SAN MATEO RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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HALF MOON BAY, CA 94019

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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: Johnston Ranch Riparian Enhancement

Project Location: Lower Arroyo Leon Creek, Pilarcitos Watershed (37°27'06.5"N, 122°25'01.3"W)
APN# 065210240, 064370070, and 064370110

City and County: Half Moon Bay, San Mateo County

Description of Nature and Purpose of Project:

The San Mateo Resource Conservation District is proposing the Johnston Ranch Riparian Enhancement Project. The purpose of this project is to expand and maintain riparian habitat improvements along Arroyo Leon Creek in San Mateo County, CA. This will be accomplished through invasive species removal and subsequent monitoring and maintenance. The objective of the project is to better provide California red-legged frog and San Francisco garter snake breeding, foraging, sheltering, migration, and dispersal habitat.

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: Caileen Viehweg Telephone: 650-712-7765 ext. 116

EXEMPT STATUS:
Categorical Exemption, Class 33 (15333)

Remarks: See next page.

Date of Determination: 03/05/2024

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

Caileen Viehweg, Conservation Project Manager

REMARKS:

As described below, the Johnston Ranch Riparian Enhancement Project meets the CEQA criteria for exemption from environmental review under Class 33 section 15333. This section of the guidelines 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 provided that: (a) There would be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare, or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 15065 (b) There are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed, and (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.

Project Description

The Johnston Ranch Riparian Enhancement project will improve up to 3 acres of riparian and upland habitat to better provide California red-legged frog (CRLF) and San Francisco garter snake (SFGS) breeding, foraging, sheltering, migration, and dispersal habitat in coastal San Mateo County, California. The project entails the manual removal or herbicide treatment of weedy and invasive species within 3-acres of riparian and upland corridor along Arroyo Leon Creek. Arroyo Leon Creek is approximately 7 miles in length and is a tributary to Pilarcitos Creek, which then flows into Half Moon Bay. It is a fish-bearing stream, including salmonids (CDFW 2013). Project treatment focuses on hand removal of cape ivy (*Delaria odorata*), an invasive species that dominates shaded understory and can significantly reduce native plant diversity. The foliage contains toxic compounds that make it unpalatable to most herbivores and is also toxic to fish and other aquatic life. Other target species include poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), panic veldtgrass (*Ehrharta erecta*), Bermuda buttercup (*Oxalis pes-caprae*), bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), and Italian thistle (*Carduus pycnocephalus*). Herbicide may be utilized to treat jubata grass (*Cortaderia jubata*). Any herbicide used will be applied by a licensed herbicide applicator and treatment will be approved for use in riparian and aquatic environments.

The project treatment will open the understory for native recruitment (regeneration and spread of native plants) to occur. The existing populations of native riparian vegetation are expected to quickly move into the areas vacated of cape ivy and other removed weeds. In similar areas within the watershed, rhizomal and root spreading species such as stinging nettle, carex, juncus, thimbleberry, gooseberry, and twin-berry; vine cover from blackberry, wild cucumber, and honeysuckle; root saplings from red elderberry and willow, and prodigious seed production from red alder and willow have filled in weeded areas more than adequately.

Class 33 (CEQA State Guidelines, Section 15333)

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 provided that:
(a) There would be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare, or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 15065
(b) There are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed, and
(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.

This project entails manual removal of weedy vegetation across 3-acres of riparian habitat. This removal will open capacity for revegetation by native species that support biodiversity and resilience in the ecosystem. This habitat type is utilized by CRLF and SFGS, this work will directly benefit their habitat. There will be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare, or threatened species or

their habitat; the project will improve their habitat. The project includes removal of debris that has been dumped in the riparian and upland corridor, but the debris does not include hazardous materials and the off haul ensures it will not mobilize into the waterway. The project impacts will be positive and result in enhanced habitat.

Examples of this exemption that this project is most related to 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 will restore riparian and upland corridor by removing invasive species that are toxic to fish and detrimental to biodiversity. This removal will open capacity for revegetation by native species that support biodiversity and resilience in the ecosystem. One of the target invasive species is cape ivy. This species dominates shaded understory and can significantly reduce native plant diversity. The foliage contains toxic compounds that make it unpalatable to most herbivores and is also toxic to fish and other aquatic life. This habitat is utilized by CRLF and SFGS, this work will directly benefit their habitat.

(4) projects to restore or enhance habitat that are carried out principally with hand labor and not mechanized equipment.

The project treatment involves light-touch methods that do not utilize any heavy equipment. Proposed methods include hand removal of target species, herbicide application on individual jubata grass plants found in the project reach, and hand removal/off haul of debris that has been dumped in the riparian zone. The goal of these actions is to enhance habitat for riparian and aquatic species. No mechanized equipment will be used to achieve project treatment goals.