

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 27, 2004

FARMONT RANCH RESTORATION

File No.02-134
Project Manager: Peter S. Brand

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$55,000 to the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy to augment funds authorized by the Conservancy on January 23, 2003, to preserve, restore, and provide public access to Farmont Ranch, specifically for the restoration of trail corridors for habitat and erosion control.

LOCATION: Ventura River, adjacent to the City of Ojai, in Ventura County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Coastal Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: Trail System Map

Exhibit 3: January 23, 2004 Staff Recommendation

Exhibit 4: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed fifty-five thousand dollars (\$55,000) to the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy (OVLC) for the restoration of trail corridors for habitat and erosion control on the Farmont Ranch in Ventura County, subject to the condition that the project shall not commence and no funds shall be disbursed until:

1. The Executive Officer has approved in writing a project work program, budget, and timeline; the names and qualifications of any contractors to carry out all or part of the project; and a signing plan that acknowledges Conservancy funding.
 2. OVLC has entered into and recorded agreements pursuant to Public Resources Code Sections 31116(c) and 831.5, to protect the public interest in improvements funded under this grant, and to afford the OVLC the same level of tort immunity as afforded a public entity.”
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Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that the proposed Farmont Ranch Restoration project remains consistent with the purposes and criteria set forth in Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, and with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001, as determined by the Conservancy in its original authorization of the project on January 23, 2003.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends an augmentation to the Farmont Ranch project by providing additional funding of up to \$55,000 to the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy (OVLC) for the restoration of trail corridors for habitat and erosion control. The project was authorized on January 23, 2004, through a grant to OVLC in the amount of \$3.1 million to acquire, preserve, and plan for restoration of and public access to Farmont Ranch. The 1,556-acre acquisition was accomplished in June 2003.

In approving the funding for the Farmont Ranch acquisition, the Conservancy challenged the OVLC to raise the money needed for stewardship. Since then OVLC has received \$800,000 in donations that funds an endowment for long-term operation and management of the property.

As part of the authorization of the Farmont Ranch acquisition, the Conservancy also provided \$100,000 for a public access, restoration, and resource management plan for the property and to cover pre-acquisition costs. The trails plan is complete (see Exhibit 2). With its own funds, OVLC has already created a trailhead and parking lot on property adjoining the ranch, closed five miles of damaged trails and opened five miles of trail. The proposed authorization would provide funding to complete implementation of the trails plan. The plan focuses on restoring trail corridors that currently consist of informal paths and old forest roads that are causing erosion and sedimentation problems and other adverse impacts to habitat in the Ventura River watershed. Once the proposed trail corridor restoration is complete, the OVLC will open the remaining six miles of trail for equestrian, bicycling, and hiking use.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Previous Authorization:	\$100,000
Recommended Action:	<u>55,000</u>
Total Conservancy Funds:	\$155,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is Proposition 50, the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002. The proposed trail corridor project will provide coastal watershed protection consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, specifically Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code and with Water Quality Control Plan—Los Angeles Region, Basin Plan for the Coastal Watersheds of Los Angeles and Ventura Counties, and is thus consistent with the purposes of this funding source. The OVLC is providing a match through the restoration of other trails on the property with donated funds.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION,
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES, AND
LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

In its authorization on January 23, 2003, (Exhibit 3), the Conservancy determined that acquisition and preparation of a restoration plan and public access management plan for the Farmont Ranch property would be consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code and with the Conservancy's project selection criteria and guidelines. The proposed authorization would continue to implement the project initiated in that action, which remains consistent with the 2003 findings.

**CONSISTENCY WITH THE CONSERVANCY'S
STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES:**

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective B**, the project will open an area that is currently inaccessible or closed to public use while respecting the need to minimize impacts on sensitive natural resources.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective A**, the project will restore and enhance oak woodlands and other coastal habitats.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed trail project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the following reasons:

The proposed project qualifies as a Class 4 categorical exemption pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15304 in that it consists of minor private alterations in the condition of land and vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees.

The proposed project also qualifies as a Class 1 categorical exemption pursuant to § 15301 in that it consists of minor alterations of existing facilities including pedestrian trails and similar facilities that would not involve removal of a scenic resource, and maintenance of native growth and streamflows to protect fish and wildlife resources.