SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESTORATION AUTHORITY

Staff Recommendation
June 12, 2026

NAPA RIVER ESTUARY ENHANCEMENT AND PUBLIC ACCESS PROJECT

Project No. RA-050
Project Manager: Susan Glendening

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to $600,000 to the Napa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District to conduct outreach and prepare designs, environmental documentation, and permit applications for the Napa River Estuary Enhancement and Public Access Project, consisting of restoring 46 acres of tidal wetlands, converting an unused barn to an interpretative center, and redeveloping an existing levee to serve as a pedestrian trail located in the Napa River estuary south of the City of Napa's urbanized limit in Napa County.

LOCATION: Napa River Wetlands, Napa County; Measure AA Region: North Bay

MEASURE AA PROGRAM CATEGORY: Safe, Clean Water and Pollution Prevention Program; Vital Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program; Integrated Flood Protection Program; Shoreline Public Access Program.

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Maps

Exhibit 2: Project Photographs

Exhibit 3: Project Letters

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 six hundred thousand dollars ($600,000) to Napa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District to conduct outreach and prepare designs, environmental documentation, and permit applications for restoring 46 acres of tidal wetlands, converting an unused barn to an interpretative center, and redeveloping an existing levee to serve as a pedestrian trail in the Napa River estuary south of the City of Napa's urbanized limit in Napa 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 employed in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Authority funding.

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 Authority authorize the disbursement of up to $600,000 to the Napa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (District) to conduct outreach and prepare designs, environmental documentation, and permit applications (collectively referred to as the project) for the Napa River Estuary Enhancement and Public Access Project, consisting of restoring 46 acres of tidal wetlands, converting an unused barn to an interpretative center, and redeveloping an existing levee to serve as a pedestrian trail in the Napa River estuary. The project site is located within the South Wetlands Opportunity Area (SWOA), which is a 1,230-acre floodplain and tidal wetland restoration area along the Napa River (Exhibit 1). In 2024, the District acquired the project site with a grant from the State Coastal Conservancy.

The total project area is about 57 acres, which consists of 46 acres of land formerly managed as a privately-owned vineyard, an additional six acres with a barn next to the vineyard area, and a levee surrounding the former vineyard and barn, referred to as the levee loop, and another levee segment that runs from the northern end of the levee loop to the City of Napa's (City) urbanized edge, referred to as the levee segment (roughly 4,450 linear feet (about five acres)). The levees are expected to be used for construction access and then redeveloped as a public trail (Exhibits 1 & 2). The project concept plan has three major elements: (1) strategically breach the levee loop to passively restore Napa River's tidal flow through the former vineyard area; (2) repurpose the existing barn as an interpretive center; and (3) redevelop the levee loop and the levee segment for public access, including a footbridge at each of the breach sites along the levee loop.

The project entails developing design plans and specifications, environmental review documents sufficient for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and permit applications. District staff will oversee consultants' work to design the project, conduct biological surveys, and prepare a public outreach plan. District staff will prepare CEQA documentation and permit applications to agencies.

Throughout the planning and design process (including environmental review) the District staff will reach out to the community for input consistent with a public outreach plan to be prepared

with the project. The target audiences for the plan will include local community groups, residents, and tribes. Similar to public outreach for the District's other projects, the public outreach plan for this project will likely entail a range of opportunities for public participation through community events (e.g., Earth Day festival), public meetings (e.g., public workshops and other public forums), and print and social media articles and messages. Some of the elements the District intends to address through public outreach include recreational features for a trail network, an interpretive center, a kayak launch, and wildlife observation and lookout points. Based on community feedback, the District will oversee the development of preliminary concept alternatives and ultimately a preferred alternative.

The District is also consulting with tribes for design of the project. Specifically, two tribes that are culturally affiliated with the project area have expressed interest in consulting on the project design and implementation, particularly for the interpretive center to have themes focusing on the tribes' cultural knowledge about the area and habitat, land acknowledgements, and historical information.

Once constructed, the project area will serve as a public open space. The City and the Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District (Parks District) will manage and maintain the public access areas and interpretive center as free public amenities. The San Francisco Bay Trail reach along West Imola Avenue in the City of Napa is about one-half mile north of the public access trailhead that would be at the end of South Jefferson Street, making the project site readily accessible for walking and biking from the Bay Trail. The District anticipates the interpretive center will serve as a new resource for Native American cultural history and natural history of the project area. Once constructed, the project will connect to and serve the City's Economically Disadvantaged Communities (EDC), defined by the Authority as communities with a median household income less than 80% of the area median income.

Separate from the public park functions at the project site, once constructed, the District will implement long-term monitoring and management of the floodplain and wetlands at the project site by following its existing stream maintenance program (SMP). The SMP, which is vetted and authorized by the regulatory agencies, addresses a host of monitoring and management measures designed to protect the functions and values of the Napa River including restored tidal wetlands. Under the SMP, the District routinely surveys Napa River and its tributaries each year and performs maintenance such as clearing log jams and regrading sediment, as needed, as well as vegetation management such as monitoring for invasive species. If needed, the District would actively manage or eradicate invasive species. Consistent with the SMP, adaptive management may include mechanical, chemical, or grazing methods. The least impactful method would be selected to avoid and minimize impacts to natural resources and water quality.

As the District's primary partners on the project, the City and the Parks District endorsed the project in letters of support to the Authority, and the project is also endorsed by the Napa County Board of Supervisors (Exhibit 3). Another major partner is the Napa County Resource Conservation District, which will prepare a public outreach plan for the project and assist the District in public outreach implementation.

The District has a long history of successfully developing and implementing plans for complex projects through sustained collaboration with community members, agencies, and stakeholders. In particular, the project site is within the South Wetlands Opportunity Area (SWOA), all of

which, except for the project site, was restored in 2001 as part of the Napa River/Napa Creek Flood Control Project (Flood Control Project). The identification of the SWOA emerged from the "Living River Strategy," a nature-based river management strategy developed in 1996 through a collaborative process between the District and approximately 400 participants representing 40 agencies, community groups, residents, and property owners. This partnership-driven approach reflects the District's commitment to a living river system that supports flood protection, ecosystem health, water quality, and recreation while earning strong and lasting public support.

Site Description: The project site is about 57 acres consisting of 46 acres formerly managed as a privately-owned cultivated vineyard on former alluvial floodplains and bay tidal marshlands, and an additional six acres consisting of the area with the barn and the existing levee loop surrounding the former vineyard and the adjacent barn. An additional segment of existing levee connecting the levee loop to the City's southern urbanized edge at South Jefferson Street (Exhibit 1) would also be redeveloped as a public trail (4,450 linear feet; five acres). The project site is bordered by the City to the north, Napa River including a wide floodplain referred to as the SWOA to the east, State Routes (SRs) 12/29 and agricultural land parcels to the south, and SRs 121/29 to the west. The project is an un-restored part of the Napa River SWOA (Exhibit 1). The current project will plan for restoration of the project area to tidal flow, adding additional functioning wetland to the existing habitat within the SWOA.

A mosaic of habitat types has established within the SWOA including brackish marsh, tidal mudflat, and transition zone habitat that support a diverse array of aquatic and terrestrial wildlife. The ultimate restoration of the site following implementation of the project plans is expected to result in additional suitable habitat for California native species. These include special status species such as Central California Coast steelhead, California Ridgway's rail, and salt marsh harvest mouse. Additionally, over 63 species of native resident and migratory birds have been documented in the SWOA, including American kestrel, Wilson snipe, black-necked stilt, white-tailed kite, peregrine falcon, red-tailed hawk and long-billed dowitcher. Approximately three acres in the northeast corner of the project site already support brackish marsh including large stands of pickleweed and California saltbrush, which are important for the native wildlife in the area.

PROJECT FINANCING

San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority	$600,000
District funding	$90,000
Project Total	**$690,000**

Authority grant funding would cover District staff time, consultant costs for restoration planning and design, work to inform CEQA documentation and permitting, and expenses related to community engagement. Additional funding to complete the planning project will be provided by the District.

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

The proposed project is consistent with Government Code Section 66704.5 of the Authority's enabling legislation, and therefore is eligible for grant funding from the Authority. The project location is within the Authority's jurisdiction, as defined by Government Code Section 66704.5(a). The project area, which includes lands that would be tidal wetlands in the absence of development and related uplands within the SWOA in Napa County, is on the shoreline of the San Francisco Bay area and is outside of the Delta primary zone. The District meets the grantee eligibility criteria defined in Government Code Section 66704.5(a). Consistent with Government Code Section 66704.5(b), the project will plan: the restoration of tidal wetlands that will increase habitat for native species and expand the Napa River floodplain; and as part of the restoration, improve public access and recreation by adding a public trail that will be readily accessible to community members and is about one half mile from the San Francisco Bay Trail, and by creating an interpretative center. Funding this planning project is consistent with Section 66704.5(e), which allows the Authority to award grants for "all phases of planning, construction, monitoring, operation, and maintenance" of eligible projects. 66704.5. (a) The Authority may raise funds and award grants to public and private entities, including, but not limited to, owners and operators of shoreline parcels in the San Francisco Bay area, excluding the Delta primary zone, for eligible projects in the counties within the authority's jurisdiction.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES:

The proposed project, which will create plans for future implementation, is consistent with the programs and activities of Measure AA, as outlined below:

The project will support the *Safe, Clean Water and Pollution Prevention Program's* purpose of providing clean water for fish, birds, wildlife and people, through planning for the restoration of 46 acres of wetlands that provide natural filters and remove pollution from the Bay's water.

The project will help implement the *Vital Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program's* purpose of significantly improving wildlife habitat to support and increase vital populations of fish, birds, and other wildlife in and around the Bay by planning for the re-integration of the restored area into the surrounding Napa River SWOA. As noted above in Project Summary, the SWOA is habitat for dozens of native aquatic and wildlife species, including special-status species. The project will also plan for the stewardship, maintenance, and monitoring of habitat restoration through repurposing a barn as an interpretive center and constructing trails and footbridges that will bring people into the SWOA.

The project is consistent with the goals of the *Integrated Flood Protection Program* to protect communities from coastal flooding. Advancing the project plans to implementation would incrementally increase flood flow capacity which may alleviate sea level rise effects, thereby helping to reduce flooding that could help protect the City to the north, and State Routes 121 and 29 to the west of the project site.

The *Shoreline Public Access Program's* purpose is to enhance 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 plan for the first developed trail in the SWOA for public access to enjoy this critical and beautiful habitat. The interpretive center will also provide opportunities for public education and stewardship of tidal wetland

habitats and the District is consulting with tribes for potentially developing a focus on traditional Native American land stewardship and cultural practices at the interpretive center.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA:

1. **Greatest positive impact.** The project site is the last remaining area to be reintegrated with Napa River's tidal estuary through implementing the SWOA, which was conceptualized in the "Living River Strategy" memorandum of 1996. Specifically, a "living" Napa River system functions properly when it conveys variable flows and stores water in the floodplain, balances sediment input with sediment transport, provides good quality fish and wildlife habitat, maintains good water quality and quantity and provides recreation and aesthetic values.

   The project will therefore increase the benefits provided already by the SWOA, including habitat for native species such as salt marsh harvest mouse, California Ridgway's rail, and dozens of native resident and migratory bird species and other native biota. If implemented, the project will add incremental capacity to high flow events in the SWOA, which could help reduce the potential for bank scour on levees that protect roads to the west and south. The project also increases access to public open through developing a trail and enhancing a visitor's experience with an interpretive center to be converted from a barn at the site.

   The project is consistent with the *Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals, Science Update 2015* (*Bayland Goals*), Regional Strategy 2 – Design complexity and connectivity into the baylands landscape; Regional Strategy 3 – Restore and protect complete tidal wetlands systems; and Regional Strategy 8 – Invest in planning, policy, research, and monitoring as key elements of implementing; and supports the *Bayland Goals'* North Bay Subregion Landscape Vision to "Reconnect major tributaries … to extant tidal wetlands well into the watersheds. Restore riparian corridors, including floodplains, to connect the baylands to the lower watersheds."

   The project is also consistent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *Recovery Plan for Tidal Marsh Ecosystems of Northern and Central California*, because if implemented, it would increase habitat of Ridgway's rail and saltmarsh harvest mouse, both of which have been documented in the SWOA.

2. **Greatest long-term impact.** Implementation of the project plans will support natural flow and sediment transport functions in the river while maintaining the flood risk reduction goals designed originally with the SWOA and the Flood Control Project. The project, if constructed, would help increase flood flow capacity which improves resilience to high flood flows. Restoration of ecological systems and increasing recreational access will create long-term positive impacts within the San Francisco Bay that will benefit future generations. The project's land is owned by the District and the project will be operated by the City and the Parks District. Protection in perpetuity of the project area will help create a landscape that is better able to adapt to variable climate conditions and support public recreational opportunities.

3. **Economically disadvantaged communities.** The project is next to the southern section of the City, which is an economically disadvantaged community (based on the SFBRA website map). The public trails planned with the project will be readily accessible for community members through walking and biking.

4. **Monitoring, maintenance, and stewardship.** As stewards of the SWOA for over 20 years, the District has demonstrated their ability to successfully monitor and adaptively manage tidal restoration, and they plan to continue in this capacity when the project site is reintegrated to tidal wetlands of the Napa River estuary. When implemented, the District intends to initially follow the monitoring and management requirements in agencies' permits, and thereafter incorporate the site into their routine monitoring and management program as they have done with the surrounding wetlands of the SWOA. The District has also partnered with the City and the Parks District for management of the public access and interpretive center facilities planned for the project site. The District is consulting with tribes to identify the potential for the interpretive center to include Native American themes.
5. **Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.** The project plans, if implemented, would be consistent with the Conservancy Program's criteria:
    1. Are supported by adopted local or regional plans. The project supports the Living River vision developed for the Flood Control Project. The project supports *Bayland Goals* strategies and policies, as noted above.
    2. Can be implemented in a timely way. The District will implement the project in a timely way: steps for the proposed project are intended to be completed within approximately three years. These include preparing design plans and specifications, performing environmental review pursuant to CEQA, and preparing permit applications.
    3. Provide opportunities for benefits that could be lost if the project is not quickly implemented. If not implemented in a timely manner, the existing barn structure could deteriorate rapidly, making repurposing the structure as an interpretive center more costly or infeasible. The tidal wetlands are expected to rapidly be restored when project plans are implemented; without implementation, tidal wetland restoration through natural degradation of the levees would likely take decades.
    4. Include matching funds from other sources of funding or assistance. The District intends to provide funding and may seek additional funding from other grant sources, if needed.
6. **San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's Coastal Management Program.** The project plans, if implemented, would support the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's Coastal Management Program, specifically under the following policies.

    Tidal Marshes and Mudflats Policy 5: Restore tidal action to tidal marshes and tidal flats that have been diked to the Bay and/or manage historic wetlands to provide important Bay habitat for resting, foraging, breeding. The project, once constructed, would increase habitat for listed species that rely on tidal wetlands, including Ridgway's rail and saltmarsh harvest mouse, and would increase aquatic habitat for migrating steelhead in Napa River.

    Water Quality Policy 1: Restore the Bay's tidal marshes and conserve water surface area and volume to protect and improve water quality. The project, once constructed, would increase wetland habitat, thereby increasing the capacity for pollutant filtering and nutrient cycling, which would protect water quality in Napa River. The project

would increase flood flow capacity and contribute to processed-based restoration that supports healthy sediment transport.

Fish, Other Aquatic Organisms and Wildlife Policy 1: Conserve and restore the Bay's tidal marshes, tidal flats, and subtidal habitat to assure benefits to fish and other aquatic organisms and wildlife for future generations. The project, once constructed, would increase habitat for native species including those listed above under Tidal Marshes and Mudflats Policy 5.

Public Access Policy 4: To ensure the optimum use of the Bay for recreation, enhancing access of waterfront parks by improving Bay trail segments that connect to the waterfront and interpretive programs that inform visitors about the wildlife and habitat values present in the park. The project, once constructed, would include developing a trail and nature viewpoints and an interpretive center in the SWOA, and the District is consulting with tribes to potentially include a focus on Native American land stewardship and cultural practices at the interpretive center.

7. **San Francisco Bay Joint Venture's Implementation Strategy.** The acquisition phase of the project was on the Joint Venture project list, and the District is pursuing this current phase to be included in the Joint Venture's project list. Additionally, the Joint Venture's list includes the Flood Control Project, which restored all areas of the SWOA outside of the project site. The project aligns with the Implementation Strategy by restoring marsh upland transition zone habitat, providing multiple benefits and demonstrating community support through involvement of community partners.

CONSISTENCY WITH AUTHORITY'S TRIBAL CONSULTATION POLICY:

On March 11, 2026, Authority staff mailed a letter to California Native American Tribes in the Bay Area, describing each project from the 2025-2026 Grant Round (Grant Round 9) that Authority staff planned to recommend to the Authority Board for funding authorization, per the Authority's Tribal Consultation Policy, Resolution 142. Staff received a response from one tribe that indicated the project site is not within the tribe's traditional territory; no further coordination will be pursued by staff with the tribes for this project. Additionally, the District has reached out to tribes, and two tribes have expressed interest in the project, particularly for the prospect of the interpretive center to include a focus on Native American land stewardship practices. The District plans to continue consulting with the two tribes for their input on project design and implementation.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

Authorizing the recommended grant is statutorily exempt from the requirement to prepare an environmental document under the California Environmental Quality Act and categorically exempt from CEQA under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Sections 15262 and 15306, as the authorization only involves funding for preparation of feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted or funded, and basic data collection, research and resource evaluation activities that will not result in serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The planning studies will consider environmental impacts of the proposed project elements. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of this project.