

SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESTORATION AUTHORITY

Staff Recommendation
March 3, 2023

BERKELEY NORTH BASIN PROJECT

Project No. RA-038
Project Manager: Catie Thow

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$600,000 to the East Bay Regional Park District to conduct environmental studies and prepare environmental documentation under the California Environmental Quality Act, assess the feasibility of daylighting Schoolhouse Creek, conduct community engagement, and prepare preliminary designs for the restoration of shoreline habitats and associated trails in North Basin Strip and Berkeley Meadow within McLaughlin Eastshore State Park in Alameda County.

LOCATION: Berkeley, Alameda County; Measure AA Region: East 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 Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Area Images](#)

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 East Bay Regional Park District to conduct environmental studies and prepare environmental documentation under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), assess the feasibility of daylighting Schoolhouse Creek, conduct community engagement, and prepare preliminary designs for the restoration of shoreline

habitat and associated trails in North Basin Strip and Berkeley Meadow within McLaughlin Eastshore State Park in 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 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 the disbursement of up to \$600,000 to East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) to conduct environmental studies and prepare environmental documentation under CEQA, assess the feasibility of daylighting Schoolhouse Creek, conduct community engagement, and prepare preliminary designs for the restoration of shoreline habitats and associated trails in North Basin Strip and Berkeley Meadow within McLaughlin Eastshore State Park (MESP) in Alameda County. EBRPD will conduct the environmental studies necessary to inform the development of restoration design alternatives which will include community engagement meetings to ensure the project reflects the diverse constituents of the EBRPD and the local needs.

The project will plan for the restoration of North Basin Strip and the edges of Berkeley Meadow by enhancing and restoring the intertidal shoreline and adjacent uplands into climate resilient habitats. The project will also explore nature-based flood protection options, such as the creation of tidal wetlands, to replace current shoreline infrastructure including concrete construction debris that was originally designed to protect park trails and other public access facilities from flooding but is aging and in need of repair and maintenance.

The project will evaluate the feasibility of daylighting Schoolhouse Creek based on recommendations from the Friends of Five Creek's original daylighting study (2004). Once daylighted, the stretch of creek could offer substantial ecological benefits through water quality improvements from urban runoff through creation of freshwater wetlands and provide opportunities for environmental education. The project will also plan for creation of more than one mile of the Bay Trail and compatible public access features while creating workforce

development opportunities by engaging local youth and the community during the planning process (Exhibit 1, Figure 4).

EBRPD has developed an Eastshore State Park General Plan (2002) which details specific area goals and guidelines for the management and use of Berkeley Meadow and North Basin Strip. In addition to this, EBRPD has identified threats to the Bay Trail in MESP and created approaches for adaptation in the San Francisco Bay Trail Risk Assessment and Adaptation Prioritization Plan.

EBRPD is qualified to carry out this project and has been conducting habitat restoration work and maintaining parks and trails for more than 80 years. EBRPD manages nearly 125,000 acres of parks, trails, and community spaces. A recent project example is the Dotson Family (Breuner) Marsh Restoration and Public Access Project in Richmond, Contra Costa County. EBRPD restored approximately 150 acres of high-quality habitat for threatened and endangered species, such as the Ridgway's rail and the salt marsh harvest mouse, and constructed public access features including a 1.5-mile extension of the San Francisco Bay Trail, a new parking lot, restroom, picnic area, and a spur trail. The project was designed to retain a mix of high-quality habitat and public access with projected sea rise through 2080.

The project includes the tasks below:

1. **Feasibility Studies:** The project team, including consultant subject matter experts, will review existing information on MESP including the General Plan, existing condition report, and Eastshore Final Environmental Impact Report; conduct technical studies; identify a range of potential feasible project actions; and produce a feasibility study documenting existing conditions, opportunities, and constraints for the project area.
2. **Public Outreach and Community Engagement:** EBRPD will conduct community engagement to raise awareness of the project and the policy framework guiding project development, provide opportunities for input throughout project development, and provide opportunities for stakeholders to participate in decision-making dialogue in planning and formulating the project. EBRPD will, with assistance from a consultant, engage and build capacity with community groups and residents who have an interest in the project.
3. **Preliminary Design:** EBRPD will, using a consultant, synthesize information from the feasibility study, public input process, and additional technical studies to produce a preferred project plan and a 30% design plan.
4. **Environmental Documentation under CEQA:** EBRPD, with assistance from a consultant, will determine the appropriate CEQA pathway and prepare any necessary CEQA documentation.

Site Description:

MESP is the result of decades of citizen efforts to protect the San Francisco Bay as a public open space. The Park spans eight and half discontinuous miles along the East Bay shoreline from the Bay Bridge in Oakland, north to the city of Richmond. North Basin Strip, in Berkeley, represents one of the last unimproved sections of MESP. Located amidst dense urbanization, MESP is a complex mosaic of land uses. Much of MESP is the result of the historic filling of the San Francisco Bay that took place in the 1970s, which altered the shallow subtidal nearshore aquatic

areas, intertidal mudflats and tidal marsh up to the shoreline. The fill mostly consisted of sand, gravel, clay, and varying amounts of construction debris, concrete, and garbage.

Today, much of the shoreline in North Basin Strip is a combination of fill material and concrete revetment, usually in the form of unengineered shoreline armoring from construction demolition debris. Shoreline habitats along the North Basin Strip contain steep rocky intertidal zones strewn with fill debris, which are now eroding. Less extensive but still significant, small tidal flat areas are also found in the project site. Schoolhouse Creek flows into North Basin Strip, an inlet of San Francisco Bay, through a large culvert at the southern end of the rectangular piece of parkland.

The water in Schoolhouse Creek was diverted in the 1930s nearly 2,500 feet from its original outlet and placed in a 60-inch pipe that now traverses under MESP and flows directly into the Bay. In present day, Schoolhouse Creek drains a densely populated urban area to the east which includes runoff from Interstate 80. In 2004, Friends of Five Creeks completed the Schoolhouse Creek Daylighting Study and concluded that water quality improvements from removal of the culvert and creation of tidal wetlands at the mouth of the creek could be substantial. According to the study, Schoolhouse Creek is one of the few places in the East Bay where it is practical to reestablish the connection between creeks and the Bay.

Adjacent to North Basin Strip sits Berkeley Meadow, a restored 72-acre former landfill. Starting in the late 1990s, EBRPD began removing hazardous waste from the site and ultimately restored seasonal wetlands, coastal prairie, and coastal scrub areas in three phases over five years. The area is actively managed to prevent the spread of invasive species and has established native vegetation. Today, parts of the restored Berkeley Meadow, including shoreline trails, flood during King Tides and present obstacles for recreational access and maintenance for EBRPD staff.

PROJECT FINANCING

| | |
|--|------------------|
| San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority | \$600,000 |
| Others | \$100,000 |
| Project Total | \$700,000 |

EBRPD will leverage \$100,000 of secured general funds to help fund the environmental documentation under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for this restoration project.

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 is therefore eligible for grant funding from the Authority. Consistent with Government Code Section 66704.5(a), EBRPD is a public entity and the project is located in Alameda County, along the shoreline, in the Authority's jurisdiction.

Consistent with Government Code Section 66704.5(b) the project will conduct the planning, design, and environmental review necessary to restore and protect the North Basin Strip and Berkeley Meadow. The designs to be prepared will provide for removing failing and eroding construction debris currently armoring the shoreline and replacing it with shoreline plantings including wetland and seaweed species, potentially a gravel beach, and green riprap. Consistent with Government Code Section 66704.5(b), public access enhancements will be integrated into the design where appropriate for the educational and recreational value provided by North Basin Strip, such as the Bay Trail along the western boundary of the site which allows for wildlife viewing of North Basin Strip.

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.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES:

The project is consistent with Measure AA’s *Integrated Flood Protection Program*’s purpose of using natural habitats to protect communities along the Bay’s shoreline by incorporating nature-based solutions to reduce shoreline erosion and mitigate wave action and sea level rise.

The project is consistent with Measure AA’s *Vital Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program*’s purpose of providing clean water for fish, birds, wildlife and people, through the restoration and enhancement of tidal wetlands at the mouth of Schoolhouse Creek, which will benefit Ridgway’s Rail and the salt marsh harvest mouse, and through restoration of shoreline habitats to maintain and protect nesting habitat for California least terns, Western snowy plover, and other shorebirds and waterfowl using the site.

The project is consistent with Measure AA’s *Shoreline Public Access Program*’s purpose of enhancing quality of life for Bay residents and improving public access by preparing for sea level rise and increasing Bay Trail access. In the 2021 San Francisco Bay Trail Risk Assessment & Adaptation Prioritization Plan, North Basin Strip was included as a priority site for Bay Trail improvement.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA:

1. **Greatest positive impact.** The project will provide major positive benefits to wildlife by planning for the restoration and enhancement of intertidal habitats including gravel beaches and rocky intertidal areas, adjacent uplands, and creek habitats within the area of tidal influence. It will also plan for improved public access facilities including expanding the Bay Trail. Habitat improvements and public access facilities, once constructed, will be maintained by EBRPD as part of MESP in perpetuity. The project aims to improve water quality and flood protection by removing riprap and construction debris along the shoreline and replace them with nature-based solutions within wider range of elevation and habitat types.
2. **Greatest long-term impact.** The use of nature-based solutions in this project will support habitat migration across a transect of wetland to upland environments increasing the ability of the area to be more climate resilient.

3. **Leveraging resources and partnerships.** EBRPD is working closely with San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI), the grantee of the SFBRA-funded, Regionally Advancing Living Shorelines Project which includes the Conservancy and other partners. The EBRPD will coordinate with SFEI and the Conservancy to optimize integrated subtidal and intertidal habitat restoration and flood protection benefits during the planning of the two projects.
4. **Economically disadvantaged communities.** This project is located directly adjacent to an economically disadvantaged community, in which the median household income is less than 80% of the county median. In addition, the location contains a significant pollution burden, according to CalEnviroScreen, a tool that identifies communities that are disproportionately burdened by multiple sources of pollution, with the adjacent community being in the 66th percentile of impacted communities across the State. The adjacent disadvantaged community and other stakeholders will be involved in selecting the preferred alternative design plan for the project.
5. **Benefits to economy.** According to the EBRPD's Economic Analysis Impact Report (2017), the Regional Parks provide a range of benefits to residents, businesses, and visitors that total about \$500 million annually. This includes the value of recreation, healthcare, property values, and other ecosystem services. In addition, the Regional Parks generate nearly \$200 million in regional economic activity every year that would not happen without the Park District.
6. **Engage youth and young adults.** EBRPD will hire a public engagement consultant who will target outreach to local communities, including youth and young adults, in the planning process.
7. **Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.** The project is consistent with the Conservancy Program's criteria because it is supported by local and regional plans, including the EBRPD Master Plan and MESP General Plan. The project will serve a regional constituency including Alameda and Contra Costa County residents who visit EBRPD's regional parks and shoreline areas. The planning and design phase of the Berkeley North Basin Project can be implemented immediately by EBRPD planning team and is supported by matching funds from EBRPD. Funding would provide EBRPD the opportunity to make one of the last unimproved sections of MESP more climate resilient.
8. **San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's Coastal Management Program.** The project is consistent with and meets the following priorities of the plan:

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.

Water Quality Policy 1: Restore the Bay's tidal marshes and conserve water surface area and volume to protect and improve water quality.

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.

Public Access Policy 4: To ensure the optimum use of the Bay for recreation, enhance access to 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.

9. **San Francisco Bay Joint Venture's Implementation Strategy.** The San Francisco Bay Joint Venture supports the Berkeley North Basin Project and is listed as an approved Tier 2 project. Consistent with the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture Implementation Strategy, the project will enhance and restore wetland habitat.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from CEQA under 14 Cal. Code Regulation Section 15306 for information collection because it consists of basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The proposed project is a part of a study leading to an action which a public agency has not yet approved, adopted, or funded. The project is also statutorily exempt under 14 Cal. Code Regulation Section 15262 in that the proposed project will prepare studies for future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted, or funded.

Upon approval of the project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.