

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Project Synopsis d.  
April 24, 2003

**SAN MATEO CREEK ACTION PROGRAM PHASE II**

File No. 03-036  
Project Manager: Jack Liebster

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$150,000 to Trout Unlimited to conduct an exotic animal species reduction program in the San Mateo Creek watershed.

**LOCATION:** The San Mateo Creek watershed is located in northern San Diego County and encompasses part of the Cleveland National Forest (CNF), the north end of Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base, and surrounding private lands. This project will be confined to the CNF portion of the Creek (see Exhibit 1).

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Resource Enhancement

<b>ESTIMATED COST:</b>	Coastal Conservancy	\$150,000
	U.S. Forest Service (est. in-kind services)	10,000
	State Dept. of Fish and Game (est. in kind services)	15,000
	Trout Unlimited (est. in-kind services)	<u>5,000</u>
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$180,000</b>

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the "Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000" (Proposition 12) for the restoration of native fish to San Mateo Creek.

**PROJECT SUMMARY:** The proposed action consists of authorizing a grant of up to \$150,000 to reduce exotic animal and plant populations that limit the potential for restoring steelhead and other native fish to the San Mateo Creek watershed. Proposition 12 specifically allocates \$800,000 to be administered by the Conservancy for restoring fish to San Mateo Creek. Exotic animal species, including largemouth bass, brown bullhead, green sunfish, and several others are major predators of the native steelhead and partially armored threespine stickleback, and have invaded San Mateo Creek (Creek) in large numbers. Invasive plants, in-

cluding giant reed (*Arundo donax*), tamarisk, pampas grass, castor bean, and others also have gained a foothold in the watershed, encroaching on the native habitat necessary to support indigenous fish populations.

San Mateo Creek rises in the Cleveland National Forest and flows in a southwesterly direction to the Pacific Ocean just south of San Clemente (Exhibit 1). Much of the lower reach flows through the Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base (Base). The Creek was at one time an important steelhead-producing stream in San Diego County, supporting significant local sport fisheries of both juveniles and adults. Newspaper articles from 1916, for example, report a large steelhead/rainbow trout population and high fishing success in the Creek. Local residents and Department of Fish and Game (DFG) personnel have reported seeing adult steelhead ranging up to 4 feet and weighing up to 15 pounds between 1900 and 1950. After 1950 surveys began to reflect a decline of juvenile steelhead/rainbow trout in San Mateo Creek. By 1991 one researcher classified the San Mateo Creek steelhead population as extinct.

But in 1999, a fisherman reported catching and releasing a steelhead/rainbow trout from San Mateo Creek. Numerous sightings of a small population of these fish have been made since. Studies of individual fish by the DFG and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have confirmed that they were anadromous steelhead. Wildlife biologists have become increasingly aware that the production capability of small coastal streams such as San Mateo Creek may be relatively small compared to large, perennial river systems, but collectively they provide a means to ensure a greater diversity of sub-populations, and are critical to range expansion and recovery after drought or other perturbations.

In September 2002, the Conservancy granted an initial \$50,000 to Trout Unlimited (TU) to begin planning for needed restoration activities. Through a cooperative effort with the Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, California Department of Parks and Recreation, San Diego Trout, and other agencies and organizations, this work program is proceeding. This grant would enable development of a long-term plan and implementation program to reduce exotic animal and plant populations, obtain necessary permits and approvals, carry out the highest priority enhancement projects, establish means to prevent future re-infestation of the watershed, and develop a monitoring and adaptive management strategy to sustain restoration accomplishments. Proposed proj-

ects will be presented to the Conservancy for consideration and possible authorization at a future meeting.

**PROJECT SUPPORT** The proposed authorization has the support of public agencies, environmental organizations and community groups. Letters of Support are attached in Exhibit 2 and additional letters will be hand-carried to the Conservancy meeting.

**CONSISTENCY WITH  
CONSERVANCY'S  
ENABLING LEGISLATION**

Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251 *et seq.*) provides for the Coastal Conservancy's participation in a program of coastal resource enhancement. The proposed authorization would facilitate the study and enhancement of wetland and riparian resources at San Mateo Creek that have become degraded due, in part, to human activities. The proposed project may also lead to the enhancement of the natural and scenic character of the area, and the ability of the watershed to support steelhead salmon and other endangered species. Accordingly, the proposed project is consistent with Section 31251, under which the Conservancy may award grants to state agencies, local public agencies, and nonprofit organizations for projects that seek to remedy loss of natural and scenic values because of natural or human-induced events.

Public Resources Code Section 31251.2(a) authorizes Coastal Conservancy participation in projects to enhance a watershed resource that is partly outside of the coastal zone where such action protects or enhances coastal resources within the coastal zone. Camp Pendleton officials have been carrying out a control program to remove exotic animals from the lagoon at the mouth of San Mateo Creek. Reducing the exotic animals infesting the pools outside the coastal zone in the upper San Mateo Creek watershed will enhance the resource by slowing or halting the re-infestation of the whole stream system, including that portion within the coastal zone, when water flow returns.

Public Resources Code Section 31251.2(a) further provides that "[a]ny of these projects or grants which involve the management of fish shall be approved by the Department of Fish and Game." Consistent with this provision, the Department has participated in development of the project and will be directly involved in its implementation.

Public Resources Code Section 31252 specifies that "[a]ll areas proposed for resource enhancement by a state agency, local

public agency, or nonprofit organization shall be identified in a certified local coastal plan or program as requiring public action to resolve existing or potential resource protection problems or shall be so identified in other local plans which the commission determines to be consistent with the policies and objectives of Division 20 (commencing with Section 30000). . . .” Since the project area is on federal land, no local coastal program exists or will be developed. However, the San Mateo Creek Enhancement Plan adopted by the Conservancy September 26, 2002 constitutes a local plan under Section 31252. As discussed under “Consistency with the Coastal Act” below, the Plan is consistent with Section 30231 of Division 20 of the Public Resources Code which provides for restoring the biological productivity of coastal waters.

Public Resources Code Section 31253 provides that the Conservancy “may provide up to the total cost of any coastal resource enhancement project. . . .” Staff is recommending that the Conservancy authorize funds toward the process of restoring the resources of the San Mateo watershed.

**CONSISTENCY WITH  
CONSERVANCY'S  
PROJECT SELECTION  
CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

**Required Criteria**

**Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.

**Consistency with the purposes of the funding source:** The proposed actions to improve habitat for native fish are consistent with the funding source, an appropriation to the Conservancy from the Coastal Protection Program of Proposition 12, which specifically provides for such activities.

**Support from the public:** See "Project Support" above.

**Location:** The proposed project is located in upper San Mateo Creek and its watershed, within historic steelhead spawning habitat and in adjacent areas affecting that habitat, including in the coastal zone.

**Need:** The financial support and participation of the Conservancy are critical for the success of this project. The USFS,

NMFS, TU, and DFG are all operating on limited budgets and staffing resources that must be spread across their jurisdictional responsibilities. At the same time, Proposition 12 specifically allocates funds for the Conservancy to restore native fisheries to the San Mateo Creek watershed. Without the Conservancy funding specifically allocated to San Mateo Creek, the cooperating federal, state, and private organizations (USFS, NMFS, DFG, TU) would not have the funds to accomplish this restoration. Moreover, the Conservancy's organizing, funding, and staff assistance help catalyze a coordinated, comprehensive, cooperative effort among the agencies and organizations that have jurisdiction and interest in various parts of the watershed. The project will continue work on a comprehensive, workable restoration plan for the watershed's critical resources.

**Greater-than-local interest:** Restoration of salmon habitat has great priority at both a state and nationwide level. Southern steelhead have been designated as an endangered species under the federal Endangered Species Act. The National Marine Fisheries Service has recognized the importance of restoring populations of steelhead in southern California streams, and San Mateo Creek in particular, to long-range species recovery efforts. It extended the range of the endangered species designation of the southern California steelhead to include San Mateo Creek and areas to the south.

The California Department of Fish and Game published a Steelhead Restoration and Management Plan (Feb. 1996) that specifically calls for an "assessment of habitat and the potential for restoration of streams south of Los Angeles." The statewide bond measure, Proposition 12, specifically identifies the restoration of native fish to San Mateo Creek as a state priority, and allocates \$800,000 specifically for that effort.

#### **Additional Criteria**

**Conflict Resolution:** The proposed project will continue to build the working relationship between government agencies and public advocacy groups that has replaced what were sometimes contentious and unproductive interactions with cooperation and a growing sense of trust.

**Cooperation:** In developing the project proposal, the involved governmental agencies and private organizations have not only begun a new level of cooperation, but have stepped forward to take on specific responsibilities for accomplishing project goals, as evidenced by their participation in the development of this project and the in-kind support already pledged.

CONSISTENCY WITH  
THE COASTAL ACT:

The proposed project would be consistent with the planning and management policies contained in Section 30231 of the Public Resources Code, which states that “[t]he biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries and lakes appropriate to maintain optimum populations of marine organisms and for the protection of human health shall be maintained and, where feasible, restored. . .” The objective of the project is to restore the San Mateo Creek and the native populations of fish that once made it their home. The project is entirely on federal land, so there is no applicable Local Coastal Program; however, the project will affect the coastal zone.

COMPLIANCE  
WITH CEQA:

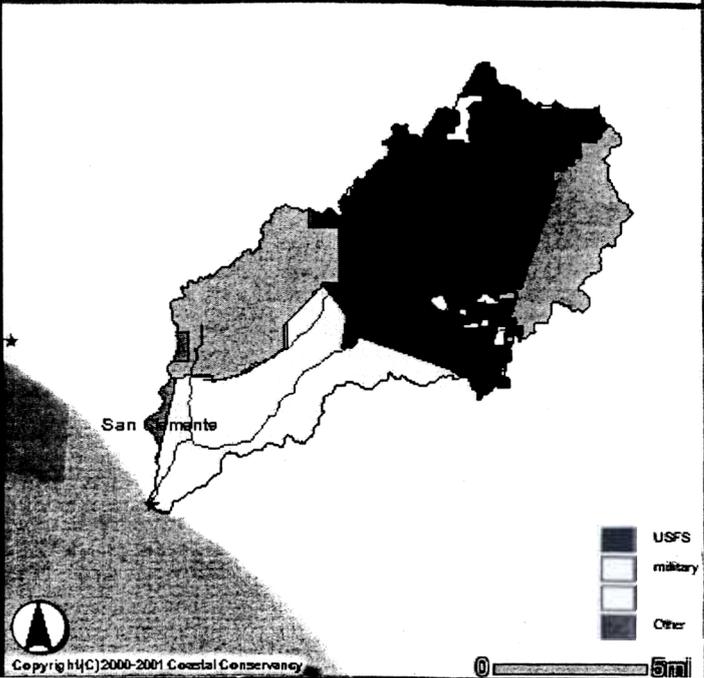
The proposed authorization only involves feasibility and planning for possible future actions and, thus, is statutorily exempt (14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262) from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15378. The project is also categorically exempt under Section 15306 as it involves basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to environmental resources. Any projects later proposed for Conservancy authorization of funding for implementation will be evaluated as required by CEQA.

EXHIBIT

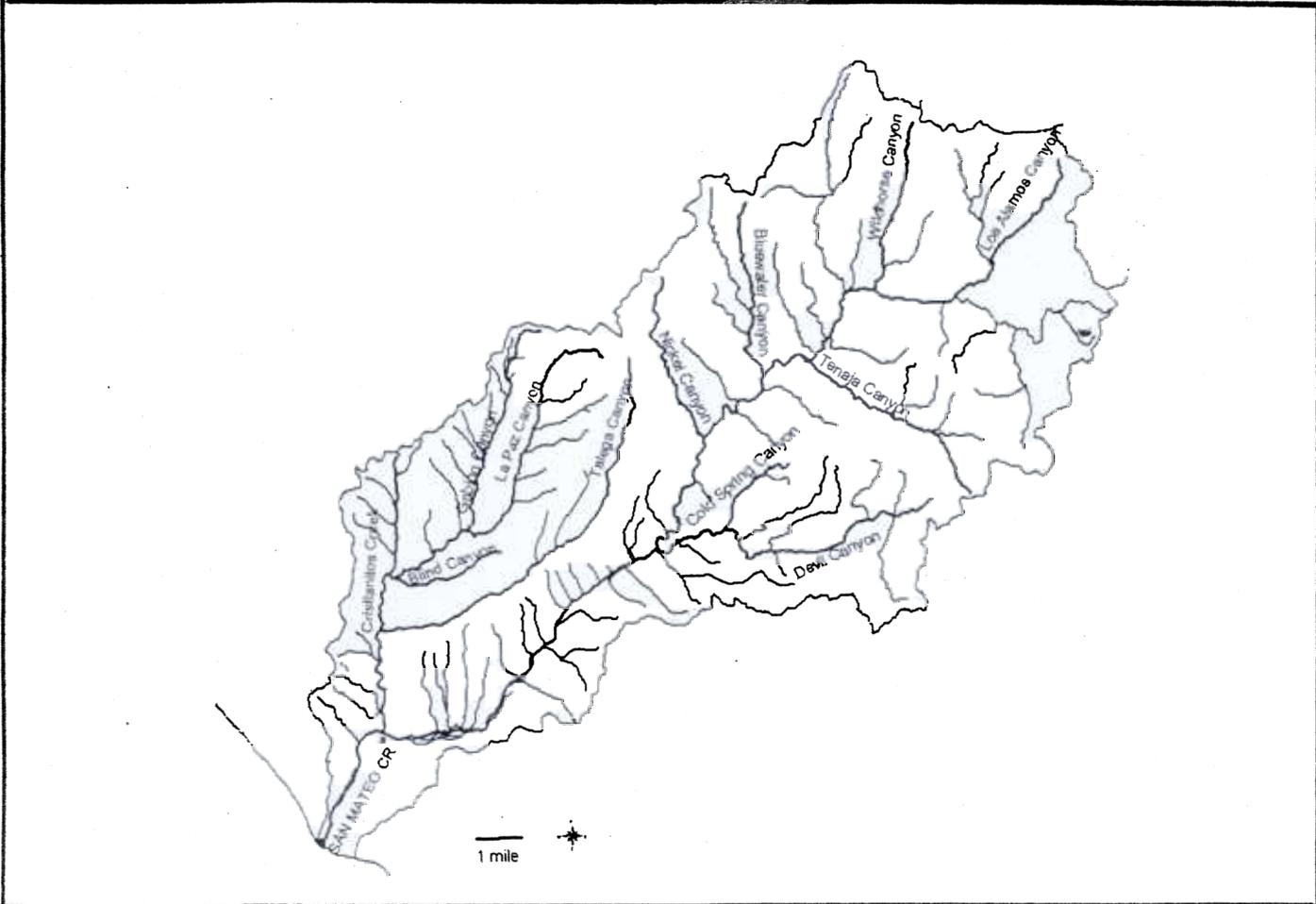
San Mateo Creek Watershed



Regional Location



Land Ownership



San Mateo Watershed Hydrology

**EXHIBIT 2**

**Letters of Support**

*Additional letters will be mailed separately and/or hand-carried to the meeting.*

SACRAMENTO OFFICE

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WWW.SENATE.CA.GOV/MORROW/

WADE C. TEASDALE  
CHIEF OF STAFF

# California State Senate

SENATOR  
**BILL MORROW**  
THIRTY-EIGHTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT



## COMMITTEES

BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS

ENERGY, UTILITIES  
AND COMMUNICATIONS  
(VICE CHAIR)

GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

TRANSPORTATION

SELECT COMMITTEES

SELECT COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE  
PRICE MANIPULATION OF THE  
WHOLESALE ENERGY MARKET

MOBILE AND MANUFACTURED HOMES

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY  
ADMISSIONS AND OUTREACH

URBAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

SUBCOMMITTEES

MENTAL HEALTH AND  
NEURODEVELOPMENTAL  
DISORDERS

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

September 9, 2002

Mr. Samuel Schuchat, Executive Director  
California State Coastal Conservancy  
1330 Broadway, Suite 1100  
Oakland, CA 94612

**Subject: San Mateo Creek Urgent Action Plan**

Dear Mr. Schuchat:

It gives me great pleasure to write this letter in support of efforts that the Coastal Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, San Diego Trout and other cooperating governmental agencies are doing to restore native fish to the San Mateo Creek watershed in San Diego, Riverside and Orange counties.

I have been a strong advocate of procuring funding to find native fish such as the Southern California steelhead in Proposition 12 monies. The next step is to remove the exotic animals that are predators to the native species and degrade the habitats of the watershed. This is an extremely vital and important step toward restoring the watersheds and fisheries within Southern California. Therefore I urge your support of Trout Unlimited's project to tackle this very important task.

I appreciate your assistance toward restoring the wetlands and I hope that you will continue with your support of Trout Unlimited's San Mateo Creek Urgent Action Plan.

Respectfully,

  
BILL MORROW  
Senator, 38<sup>th</sup> District



DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

http://www.dfg.ca.gov
4949 Viewridge Avenue
San Diego, CA 92123
(858) 467-4201



September 18, 2002

Samuel Schuchat, Executive Director
State Coastal Conservancy
Attn: Jack Liebster, Project Manager
1330 Broadway, Suite 1100
Oakland, California 94612



Dear Mr. Schuchat:

San Mateo Creek Project

The Department of Fish and Game has reviewed the San Mateo Creek Project proposed by Trout Unlimited. With this grant Trout Unlimited, working closely with DFG staff and the other cooperating nonprofit and governmental agencies, will begin the process to restore native fish, including the Southern California steelhead, to the San Mateo Creek Watershed in San Diego, Orange and Riverside Counties.

As you know, this work was specifically identified as a priority in the "Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000" (Proposition 12). The proposed project to remove non-native animals in the San Mateo Watershed is an important first step in what will need to be a careful and sustained effort to restore the resources of this watershed. The presence of invasive fish, bull frogs and crayfish has resulted in decimation and displacement of the native fish, amphibians, and pond turtles, which historically occupied this watershed. This has, in part, lead to degradation of the habitat value of San Mateo Creek and its tributaries.

For these reasons, we support and approve of the Coastal Conservancy's proposed grant of \$50,000 to Trout Unlimited. Further, we urge your support of the San Mateo Creek Project.

Sincerely,

[Handwritten signature of C. F. Raysbrook]

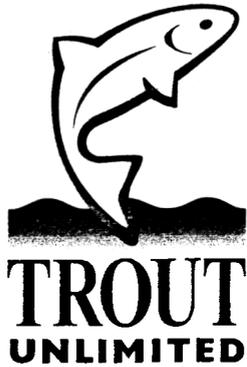
C. F. Raysbrook
Regional Manager

cc: Department of Fish and Game
Mary L. Larson-R5, Los Alamitos; Tim Hovey-R5, San Diego

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RECEIVED

SEF



8-29-02

Samuel Schuchat, Executive Director  
State Coastal Conservancy  
1330 Broadway, Suite 1100  
Oakland, CA 94612

Re: San Mateo Creek Enhancement Plan  
Attn: Jack Liebster, Project Manager

Dear Mr. Schuchat,

Trout Unlimited, a 501c3 non-profit corporation, founded in 1959, is the largest Coldwater Conservation Organization in the United States. Its mission is to Preserve, Protect and Restore, coldwater fisheries and their watersheds. The South Coast Chapter of Trout Unlimited has been involved with the historical fact-finding, and restoration efforts on San Mateo Creek since 1990.

The California Council of Trout Unlimited, comprised of 8 Chapters and over 10,000 members hereby asks that the Conservancy Board appoint Trout Unlimited of California as the grantee for this project. Trout Unlimited has historical and ongoing support of the following organizations on this effort: San Diego Trout, California Trout, Southern Steelhead Coalition, Surfrider Foundation, Sierra Club, Orange County Flyfishers, San Diego Flyfishers, Isaac Walton League, People for Trees, North County Audubon Society, San Diego County Fish and Wildlife Commission, Hubbs Sea World Research Center, Fly Fishing Federation, San Diego Wildlife Federation, and others.

This project will involve the expenditure of \$800,000 in funds specifically set aside by the voters of California on March 7, 2000 within the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Act, (Proposition 12). The funds shall be spent to restore the arroyo chub, partially armored stickleback and southern steelhead fisheries to their native creeks of San Mateo Creek, and it's tributary Devil Canyon Creek and San Onofre Creek located in San Diego County. The project will involve a stream survey, the removal of predatory non-native plants and animals, the removal of fish migration barriers, reduction of erosion and sedimentation problems and reintroduction of native plants and fish.

**RFC/EI**

TU will provide \$5000 of in-kind funding, i.e. volunteer time.

TU is prepared to agree with the terms and conditions of the Grant Agreement once the Agreement is final and has been reviewed by Trout Unlimited.

TU authorizes any of the following people to act as a representative of Trout Unlimited And to negotiate, execute, and carry out terms and conditions of this Grant Agreement.

George Sutherland, RVP  
Brian Arsenault, Chapter President  
Gary Watt, Council Chair  
Jamie Hunter, National Resource Board  
Steve Netti, VP

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "George Sutherland".

George Sutherland, Vice President  
Southwest Region 10.

cc: Gary Watt  
Gordon Ehrman  
Brian Arsenault  
Jamie Hunter  
Steve Netti

September 8, 2002

Mr. Paul Marabito, Chairman  
State Coastal Conservancy  
1330 Broadway, Suite 1100  
Oakland, CA 94612

RE: SAN MATEO CREEK NATIVE FISH RESTORATION

Dear Chairman Morabito:

Over 20 years ago, San Diego Trout was founded from a small group of dedicated trout fishermen that felt that the decline of natural habitat for San Diego's native fish population had reached a point of no return.

Whether as individuals or as a group, we have always felt that the native fish in San Diego County's streams and creeks were unique and special. Subsequently, over the years, fisheries scientists have proven that not only are some of our fish unique, but that they are special--in the case of steelhead trout (*Onchorynchus mykiss irideus*), they were revealed to be the original steelhead trout from which all later subspecies evolved as the glaciers receded northward.

The original genetic code for all the steelhead/rainbow trout in the world today lies within the few remaining fish found in San Diego County's (partly Riverside County) San Mateo Creek. As such, the importance of restoring native fish habitat, on San Mateo Creek, extends far beyond the borders of San Diego County to all the current environs of rainbow trout throughout the world.

Past studies, from 1939, found partially armored three-spine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus microcephalus*) populations inhabiting San Mateo Creek. But since that time, its habitat has declined and the fish are gone.

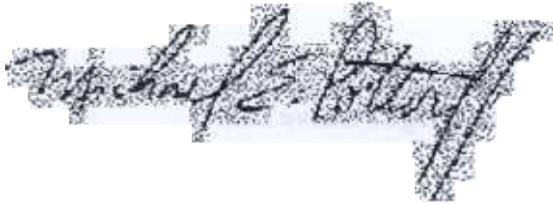
One of the first items of any native fish restoration on San Mateo Creek, will be the necessity of removing the non-native predators to steelhead and partially armored three-spine stickleback, that inhabit--in large quantities--the stream today.

We (Coastal Conservancy, San Diego Trout, Trout Unlimited, and cooperating governmental agencies) all agree that urgent action to remove non-native predatory animals from San Mateo Creek is required as a first step in the restoration. (The southern steelhead in San Mateo Creek have been predated by these animals to the extent that there only 4-5 individuals remaining from the original 42.

We are asking that you approve the grant to Trout Unlimited through the Coastal Conservancy's "San Mateo Creek Urgent Action Program," to save the remaining fish and to make the waters hospitable for subsequent returning steelhead, and, to make San Mateo's Creek's waters viable for the reintroduction of partially armored three-spine stickleback.

We thank you for all your help and cooperation on this urgent matter,

Sincerely,



Michael Pottorff  
San Diego Trout



Allen Greenwood  
San Diego Trout