



US Army Corps
of Engineers®
San Francisco District

Regulatory Division
450 Golden Gate Ave., 4th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94102-3406

SAN FRANCISCO DISTRICT

PUBLIC NOTICE

PROJECT: Greater Prairie Creek Ecosystem Restoration Project

PUBLIC NOTICE NUMBER: SPN-2019-00237

PUBLIC NOTICE DATE: September 26, 2024

COMMENTS DUE DATE: October 26, 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Redwood National and State Parks (POC: Mr. Leonel Arguello, 707-445-7701), 1111 Second Street, Orick through its agent, Save the Redwoods League (POC: Rosalind Litzky, 415-365-2352), have applied to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), San Francisco District, for reissuance of Regional General Permit (RGP) 29 for continuation of the rehabilitation of the Greater Prairie Creek Ecosystem, located near the town of Orick, Humboldt County, California. This Department of the Army permit application is being processed pursuant to the provisions of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1972, as amended (33 U.S.C. § 1344 et seq.).

2. PROPOSED PROJECT:

Project Site Location: The proposed project is located on approximately 10,300 acres in the lower portion of the Prairie Creek watershed within the Redwood National Park and Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park. It is located along the east and west sides of Highway 101, approximately 6 miles north of the city of Orick in Humboldt County, California, at center latitude 41.364137°N and longitude -124.023173°W. See enclosure 1.

Project Site Description: The Greater Prairie Creek Ecosystem Restoration Program (GPCERP) is located primarily in the lower portions of the Prairie Creek watershed within Redwood National Park and Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park. The program area includes 9,160 acres that would be restored and incorporates the following sub-basins: Skunk Cabbage Creek, Berry Glen, Little Lost Man Creek, Streeflow Creek, Home Creek, May Creek, Boyes Creek, and a portion of Redwood Creek along Bald Hills Road. This area also includes the non-anadromous fish bearing Gold Bluffs watersheds from Squashan Creek to the north to Major Creek to the south. The restoration area contains small, isolated stands of old growth redwood and is bordered in most areas by larger contiguous stands of old growth redwood forest as well as one isolated second growth stand surrounded by old growth redwood forest in the northern section of Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park.

Project Description: As shown in the attached

drawings, the applicant proposes to continue restoration efforts in the Greater Prairie Creek Ecosystem Restoration Program (GPCERP) area through a combination of forest and aquatic restoration as well as road removal activities. The ecosystem restoration activities will be phased

geographically over three time periods or phases. Phase 1 restoration activities will be described at the project detail level while Phases 2 and 3 will be described programmatically. The activities will be identical to those in Phase 1, but in different locations (Figure 3). Project level detail for Phases 2 and 3 will be planned in coordination with NMFS. See the end of Section 1 – Implementation Phases and Section 8 - Pre and Post Project Reporting, for details. Restoration activities are grouped into three major categories: forest restoration – thinning and yarding second growth stands; road reconstruction, maintenance, use, and removal (watershed restoration); aquatic restoration – placing large wood in streams and riparian planting. See enclosure 2.

Basic Project Purpose: The basic project purpose comprises the fundamental, essential, or irreducible purpose of the project, and is used by USACE to determine whether the project is water dependent. The basic project purpose is to restore the ecosystem.

Overall Project Purpose: The overall project purpose serves as the basis for the Section 404(b)(1) alternatives analysis and is determined by further defining the basic project purpose in a manner that more specifically describes the applicant's goals for the project while allowing a reasonable range of alternatives to be analyzed. The overall project purpose is to improve aquatic and upland habitat conditions through forest and stream restoration activities.

Project Impacts: The proposed project would result in the placement of approximately 2,420 cubic yards of fill within 17,681 linear feet of jurisdictional waters and would result in a permanent, beneficial effect on the ecosystem.

Proposed Mitigation: The proposed project is comprised wholly of restoration activities that would result in a net benefit to the ecosystem. Therefore, the proposed project does not require mitigation.

Project Alternatives: USACE has not endorsed the submitted alternatives analysis at this time. USACE will conduct an independent review of the project alternatives prior to reaching a final permit decision.

3. STATE AND LOCAL APPROVALS:

Water Quality Certification: State water quality certification or a waiver thereof is a prerequisite for the issuance of a Department of the Army Permit to conduct any activity which may result in a fill or pollutant discharge into waters of the United States, pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act of 1972, as amended (33 U.S.C. § 1341 *et seq.*). The applicant has recently submitted an application to the California Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) to obtain water quality certification for the project.. No Department of the Army Permit will be issued until the applicant obtains the required certification or a waiver of certification. A waiver can be explicit, or it may be presumed if the RWQCB fails or refuses to act on a complete application for water quality certification within 60 days of receipt, unless the District Engineer determines a shorter or longer period is a reasonable time for the RWQCB to act.

Water quality issues should be directed to the Executive Officer, California Regional Water Quality Control Board, North Coast Region, 5550 Skylane Boulevard, Suite A, Santa Rosa, California 95403, by the close of the comment period.

Coastal Zone Management: Section 307(c) of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended (16 U.S.C. § 1456(c) *et seq.*), requires a Federal applicant seeking a federal license or permit to conduct any activity occurring in or affecting the coastal zone to obtain a Consistency Determination that indicates the activity conforms with the state's coastal zone management program that indicates the activity conforms with the state's coastal zone management program. Generally, no federal license or permit will be granted until the appropriate state agency has issued a Consistency Certification or has waived its right to do so. Since the project occurs in the coastal zone or may affect coastal zone resources, the applicant has applied for a Consistency Determination from the California Coastal Commission to comply with this requirement.

Coastal zone management issues should be directed to the District Manager, California Coastal Commission, North Coast District Office, 710 E Street, Suite 200, Eureka, California 95501, by the close of the comment period.

Other Local Approvals: The applicant has applied for the following additional governmental authorizations for the project: *a Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement to be issued by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.*)

4. COMPLIANCE WITH VARIOUS FEDERAL LAWS:

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): Upon review of the Department of the Army permit application and other supporting documentation, USACE has made a *preliminary* determination that the project neither qualifies for a Categorical Exclusion nor requires the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement for the purposes of NEPA. At the conclusion of the public comment period, USACE will assess the environmental impacts of the project in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. § 4321-4347), the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations at 40 C.F.R. § 1500-1508, and USACE regulations at 33 C.F.R. § 325. The final NEPA analysis will normally address the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts that result from regulated activities within the jurisdiction of USACE and other non-regulated activities USACE determines to be within its purview of Federal control and responsibility to justify an expanded scope of analysis for NEPA purposes. The final NEPA analysis will be incorporated in the decision documentation that provides the rationale for issuing or denying a Department of the Army Permit for the project. The final NEPA analysis and supporting documentation will be on file with the San Francisco District, Regulatory Division.

Endangered Species Act (ESA): Section 7(a)(2) of the ESA of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. § 1531 *et seq.*), requires Federal agencies to consult with either the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) or the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to ensure actions authorized, funded, or undertaken by the agency are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any Federally-listed species or result in the adverse modification of designated critical habitat. As the Federal lead agency for this project, that applicant has conducted a review of the California Natural Diversity Data Base, digital maps prepared by USFWS and NMFS depicting critical habitat, and other information provided by the

applicant to determine the presence or absence of such species and critical habitat in the project area. Based on this review, the applicant has made a preliminary determination that the following Federally-listed species are present at the project location or in its vicinity and may be affected by project implementation:

- Coho Salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*)
- Steelhead Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*)
- Chinook Salmon *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*)
- Southern Eulachon (*Thaleichthys pacificus*)
- Killer Whale (*Orcinus orca*)

NMFS issued a Biological Assessment on May 10, 2019, to address potential impacts to California Coastal Chinook Salmon, Southern Oregon Northern California Coast Coho Salmon, Northern California Steelhead Trout, Southern Eulachon, and Southern Resident Killer Whale. Consultation considered implementation of the RGP for a 15-year period, from the 2019 season through the end of the 2033 season.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA): Section 305(b)(2) of the MSFCMA of 1966, as amended (16 U.S.C. § 1801 *et seq.*), requires Federal agencies to consult with the NMFS on all proposed actions authorized, funded, or undertaken by the agency that may adversely affect essential fish habitat (EFH). EFH is defined as those waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity. EFH is designated only for those species managed under a Federal Fisheries Management Plan (FMP), such as the *Pacific Groundfish FMP*, the *Coastal Pelagics FMP*, or the *Pacific Coast Salmon FMP*. As the Federal lead agency for this project, the applicant will be responsible for determining the presence or absence of EFH and the need to conduct consultation. To complete the administrative record and the decision on whether to issue a Department of the Army Permit for the project, USACE will obtain all necessary supporting documentation from the applicant concerning the consultation process. Any required consultation must be concluded prior to the issuance of a Department of the Army Permit for the project.

Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act (MPRSA): Section 302 of the MPRSA of 1972, as amended (16 U.S.C. § 1432 *et seq.*), authorizes the Secretary of Commerce, in part, to designate areas of ocean waters, such as the Cordell Bank, Gulf of the Farallones, and Monterey Bay, as National Marine Sanctuaries for the purpose of preserving or restoring such areas for their conservation, recreational, ecological, or aesthetic values. After such designation, activities in sanctuary waters authorized under other authorities are valid only if the Secretary of Commerce certifies that the activities are consistent with Title III of the Act. No Department of the Army Permit will be issued until the applicant obtains any required certification or permit. The project does not occur in sanctuary waters, and a *preliminary* review by USACE indicates the project is not likely to affect sanctuary resources. This presumption of effect, however, remains subject to a final determination by the Secretary of Commerce or his designee.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA): Section 106 of the NHPA of 1966, as amended (16 U.S.C. § 470 *et seq.*), requires Federal agencies to consult with the appropriate State Historic Preservation Officer to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties listed in or eligible for listing in the *National Register of Historic Places*. Section 106 of the Act further requires Federal agencies to consult with the appropriate Tribal Historic Preservation Officer or any Indian tribe to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties, including traditional cultural properties, trust resources, and sacred sites, to which Indian tribes attach historic, religious, and cultural significance. As the Federal lead agency for this project, the applicant will be responsible for determining the presence or absence of historic properties or archaeological resources and the need to conduct consultation. To complete the administrative record and the decision on whether to issue a Department of the Army Permit for the project, USACE will obtain all necessary supporting documentation from the applicant concerning the consultation process. Any required consultation must be concluded prior to the issuance of a Department of the Army Permit for the project. If unrecorded archaeological resources are discovered during project implementation, those operations affecting

such resources will be temporarily suspended until USACE concludes Section 106 consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer or the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer to take into account any project related impacts to those resources.

5. COMPLIANCE WITH THE SECTION 404(b)(1) GUIDELINES:

Projects resulting in discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States must comply with the Guidelines promulgated by the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency under Section 404(b) of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. § 1344(b)). An evaluation pursuant to the Guidelines indicates the project is dependent on location in or proximity to waters of the United States to achieve the basic project purpose. This conclusion raises the (rebuttable) presumption of the availability of a less environmentally damaging practicable alternative to the project that does not require the discharge of dredged or fill material into special aquatic sites. The applicant has been informed to submit an analysis of project alternatives to be reviewed for compliance with the Guidelines.

6. PUBLIC INTEREST EVALUATION:

The decision on whether to issue a Department of the Army Permit will be based on an evaluation of the probable impacts, including cumulative impacts, of the project and its intended use on the public interest. Evaluation of the probable impacts requires a careful weighing of the public interest factors relevant in each particular case. The benefits that may accrue from the project must be balanced against any reasonably foreseeable detriments of project implementation. The decision on permit issuance will, therefore, reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. Public interest factors which may be relevant to the decision process include conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, cultural values, fish and wildlife values, flood hazards, floodplain values, land use, navigation, shore erosion and accretion, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, food and fiber production, mineral needs, considerations of property ownership, and, in general, the needs and welfare of the people.

7. CONSIDERATION OF COMMENTS:

USACE is soliciting comments from the public; Federal, State, and local agencies and officials; Native American Nations or other tribal governments; and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of the project. All comments received by USACE will be considered in the decision on whether to issue, modify, condition, or deny a Department of the Army Permit for the project. To make this decision, comments are used to assess impacts on endangered species, historic properties, water quality, and other environmental or public interest factors addressed in a final environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. Comments are also used to determine the need for a public hearing and to determine the overall public interest in the project.

8. SUBMITTING COMMENTS:

During the specified comment period, interested parties may submit written comments to Stephen Ryan, San Francisco District, Regulatory Division, Eureka Field Office, 601 Startare Drive, Box 13, Eureka, California 95501, comment letters should cite the project name, applicant name, and public notice number to facilitate review by the Regulatory Permit Manager. Comments may include a request for a public hearing on the project prior to a determination on the Department of the Army permit application; such requests shall state, with particularity, the reasons for holding a public hearing. All substantive comments will be forwarded to the applicant for resolution or rebuttal. Additional project information or details on any subsequent project modifications of a minor nature may be obtained from the applicant and/or agent or by contacting the Regulatory Permit Manager by telephone or e-mail (cited in the public notice letterhead). An electronic version of this public notice may be viewed under the Public Notices tab on the USACE website: <https://www.spn.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory>