

Memorandum

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS

CTC Meeting: March 21-22, 2024

From: TANISHA TAYLOR, Executive Director

Reference Number: 2.5c.(8), Action

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Subject: Allocation for the 2023 California Natural Resources Agency's Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program, Resolution FP-23-85

Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the California Transportation Commission (Commission) approve an allocation of \$9,350,924 to fund eight projects included in the 2023 Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program, as provided in Attachment A.

Issue:

Reference Number 4.20 on this agenda requests the Commission's approval of the 2023 Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program to program funding for eight projects totaling \$9,350,924. This agenda item, Reference Number 2.5v.(8), requests the Commission allocate funds for the projects programmed under Reference Number 4.20. The California Natural Resources Agency requests an allocation as follows:

- 57 percent of the available funding is requested for four projects in Northern California, totaling \$5,373,937.
- 43 percent of the available funding is requested for four projects in Southern California, totaling \$3,976,987.

As the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Lead Agency, the California Natural Resources Agency determined all eight projects are Categorically Exempt from CEQA and filed Notices of Exemption for each project.

The 2023 grant cycle is oversubscribed by \$2,650,924. The California Natural Resources Agency proposes to use \$1,634,511 in remaining funds from the 2022 grant cycle and \$1,750,924 in project cost savings to fully fund the awarded projects in the 2023 grant cycle.

Background:

The Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program was established by the state Legislature in 1989 to fund environmental enhancement and mitigation projects directly or indirectly related to the environmental impact of modifying new or existing transportation facilities. Pursuant to Streets and Highways Code Section 164.56, seven million dollars

(\$7,000,000) is appropriated to the program from the State Highway Account. The Commission awards annual grants to fund projects as recommended by the California Natural Resources Agency.

The California Natural Resources Agency develops and adopts procedures to determine eligibility, evaluate project proposals, recommend projects for funding to the Commission, and manage the grants post award. Any local, state, or federal agency, or nonprofit entity may apply for and receive funding to undertake environmental enhancement and mitigation projects. Eligible projects must fit at least one of the following three categories:

1. **Urban Forestry** - projects designed to offset vehicular emissions of carbon dioxide.
2. **Resource Lands** - projects for acquisition or enhancement of resource lands to mitigate the loss of, or the detriment to, resource lands lying within the right-of-way acquired for proposed transportation improvements.
3. **Mitigation Projects Beyond the Scope of the Lead Agency** - projects to mitigate the impact of proposed transportation facilities or to enhance the environment, where the ability to effectuate the mitigation or enhancement measures is beyond the scope of the lead agency responsible for assessing the environmental impact of the proposed transportation improvement.

Pursuant to Streets and Highways Code Sections 187 and 188, the California Natural Resources Agency tries to award 40 percent of the total funding to projects in northern counties and 60 percent of the total funding to projects in southern counties. The percentages vary slightly each year depending on the applicant pool.

Financial Resolution:

Resolved that \$9,350,924 be allocated for eight projects included in the 2023 Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program, as identified in Attachment A. Funds for this allocation are available from the following sources: \$6,700,000 from the Budget Act of 2023, \$2,534,511 from the Budget Act of 2022, and \$116,413 from the Budget Act of 2018 to the California Natural Resources Agency.

Attachment:

- Attachment A: California Natural Resources Agency's Proposed 2023 Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program - List of Projects for Allocation

2023 Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program Projects Recommended for Funding

Applicant	Project	County	Eligibility	Requested	Recommended	Cumulative	Project Description
SOUTHERN PROJECTS							
Amigos de los Rios	El Rancho Unified Emerald Necklace Natural Infrastructure High School Complex	Los Angeles	Urban Forests	735,459	735,459	735,459	Recommend Full Funding. Project to plant 250 trees and 1,500 shrubs, all native and Mediterranean, at the ~ 56-acre El Rancho Unified School District High School complex comprising: El Rancho High School; Ruben Salazar Continuation High School; and El Rancho Adult School in the City of Pico Rivera. Project will also provide events inviting students, Conservation Corps members, and community stakeholders to plant and care for the plants. Project will provide multiple benefits by capturing stormwater and runoff, create habitat, and recreational opportunities.
City of Torrance	Torrance - Cabrillo Avenue EEMP Urban Forestry Project	Los Angeles	Urban Forests	718,528	718,528	1,453,987	Recommend Full Funding. Project to plant 121 native trees within the Cabrillo Avenue median between 213th Street to the north and Plaza del Amo to the south in Downtown Torrance. Project will also install a smart irrigation system and replace asphalt with a permeable surface to increase infiltration.
Arroyos & Foothills Conservancy	Sycamore Canyon Acquisition Project	Los Angeles	Resource Lands	1,023,000	1,023,000	2,476,987	Recommend Full Funding. Project to acquire in-fee a 10-acre privately owned Sycamore Canyon property which is part of an urban wildlife corridor in the San Rafael Hills of Northern Los Angeles. Sycamore Canyon contains oak woodland, chaparral, and riparian habitats along with a seasonal stream. Cottonwood Canyon (2018 EEM Grant) was purchased creating the eastern entrance to this wildlife corridor.
Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority	Paradise Hill Open Space	Los Angeles	Resource Lands	1,500,000	1,500,000	3,976,987	Recommend Full Funding. Project to acquire in-fee the 31.24-acre Paradise Hill property within the City of Los Angeles. The project will protect one of the last remaining undeveloped hilltops in northeast Los Angeles. The project will protect grassland and Southern California black walnut trees and secure connectivity for wildlife between islands of remaining habitat in the region. Existing informal trails provide views over the downtown L.A. skyline and coast. MRCA will manage the property for conservation and recreation.
4 SOUTHERN PROJECTS (43 % OF TOTAL FUNDING)				\$ 3,976,987	\$ 3,976,987		

2023 Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program Projects Recommended for Funding

Applicant	Project	County	Eligibility	Requested	Recommended	Cumulative	Project Description
NORTHERN PROJECTS							
Northcoast Regional Land Trust	Lost Coast Redwood Creek Conservation Easement	Humboldt	Resource Lands	1,500,000	1,500,000	5,476,987	Recommend Full Funding. Project to acquire a conservation easement over an 895-acre working forest dominated by redwood and Douglas-fir. The property includes most of the headwaters of the Redwood Creek watershed, contains critical habitat for threatened steelhead trout, Coho & Chinook salmon, and drains directly to the South Fork Eel River. The project will create almost 20,000-acre block of privately-held headwaters managed for multiple ecosystem benefits of streamflow enhancement and sustainable forest management practices. The project will remove subdivision rights, highly restrict development, ensure forested portion of property is managed as a Late Seral Reserve, increase riparian buffers and enhance wildlife habitat/water quality.
Sierra Foothill Conservancy	Green Mountain Ranch Conservation Easement Acquisition	Mariposa	Resource Lands	873,937	873,937	6,350,924	Recommend Full Funding. Project to purchase a 1,690-acre conservation easement on Green Mountain Ranch, which is part of the 4,407-acre Martin-Jensen owned ranches near the Madera County border, Eastman Lake, and the Chowchilla River. The project will permanently conserve the open-space grasslands, working rangeland, and valley oak riparian habitats that support many species including western pond turtle, California tiger salamander and other Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Green Mountain Ranch is a keystone of SFC's Madera Mariposa Focus Area for protecting and connecting 30,000+ acres of public and private land.
American River Conservancy	El Dorado Ranch Phase 5 Conservation	El Dorado	Resource Lands	1,500,000	1,500,000	7,850,924	Recommend Full Funding. Project to purchase in-fee the 2,997-acre El Dorado Ranch (29 parcels, single ownership) located in southern El Dorado County containing 3.8 miles of riparian frontage along Slate Creek and Big Canyon Creek, two foothill tributaries to the Cosumnes River. El Dorado Ranch is a working ranch which maintains open space, water quality, and wildland fire protection in the Cosumnes River watershed. The property east-and west-facing slopes as well as north-facing slopes that support diverse microhabitats, providing refugia for species sensitive to climate change.
The Trust for Public Land	Tiburon Ridge (Martha Property) Acquisition	Marin	Resource Lands	1,500,000	1,500,000	9,350,924	Recommend Full Funding. Project to acquire in-fee the 110-acre Martha Property near the tip of the Tiburon Peninsula. The property offers irreplaceable panoramic views of the San Francisco Bay Area; well-established social trails and wildlife corridors; native grassland, and wetland habitats that support five special status species. Project will protect in perpetuity coastal live oak woodland, freshwater wetland, and California red-legged frog upland habitat. The community has been working to protect the property for more than three decades. Ownership will be transferred to Marin County Open Space District for management as a public open space preserve.
4 NORTHERN PROJECTS (57% OF TOTAL FUNDING)				5,373,937	5,373,937		
8 PROJECTS - TOTAL RECOMMENDED					9,350,924		