SAN MATEO RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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NOTICE OF EXEMPTION FROM ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Filed to:	Office of Planning and Research P.O. Box 3044, Room 113 Sacramento, CA 95812-3044
	County Clerk of: San Mateo
Project Title:	Little Butano Creek Fish Passage and Habitat Enhancement Project
Project Location:	2599 Cloverdale Road, Pescadero, CA 94060; Latitude: 37.214725, Longitude: -122.352722
City and County:	Pescadero, San Mateo County

Description of Nature and Purpose of Project:

The project will remediate two fish passage barriers and improve stream and wetland habitat on Little Butano Creek in the Pescadero-Butano Watershed. The downstream of the two barriers is a bedrock chute created by historic land-use and resulting anthropomorphically induced channel straightening and incision. The upstream barrier is created by a series of concrete steps and accumulated sediment associated with a culvert on Cloverdale Road. The project builds on decades of watershed investments to restore access for salmonids to the project site, restore floodplains and lagoons, and improve flows. In addition to restoring access to 2.7 miles of cold-water stream up to the final remaining barrier in Butano State Park, this project also improves 3.1 acres of habitat through installation of large woody debris structures, creation of low flow pools, floodplains, a new stream meander, and habitat enhancements at two confluence zones.

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

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

Lead Agency ☒
Responsible Agency ☐

Contact Person: Christina Kelleher Telephone: 650-712-7765 ext. 127

EXEMPT STATUS:

Categorical Exemption Class 33, Section 15333 (Small Habitat Restoration)

Remarks: See next page.

Date of Determination: September 18, 2023

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

Christina Kelleher 9/18/2023

Christina Kelleher, Conservation Project Manager

REMARKS:

As described below, the 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.

This Project will restore access for salmonids to 2.7 miles of creek habitat by addressing two fish passage barriers and improving habitat. The Project is approximately 3.6 acres in size and is for the purpose of habitat improvement for state and federally threatened and endangered fish species.

Project Description

The project will restore access for salmonids to nearly 2.7 miles of Little Butano Creek by addressing two fish passage barriers and improving instream habitat on Little Butano Creek in the Pescadero-Butano Watershed. The first passage barrier is a 15-foot-tall bedrock chute located approximately 1,000 feet upstream from the confluence of Butano and Little Butano Creeks. The bedrock chute is the current limit of anadromy and was formed due to historic realignment of the creek in an effort to dry back prime lands for grazing and agriculture. The realignment and subsequent rampant incision of the creek resulted in a total barrier and limit of anadromy on Little Butano Creek. This project will also modify a juvenile passage impediment created by a set of concrete steps associated with a road culvert on Little Butano Creek at Cloverdale Road. One of the two culvert boxes is over 50% filled with sediment creating conditions that result in excessive velocities in the open culvert, likely impacting adult passage during high flows as well as flow capacity. The sediment will be removed & reused and a low flow sill installed to enhance passage conditions at low flows by directing streamflow through one culvert as flows recede. The project objectives will be accomplished through implementation of the following actions:

Site 1 (chute):

- Address the bedrock chute feature to adjust the grade through the reach and restore fish passage above the chute.
- Install approximately 21 woody debris structures to increase complexity, sort and store sediment, and provide shelter and cover.
- Create seven low-flow pools for resting and drought refuge.
- Backwater two existing, but perched, floodplain terraces by raising the bed of the channel and lowering floodplain surfaces.
- Restore a historic meander and confluence zone that will create high quality, low gradient habitat where an unnamed tributary drains into Little Butano.

Site 2 (culvert):

- Remove a portion of the concrete steps to allow for passage upstream of the Cloverdale Road culvert and meet CDFW design criteria for juvenile salmonids over the full range of flows.
- Remove sediment from the clogged box culvert to restore hydrology and reduce velocities during high flows and beneficially re-use the material downstream at the chute, as appropriate.
- Install a small (approx. 3~6 inch) sill at the upstream end of one of the cleaned-out culvert to avoid potential impacts to low flow passage caused by bifurcated flow and loss of depth.

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 and other native aquatic species. The project would restore ancestral migration access to an additional 2.7 miles of habitat and provide the diversity of habitat fish need to forage, take refuge, rest, rear, and spawn. Additionally, the Central California Coast (CCC) Coho Recovery Plan identifies the watershed as a focus population for protection, and one of two independent populations for coho recovery in San Mateo County. Habitat between the chute and the Little Butano Creek Dam is ranked as moderate quality for steelhead and coho salmon, and habitat in Butano State Park is considered to be the highest quality coho salmon habitat in the in the entire Pescadero-Butano Watershed. During recent drought years, Little Butano Creek has also been observed to provide good water quantity that is cooler than mainstem Butano Creek, likely a quality for recovery. To the maximum extent possible, temporary and localized impacts to sensitive habitats would be minimized by implementing avoidance and minimization measures and construction-related best management practices. Construction within the creek 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 project will not 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

Old agricultural garbage will be removed from the project area. There are no known hazardous materials at the site or project vicinity based on preliminary investigations.

(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. Overall, the project would improve fish habitat in the creek. 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;*

The project would be exempt under the above-cited classifications as it involves restoration of Little Butano Creek for the primary purpose of habitat improvement for native fish through remediation of two passage barriers and installation of features to provide habitat diversity. The goals of this project are to restore fish passage to 2.7 miles of creek habitat, install woody debris habitat features, create low-flow pools, backwater an existing floodplain, and create a low-gradient high quality habitat creek meander.

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.