SAN MATEO RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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HALF MOON BAY, CA 94019

SANMATEORCD.ORG

CERTIFICATE OF DETERMINATION
OF EXEMPTION/EXCLUSION FROM ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Project Title:	Mindego Creek Fish Passage Project
Project Location:	The project site is located within the "Log Cabin Ranch" property off Alpine Road, approximately 2.5 miles south of La Honda in San Mateo County
Assessor's Parcel Numbers:	083300010
City and County**:**	La Honda, San Mateo County

Description of Nature and Purpose of Project:

The San Mateo Resource Conservation District (RCD) proposes the Mindego Creek Fish Passage Project (project) located on Mindego Creek south of La Honda in San Mateo County. The project will remove a fish passage barrier, improve creek habitat, and restore access to 5 miles of range for federally threatened steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus*) and federally endangered coho salmon (*O. kisutch*) in the San Gregorio Watershed.

The RCD removed the downstream barrier on Alpine Creek at Pescadero Creek Road in 2019, and the Mindego Creek barrier is now the next upstream removal priority. The barrier consists of a 6-foot-high concrete dam, Denil fish ladder, and water diversion infrastructure. The existing fish ladder is prone to clogging, particularly at its inlet, which frequently renders it unpassable to fish. The hydraulic drop over the dam is a complete passage barrier when the ladder becomes clogged.

This project will address the creek's fish passage barrier by removing the channel-spanning dam, ladder, and submersible pump and by relocating the diversion intake to an instream pool. The new gravity-fed diversion will have a regulated weir plate and fish screen designed to meet California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) screening criteria to protect against fish entrapment. Approximately 310 linear feet of channel will be reconstructed based on the stream simulation method outlined in the "Guidelines for Salmonid Passage at Stream Crossings" (NMFS, 2001) and the "Stream Simulation" design approach outlined in the "California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual" (CDFG, 2009). Two rock weir pools will be integrated to provide resting habitat along with two large woody debris installations to enhance habitat complexity and capture sediment. The project is less than a half-acre in size.

Name of Person, Board, Commission or Department Proposing to Carry Out Project:

San Mateo Resource Conservation District
Kellyx Nelson
80 Stone Pine Road, Suite 100
Half Moon Bay, CA 94019

EXEMPT STATUS:

X Categorical Exemptions, Class 3 [CEQA State Guidelines, Section 15333]

REMARKS: See page 3.

Contact Person: Amy Kaeser Telephone: (650) 712-7765 x 121

8/20/2020

Date of Determination

I do hereby certify that the above determination has been made pursuant to State and Local requirements.

Amy Kaeser, Conservation Project Manager
San Mateo Resource Conservation District

REMARKS:
As described below, the Mindego Fish Passage Project (project) meets the CEQA criteria for exemption from environmental review under Class 33, Section 15333. This section of the guidelines describes Small Habitat Restoration Projects that do not exceed 5 acres in size and are constructed for the purpose of maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, and wildlife.

The proposed restoration project is less than a half-acre in size and is for the purpose of habitat improvement for fish. The project involves removal of a fish passage barrier and channel restoration in accordance with California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration (NOAA) Fisheries guidelines. The project also includes a minor alteration to a water diversion system (screened to meet CDFW and National Marine Fisheries Service screening criteria to protect against fish entrapment) that would not result in expanded footprint or capacity.

Project Description
The proposed project would improve habitat and restore access to 5 miles of range for federally threatened steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus*) and federally endangered coho salmon (*O. kisutch*) in the San Gregorio Watershed in San Mateo County, CA.

The Mindego Creek dam and Denil fish ladder were designated as a high priority fish barrier for remediation by the Integrated Watershed Restoration Program (IWRP), a collaborative species recovery effort that works to meet the need for a coordinated, regional process to improve fish and wildlife habitat. CDFW and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) personnel working through the IWRP process identified the project site as the top priority within San Mateo County. A 2004 stream crossing inventory by Ross Taylor and Associates also identified the dam and fish ladder as a high priority barrier for both juvenile and adult salmonids. The barrier consists of a 6-foot-high concrete dam, Denil fish ladder, and water diversion infrastructure. The existing fish ladder is prone to clogging, particularly at its inlet, which frequently renders it unpassable to fish. The hydraulic drop over the dam is a complete passage barrier when the ladder becomes clogged.

The project would address the creek's fish passage barrier by removing the channel-spanning dam, ladder, and submersible pump and by relocating the diversion intake to an instream pool. The new gravity-fed diversion would have a regulated weir plate and fish screen designed to meet CDFW and NMFS screening criteria to protect against fish entrapment. The concrete building and other elements of the water diversion would remain intact to provide the necessary infrastructure to support continued pumping to off-channel storage at Log Cabin Ranch, within the landowner's water right. Approximately 310 linear feet of channel would be reconstructed based on the stream simulation method outlined in the "Guidelines for Salmonid Passage at Stream Crossings" (NMFS, 2001) and the "Stream Simulation" design approach outlined in the "California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual" (CDFG, 2009). Two rock weir pools will be integrated to provide resting habitat along with two large woody debris installations (utilizing on-site downed wood) to enhance habitat complexity and capture sediment.

The following key steps would be taken to implement the project:
- Creek diversion and fish relocation
- Dam and fish ladder demolition
- Diversion box and fish screen installation
- Channel and boulder weir construction

- Log structure installation
- Backfill and jetting of stream simulation material
- Rock slope protection installation
- Channel rewatering and diversion removal
- Site restoration

Class 33 (CEQA State Guidelines, Section 15333) Small Habitat Restoration Projects
Class 33 consists of projects not to exceed five acres in size to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife. The following four bullets list the criteria for projects to meet Categorical Exemption 15333 as described in the CEQA Statute and Guidelines.

(a) There would be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 15065

The proposed project is designed specifically to benefit threatened and endangered fish. The project would improve fish passage and provide higher functioning aquatic and riparian habitat for species that may spawn, nest, forage, or transit the project vicinity.

To the maximum extent possible, temporary and localized impacts to sensitive habitats would be minimized by implementing the mitigation measures and construction-related best management practices. Construction will occur during the dry season, minimizing the potential for erosion and any construction-related effects on aquatic species. Additionally, erosion control measures, such as fiber rolls will be installed to further reduce the risk of sedimentation resulting from project activities. Disturbed areas will be winterized and re-vegetated as needed following construction.

The water diversion system has been designed to meet the most conservative approach velocity requirements established by CDFW and NMFS for all life stages of steelhead trout and a screen designed to meet CDFW and NMFS criteria would be installed on the intake pipe to protect against entrainment of fish.

The project does not have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment and would not substantially reduce the habitat or threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community; substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of any endangered, rare or threatened species; or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory.

(b) There are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed

The existing dam is concrete and would be demolished, removed, and disposed of at an facility. No other hazardous materials are known to the site or project vicinity.

(c) The project will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.

The proposed project will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with effects of past, current, and probable future projects because all such projects comply with requirements of regulatory permits issued for the purpose of protecting natural resources. Overall, the project would improve fish passage and provide for higher functioning aquatic and riparian habitat. The

project would not adversely affect farmland, public services, geologic stability, soils, or health risk. There are no known or planned overlapping projects in the vicinity that would have environmental impacts to which the proposed project would add cumulatively.

(d) Examples of small restoration projects may include, but are not limited to:
(3) stream or river bank revegetation, the primary purpose of which is to improve habitat for amphibians or native fish
(6) culvert replacement conducted in accordance with published guidelines of the Department of Fish and Game or NOAA Fisheries, the primary purpose of which is to improve habitat or reduce sedimentation.

The project would be exempt under the above-cited classifications as it involves restoration of Mindego Creek for the primary purpose of habitat improvement for native fish through removal of an existing fish passage barrier (water diversion infrastructure) to reconnect instream habitat. The project has been designed in accordance with CDFW and NOAA Fisheries guidelines including:

- The channel design approach follows the stream simulation method established by the CDFW and NMFS (NOAA Fisheries). The intent of the design approach is to restore a channel that poses no more of a challenge for the upstream movement of fish than the adjacent channel directly upstream and downstream of the project site.
- The water diversion system has been designed to meet the most conservative approach velocity requirements established by CDFW and NMFS for all life stages of steelhead trout and a screen designed to meet CDFW and NMFS criteria would be installed on the intake pipe to protect against entrainment of fish.

CEQA State Guidelines Section 15300.2 states that a categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances. As described above, there are no usual circumstances surrounding the proposed project that would suggest a reasonable possibility for a significant environmental effect.

REFERENCES

California Department of Fish and Game. 2009. California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual, Part XII. Design and Implementation.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife, K. Capiro. 2017. Alpine Creek Fish Passage Project. The 2017 Fisheries Habitat Restoration Project.

National Marine Fisheries Service Southwest Region. 1997. Fish Screening Criteria for Anadromous Salmonids.

National Marine Fisheries Service Southwest Region. 2001. Guideline for Salmonid Passage at Stream Crossings.

Seymour, G. 2014. Fish Passage Improvements at Memorial County Park, San Mateo County. MND Project.

Waterways Consulting. 2017. San Mateo County Fish Passage Assessment Site Visit Summary. Memorandum to Jarrad Fisher, San Mateo County Resource Conservation District, Half Moon Bay, CA.