SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESTORATION AUTHORITY

Staff Recommendation December 15, 2023

AUGMENTATION FOR THE LOWER WALNUT CREEK RESTORATION PROJECT

Project No. RA-013 Project Manager: Leslie Perry

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Consideration and authorization to disburse up to \$3,000,000 to the Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District to augment the grant of \$7,929,855 previously authorized by the Authority to implement the North and South reaches of the Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project, consisting of restoration and enhancement of brackish tidal wetlands and adjacent uplands along the southern shore of Suisun Bay, Walnut Creek, and Pacheco Creek in Contra Costa County.

LOCATION: Lower Walnut Creek, 3 miles east of the City of Martinez, Contra Costa County; Measure AA Region: East Bay.

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

<u>EXHIBITS</u>

Exhibit 1: Map

Exhibit 2: Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project (December 16, 2019)

Exhibit 3: Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project, Addendum to the Mitigated Negative Declaration

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 dollars (\$3,000,000) to the Contra Costa County Flood

Control and Water Conservation District (District) to augment the grant of \$7,929,855 previously authorized by the Authority on December 6, 2019, for implementation of the North and South reaches of the Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project, consisting of restoration and enhancement of brackish tidal wetlands and adjacent uplands along the southern shore of Suisun Bay, Walnut Creek and Pacheco Creek in Contra Costa County. All conditions of the Authority's prior authorization to grant funds for this project apply to this augmentation.

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 disbursement of to \$3,000,000 to the Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (the District) to augment the grant of \$7,929,855 previously authorized by the Authority on December 6, 2019, to implement North and South reaches of the Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project, consisting of restoration and enhancement of brackish tidal wetlands and adjacent uplands along the southern shore of Suisun Bay, Walnut Creek and Pacheco Creek in Contra Costa County (Exhibit 1). Augmentation is needed to implement the public access portion of the project, which now has a much higher estimated cost due to both inflation and design updates needed to address changes in as-built site conditions compared to the original design.

As noted in the original staff recommendation (Exhibit 2), the project will implement an extensive network of trails and associated amenities, offering wildlife-compatible recreation and broad views of the restored wetland habitats, Suisun Bay, and Mount Diablo. Public access amenities and trails that are expected to be completed include four miles of trails, bridges, boardwalks, water access points, a parking area, and an interpretive/ education center.

The original construction estimate for the public access portion of the project was based on the concept design evaluated in the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) prepared under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) that was adopted in 2019. During construction of the tidal restoration portion of the project, which was

completed in 2022, a number of key project conditions changed. These changes necessitated different engineering requirements, which, in turn resulted in an increased construction cost estimate.

- Increase in Bridge Span Length. The original concept design envisioned bridges with significantly shorter spans than what is required to span the channels that have been constructed. For example, the northern bridge was expected to have a maximum span of 85 feet, but the bridge span now required is 137 feet. Extending the bridge length also requires increasing the size of all the structural members, so the cost increases become exponential with longer spans.
- Change in Bridge Material. Pacheco Marsh is on historic Bay mud with a relatively thin layer of engineered fill on the top. The conventional, and most cost-effective, approach for pedestrian crossings is to use steel prefabricated bridges with concrete pier abutments. However, given the extensive bridge spans and corresponding weights, it would require massive concrete pads on either side of the bridge which would be inappropriate for a public open space. Therefore, lightweight aluminum was identified as the only feasible bridge material. Although aluminum is the best material for coastal conditions, and aligns with the dock structure, it is significantly more expensive than steel.
- Change in Bridge Installation Process. Constructing bridges occurs in two parts: one is the fabrication and delivery of the bridge, and the other is the installation. Installation includes the construction of the abutments and the craning of the bridge onto the abutments. The installation of a 137-foot bridge requires the use of a very large crane. Temporary support pads and engineered bolstering will need to be constructed to stabilize the crane pads. In short, installing bridges on a wet site with narrow access costs much more to crane into place.
- Need to Replace Entry Bridge. The original design did not include the replacement of the entry bridge. This existing structure consists of railroad flatcar that spans the pipeline without engineered abutments. The proposed bridge replacement must meet Contra Costa County Fire Code requirements for clear width and weight capacity.
- Wheelchair Accessible Route Composition. The wheelchair accessible route to the dock area cannot use the typical stabilized decomposed granite treatment due to the truck weight and frequency of use by the Central Sanitation District. Asphalt, an alternative, is forbidden by biological regulatory agencies because it leaches toxic chemicals. Concrete is the only feasible, durable material for this location.
- **Grading Requirements.** More extensive grading is required on the western loop trail than was anticipated.
- **Historic Inflation.** Since 2020, energy costs have increased by 40%, craning costs have increased by 30%, and material costs for bridges and other components have increased at varying levels.

The augmentation of \$3,000,000 will allow for full implementation of the project. Without the augmentation for the updated public access portion of the project, this element would need

to be further delayed or eliminated.

Progress made on this project includes the completion of the heavy civil work, such as excavation, levee construction, access road construction, fill placement, and restoring tidal action by breaching the levee separating the site from Suisun Bay. It has also included the installation of a temporary irrigation system and the installation of over 31,00 native container plants. The project won the national American Public Works Association Project of the Year in the environmental category for 2022.

PROJECT FINANCING

San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority	\$3,000,000
San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority (December 6, 2019 Authorization)	\$7,929,855
Contra Costa County Flood Control District (District)	\$2,639,696
John Muir Land Trust (JMLT)	\$2,000,000
CA Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)	\$276,651
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	\$1,376,281
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)	\$1,400,000
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	\$970,000

Project Total

\$19,592,483

The District leveraged a suite of local, state, and federal funds towards the project, as itemized above. The JMLT funds are from donations dedicated to the North Reach public access construction. The updated public access features of the project can be completed with this additional augmentation funding support from the Authority.

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

The project is consistent with the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Act as described in the December 06, 2019 staff recommendation.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES:

The project is consistent with Measure AA programs and activities, as described in the December 06, 2019 staff recommendation.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA:

The project is consistent with Measure AA Prioritization Criteria, as described in the

December 06, 2019 staff recommendation.

CONSISTENCY WITH AUTHORITY'S INTERIM TRIBAL CONSULTATION POLICY:

State Coastal Conservancy staff previously sent letters to tribal organizations with interest in Contra Costa County to provide information about the Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project in connection with the Conservancy's May 5, 2020, authorization to fund the project. No tribes requested more information or to consult on the project.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

At its December 6, 2019 meeting, the Authority adopted findings under CEQA based on the Final Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project (IS/MND) adopted by the District on November 19, 2019. The District prepared an addendum to the IS/MND in June 2023 to document changes to the project related to the updated public access features (Exhibit 3).

The project changes include those discussed in the Project Summary section above and: (1) placement of a gravel water access ramp near pedestrian Bridge 3, (2) replacement of the site entry bridge near Waterfront Road, (3) relocation of the access launch point for small watercrafts near Suisun Bay to approximately 0.55 miles to the south in the same tidal channel, near pedestrian Bridge 2, and (4) placement of a gravel water access ramp in the vicinity of pedestrian Bridge 1. (See Exhibit 3, Figure 1 for a map indicating the locations of these public access features.)

The addendum indicates that the project changes involve comparable levels of disturbance (clearing and grubbing, grading and fill, etc.) over comparable areas and habitats as were analyzed in the 2019 Lower Walnut Creek IS/MND; as such, they will not result in any different or greater potential impacts to special-status species, sensitive natural communities, jurisdictional wetlands and waters, or wildlife corridors, nor will they conflict with local plans or ordinances. Accordingly, no substantive revisions are needed to the Lower Walnut Creek IS/MND, because no new significant impacts or impacts of substantially greater severity would result from the construction and operation of the updated project.