and the new trail network. The Alameda Creek Trail and San Francisco Bay Trail converge at the project site, and the project will provide a destination node in these regional trails that is currently missing. In line with the site's historic agricultural use, approximately 34 acres will continue to be farmed organically, and integrated into overarching habitat, public access and environmental education goals of the project. Finally, the project will close wells that remain from the site's historic agricultural operations because they present a risk for surface water to contaminate ground water.

The 11-acre Patterson Slough area, as noted in the *Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Science Update* (2015), supports freshwater seasonal wetlands, grasslands, and the largest remaining willow groves in the baylands ecosystem (Area E in Exhibit 4). When restored and enhanced, this area will allow for marsh migration upwards as sea level rise causes the water table to rise. The remaining 149 acres of the project site will be restored and enhanced based on results of studies conducted in the planning phase around historical ecology, vegetation test plots, and soil and drainage conditions that currently occur and are expected to change with climate change and sea level rise. Restoration activities will include soil/ fill import, grading, revegetation via planting and seeding, and installation of buffers, fencing, gates and paths to secure habitat and facilitate maintenance and operations. Planned restoration actions will transform existing ruderal weedy lands into diverse habitats that increase plant and animal diversity, and provide enhanced areas for upland refugia, overwintering, and raptor forage. Construction is slated to begin in the summer of 2022.

The Coyote Hills Restoration and Public Access Project has broad public support (see letters in Exhibit 5). Community and public meetings and workshops were held during the planning phase according to EBRPD's Public Outreach and Participation Plan for Coyote Hills Restoration & Public Access Project. Ongoing public outreach and engagement for the project will continue per this framework. EBRPD communicates closely with its partners on the project, Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (ACFCWCD) and the City of Fremont and will continue to engage them throughout the project's development. EBRPD is also partnering with San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI), one of California's premier aquatic and ecosystem science institutes, to carry out a pre- and post-project assessment of the wetlands within the project area. EBRPD will also leverage its long-standing relationship with Civicorps, a certified local Conservation Corps, on this project.

EBRPD owns and operates over 121,000 acres of parklands, open space and trails. These areas include 73 regional parks, recreation areas, wilderness, shorelines, preserves and land banks, and 31 completed regional trails and numerous inter-park trails covering 1,250 miles within parklands. EBRPD is governed by an elected seven-member board, and it has the resources, expertise and track record for successfully delivering large complex restoration and public access projects. The Coyote Hills Restoration and Public Access project will be incorporated into EBRPD's well-maintained parks system, with long term operations and maintenance provided by EBRPD staff and funded from the EBRPD's General Fund.

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Site Description:

Coyote Hills Regional Park is located in the northwest corner of the City of Fremont in Alameda County, east of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), and north of State Route 84. Today the park spans 1,266 acres. Of the 306-acre park expansion area most recently acquired by EBRPD, approximately 101 acres occur alongside and south of Zone 5 Line P- Ardenwood Creek (area D on Site Layout Map in Exhibit 1). This wetland area is being restored and managed for flood control by the ACFCWCD and is not a part of this project. The remaining 205-acres is the project area. To the east, the urban edge presents expanding business parks, which have increased visitor demand and usage at Coyote Hills Regional Park in recent years. Further site history, acquisition history, and existing environmental conditions are described in the December 2019 SFBRA Staff Recommendation (Exhibit 2).

PROJECT FINANCING

San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority	\$3,500,000
East Bay Regional Park District	\$2,221,964
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	\$2,000,000
California Natural Resources Agency	\$800,000
Additional Funding (to be secured)	\$2,270,000
Project Total	\$10,791,964

In addition to Authority funds towards implementation of the project, EBRPD is leveraging agency, state, and federal funds towards the project as itemized above. EBRPD general funds are being used for construction management and engineering design support. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency funds are from the San Francisco Bay Water Quality Improvement Fund, and California Natural Resources Agency funds are via their Proposition 68 River Parkways Grant Program for public access. Additionally, San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) will provide \$50,000 through in-kind work on the project.

The Authority provided EBRPD with a \$450,000 grant in the project’s design and planning phase. This authorization would build on the Authority’s previous planning investment, helping bring the benefits of project implementation to fruition.

Potential sources of additional funding which EBRPD has applied to include California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Proposition 1 funds, and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s National Coastal Resilience Fund.

CONSISTENCY WITH AUTHORITY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION, THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESTORATION AUTHORITY ACT:

The proposal is consistent with Section 66704.5(a), (b), and (e) of the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Act.

Under section 66704.5(a), “[t]he Authority may award grants to public and private entities, including, but not limited to, owners and operators of shoreline parcels in the San Francisco Bay

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area, excluding the Delta primary zone, for eligible projects in the counties within the authority's jurisdiction." EBRPD is a public agency that owns and operates shoreline parcels in the East Bay region of the San Francisco Bay area.

Under section 66704.5(b), "[a]n eligible project shall do at least one of the following: (1) Restore, protect, or enhance tidal wetlands, managed ponds, or natural habitats on the shoreline in the San Francisco Bay area, excluding the Delta primary zone...(3) Provide or improve public access or recreational amenities that are part of a project to restore, enhance, or protect tidal wetlands, managed ponds, or natural habitats..." The proposed project will implement habitat restoration and public access features adjacent to San Francisco Bay. The restoration component of the project includes removal of invasive plants, revegetation, and grading to restore wet meadow, willow thicket, mixed riparian forest, oak savanna, grasslands, and seasonal wetland habitats along the shoreline of the Bay. The public access component of the project includes creating a new parking lot, restrooms, picnic area, interpretive exhibits, and up to 4 miles of trail and wildlife overlooks, including new linkages to the San Francisco Bay Trail and the Alameda Creek Trail.

Under section 66704.5(e), "[g]rants awarded pursuant to subdivision (a) may be used to support all phases of planning, construction, monitoring, operation, and maintenance for projects that are eligible pursuant to subdivision (b)." The proposed project is a construction project which includes monitoring and is consistent with this section.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES:

The proposed project is consistent with the programs and activities of Measure AA, as outlined below:

The project is consistent with the *Vital Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program's* purpose by significantly improving wildlife habitat that will support and increase vital populations of fish, birds, and other wildlife around the Bay by restoring native shoreline habitats in a shoreline park to benefit wildlife, including shorebirds and waterfowl. Restoration of rare habitat, including the Patterson Slough area corridor and others described in the Project Summary section above, as well as the area's connectivity with adjacent open spaces, will provide an enhanced and enlarged habitat area for birds and other wildlife in the San Francisco Bay. As the project area will be incorporated into EBRPD's parks system, stewardship, maintenance and monitoring of this area will be ongoing, providing benefits to wildlife and people in perpetuity.

The project will help implement the *Shoreline Public Access Program's* purpose of enhancing the quality of life of Bay Area residents through safer and improved public access, as part of and compatible with wildlife habitat restoration projects in and around the Bay. The project will install a new parking lot, restrooms, picnic area, outdoor classroom, wildlife overlooks, interpretive exhibits, and up to 4 miles of trail that EBRPD will manage once constructed. All of the public trails within the new park area will be accessible and compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements. The planned trails and interpretative exhibits will be integrated into the many cultural and natural history educational programs for the community currently offered at Coyote Hills Regional Park.

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CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA:

1. **Greatest positive impact.** This project will result in the preservation, enhancement, expansion and permanent protection of a unique and integrated ecosystem complex. The large and valuable habitats of Coyote Hills Regional Park are immediately adjacent to the tidal marsh and transition zone habitats at Eden Landing Ecological Preserve and the Refuge. Together these lands will form one of the most important wildlife habitat complexes in the greater San Francisco Bay area, providing a large number of additional ecosystem functions and benefits, including sea level rise buffering of urban areas to the east, floodwater detention and storm-water water quality treatment, and public education on all of these topics through educational displays along the proposed trail network. The project was designed by a multi-disciplinary team of professional engineers, biologists, ecologists, hydrologists, and cultural and natural resource planners, using the best available science. Significant outreach was conducted to incorporate public feedback into the projects' goals and objectives, including balancing public access with habitat restoration.
2. **Greatest long-term impact.** EBRPD prioritized planning for sea level rise and climate change impacts in the project's design. Plantings will be targeted to the array of elevations, soil, and drainage conditions that currently occur and are expected to change. Vegetation test plot studies have been conducted since 2018 to inform the planting palette, and a wide variety of species will be planted so that restored areas can adapt to changing conditions by favoring those plants that best tolerate the conditions of any given area and time. The project will install soil sensors and shallow groundwater monitoring wells that are part of a larger network jointly run by ACFCWCD and Alameda County Water District, used to inform management decisions regarding saltwater aquifer intrusion. These wells, combined with project-specific shallow monitoring wells, will provide information on Bay salinity and groundwater intrusion in this area caused by sea level rise. A comprehensive monitoring program will be implemented to ensure the establishment of target habitat, inform adaptive management decisions, and guide any replacement planting or habitat boundary adjustments needed. Additionally, the project's public access improvements will have a great long-term impact by strengthening residents' connection and access to the bay and bay shoreline, fostering future generations of bay stewards.
3. **Leveraging resources and partnerships.** See PROJECT FINANCING section above.
4. **Economically disadvantaged communities.** Though the project's census tract does not contain any residential dwellings, many neighborhoods surround it, including one directly adjacent disadvantaged community (census tract 6001437101). Coyote Hills is also within a four-mile radius of four additional DACs, and the park improvements would benefit visitors from these communities.
5. **Benefits to economy.** In addition to providing job training through Civicorps engagement, implementation of the project will contribute to job growth. For example, EBRPD's recently completed Dotson Family Marsh project had 396 construction workers 35 consultants who participated in the project over 3 years. With the proposed project, 205-acres of parkland will

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be opened to the public, and along with that will be the recreation and habitat features that will add economic value for the community.

6. **Engage youth and young adults.** Coyote Hills Regional Park currently offers many educational programs to the community, with a special emphasis on elementary school groups. The proposed project will expand the park by approximately 205-acres and add an outdoor classroom, presenting the opportunity for additional Naturalist-led programs that may focus on cultural, natural, and tribal history, the restored habitat, climate-smart park features, and bird/wildlife programs.
7. **Monitoring, maintenance, and stewardship.** The monitoring of the project will be based on methodologies being applied by SFEI for other Bay Area project sites in support of the Wetland Regional Monitoring Program. After implementation, long term maintenance and stewardship will be provided by EBRPD staff and funded from the EBRPD's General Fund. Ongoing monitoring will utilize new technologies for efficient and effective documentation of changing site conditions over time. Baseline low-level aerial photography will be acquired using a drone to document pre-existing conditions, with additional photography collected each year to document weed abatement success, invasive weed threat, and effectiveness of restoration and management actions. Soil sensors will be installed in several field locations at three depths to detect and soil moisture, pH, salinity, nitrogen, phosphorus, oxygen, and carbon dioxide, and record and transmit this data wirelessly.
8. **Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.** The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program's Criteria:
 - a. The project is supported by local and regional plans including: *East Bay Regional Park District Master Plan and the Coyote Hills LUP; Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Update (2015); California State Wildlife Action Plan; City of Fremont General Plan, Climate Action Plan, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans; Alameda County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, and Water District Urban Water Management Plan; BCDC Bay Plan, and Adapting to Rising Tides (North of Alameda Creek); ABAG Bay Trail Plan; Don Edwards SF Bay National Wildlife Refuge Weed Management Plan and Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan; CDFW Eden Landing Ecological Reserve Restoration and Management Plan.*
 - b. The proposed project serves a regional constituency including Alameda County Residents, and the Bay Area as a whole.
 - c. The project can also be implemented in a timely way, with project construction estimated to start in June 2022.
 - d. The project includes matching funds from the East Bay Regional Park District, USEPA, and California Natural Resources Agency.
9. **San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's Coastal Management Program.** The project is consistent with the habitat restoration, climate change resilience,

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and creating resource-compatible public access goals of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission's *Bay Plan*.

10. **San Francisco Bay Joint Venture's Implementation Strategy.** The project is on the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture's 2017 Priority Project list.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

On December 6, 2019 the Authority adopted findings pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the Coyote Hills Restoration and Public Access Project proposed for funding in this recommendation. Authority staff filed Notices of Determination with the State of California and the County of Alameda on December 13, 2019. There have not been any project changes, new information, or changed circumstances that require additional analysis under CEQA. Therefore, this authorization remains consistent with the December 6, 2019 findings.