



Agenda Report

MEETING DATE: Tuesday, June 22, 2021

TO: City Council

FROM: PUBLIC WORKS & UTILITIES DIRECTOR PALMISANO
Jackie McCloud, Environmental Sustainability Manager

SUBJECT: OCEAN PROTECTION COUNCIL PROPOSITION 1
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PROGRAM FOR THE MIDDLE STRUVE
SLOUGH WATER QUALITY AND HABITAT IMPROVEMENT
PROJECT IN THE AMOUNT OF \$1,086,499.95

STATEMENT OF ISSUES:

The City submitted a Letter of Interest for an Ocean Protection Council Proposition 1 Coastal Environmental Justice grant. In order to apply for the grant, the City Council needs to approve and adopt the "Governing Board Resolution for Ocean Protection Council Grants."

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Adopt a resolution authorizing the City Manager to apply for and execute grant agreements from the Ocean Protection Council Proposition 1 Coastal Environmental Justice program for the Middle Struve Slough Water Quality and Habitat Improvement in the amount of \$1,086,499.95.

DISCUSSION:

The Middle Struve Slough Water Quality and Habitat Improvement project is located in the City of Watsonville in Southern Santa Cruz County in the Pájaro River Watershed. This project will provide a large suite of environmental and social benefits for the Watsonville community. It is located within a branch of the Watsonville Slough System, an approximately 800-acre freshwater wetland system, which is one of the State's largest remaining freshwater coastal wetlands.

Construction of this project will result in the restoration and enhancement of coastal wetlands and watershed habitat, stormwater capture, flood attenuation, and water quality improvement, improved access to nature, parks, and trails for Watsonville residents, greenhouse gas capture and implementation of climate change resiliency measures, and extensive environmental education and green jobs training and development for Watsonville residents.

Alignment with Proposition 1 and Ocean Protection Priority Project Types

This project is a multi-benefit ecosystem and watershed restoration project that improves water quality through implementation of habitat restoration and watershed protection measures. The project will address habitat loss and environmental degradation within the Watsonville Slough System through the enhancement of an 1,800 foot linear wetland and riparian corridor and restoration of 4.5 acres of wetland, grassland, and riparian habitat. This work will occur in a watershed that has been highly impaired through historic intensive farming and draining of the wetlands and by more recent urban development. Despite historic watershed degradation, the slough system sustains 270 resident and migratory bird species, and 23 native plants and animals that are State and federally listed as threatened, endangered, or species of concern.

The project represents a community driven effort that will reduce pollutant run-off and restore urban waters and wetlands within the Critical Coastal Area #37. This project is currently in the design and permitting stage by the City and our project partner, Watsonville Wetlands Watch, a non-profit organization dedicated to environmental conservation and community-based watershed restoration. Struve Slough, where proposed work will occur, is 303(d) listed, as impaired by pH, dissolved oxygen, chlorophyll-a, toxicity, turbidity, E. coli bacteria, and fecal coliform bacteria. In order to address this impairment, this project will implement two sediment capture and treatment basins to improve urban run-off prior to entering into the slough and enhance and restore wetland function and habitat. In so doing, the project will serve as a demonstration project, replicable throughout the City, where stormwater inputs are directed untreated to wetlands.

Additional project benefits include climate change resiliency and atmospheric carbon sequestration. Implementation will improve climate change resiliency for sensitive wildlife species dependent on coastal freshwater wetlands and will install approximately 20 trees along the adjacent roadway, which will buffer noise from the habitat area, improve air quality and improve carbon sequestration in the City's urban forest. Implementation will also attenuate peak flows and reduce the impacts of flooding and erosion associated with increased storm strength projected with climate change.

Demonstration of Significant Benefits to Communities Entitled to Environmental Justice

The proposed project will benefit residents of the City of Watsonville, a State recognized disadvantaged community, and is located within the ½ mile buffer of disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged community census tracts that are located along the interconnected impaired waterway. In addition to water quality benefits for residents, the project will enhance public access and environmental education through the creation of an approximately 400-foot trail and elevated boardwalk that will pass through the project site.

Project implementation will focus on maximizing community benefits through involvement of the public in each stage of the watershed restoration process as well as providing youth education and green jobs training for Watsonville youth. This work will be led by Watsonville Wetlands Watch who runs a youth paid job-training program, called the Climate Corps Leadership Institute that provides paid stipends for youth to develop leadership skills and work in local watershed restoration and climate resiliency projects. Watsonville Wetlands Watch staff and the Climate Corps interns will lead watershed restoration work with the

community. Native plantings, site preparation, and watershed restoration work will be done through community based events, including at least 24 youth and community watershed restoration public events. This will enable the project to provide robust bilingual community engagement and watershed education for youth and community members, leading to long-term investment in project success, maintenance, and care.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

This project supports the following City Council Strategic Plan
03-Infrastructure & Environment
05-Community Engagement & Well-Being

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

This project will be fully funded by the Ocean Protection Council Proposition 1 Coastal Environmental Justice Program and does not require match funding. The City's project partner Watsonville Wetlands Watch will be contributing matching grant funds in the amount of \$75,000 to support the Climate Corps Leadership Institute and Habitat Restoration. The City's Environmental Sustainability Manager will act as the project manager and will count grant administration and management time as in-kind contributing funds for the project.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION:

No alternative is known at this time.

ATTACHMENTS AND/OR REFERENCES (If any):

- 1) Governing Board Resolution for Ocean Protection Council Grants