

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 6, 2008

**VENTURA RIVER PARKWAY PROGRAM:
DRAPEAU PROPERTY ACQUISITION**

File No. 08-107-01
Project Manager: Bob Thiel

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$96,000 to the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy to acquire and prepare a stewardship plan for the 53-acre Drapeau property in and along the Ventura River in unincorporated Ventura County.

LOCATION: Ventura County, north of the City of Ventura.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Reservation of Significant Coastal Resource Areas

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project location](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [County and watershed maps](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Regional maps of the Drapeau property](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [OVLC Preserves and other holdings](#)
 - Exhibit 5: [Drapeau property boundaries](#)
 - Exhibit 6: [Site photos](#)
 - Exhibit 7: [Project letters](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31111 and 31350-31356 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed ninety-six thousand dollars to the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy to acquire and prepare a stewardship plan for approximately 53.50 acres of land commonly known as the Drapeau property (Ventura County Assessor’s Parcel Number 061-0-150-260) in and along the Ventura River in Ventura County to protect significant coastal resource areas. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds for acquisition, the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy (OVLC) shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy all relevant acquisition documents, including but not limited to the appraisal, environmental assessments, agreement of purchase and sale, escrow instructions, and documents of title necessary to the acquisition.
2. The OVLC shall pay no more than fair market value for the property.
3. The OVLC shall permanently dedicate the property for habitat and resource protection, open space preservation, and public access (to the extent compatible with habitat and resource protection) in a manner acceptable to the Conservancy's Executive Officer.
4. The OVLC shall acknowledge Conservancy funding by erecting and maintaining on the Drapeau property, or at another approved location, a sign that has been reviewed and approved by the Conservancy's Executive Officer.
5. Prior to disbursement of funds for preparation of the stewardship plan, the OVLC shall submit for the review and approval of the Conservancy's Executive Officer a work plan and the names and qualifications of any contractors that the grantee intends to employ to carry out that project."

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:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 8 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31350-31356) regarding reservation of significant coastal resource areas and with Section 31111 regarding the funding of plans.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines."
3. The Ojai Valley Land Conservancy is a nonprofit organization existing under the provisions of Section 501(c) (3) of the US Internal Revenue Code and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This project would provide funds to enable the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy to acquire and prepare a stewardship plan for approximately 53.50 acres of undeveloped river bottom and riparian property in and along the Ventura River in the Oak View area of unincorporated Ventura County for habitat and open space preservation. The project site, commonly known as the Drapeau property, consists of Ventura County Assessors Parcel Number 061-0-150-260. A recent appraisal of the property calculated its fair market value to be \$80,250, and a portion of the proposed \$96,000 grant equal to that appraised value would be used to fund the purchase of the property. The OVLC would use the balance of the grant (or approximately \$15,000) to prepare a stewardship plan for the site.

The acquisition would complement the OVLC's two major land holdings along the Ventura River---the Ventura River Preserve and the Confluence Preserve---and assist the OVLC in its efforts to eventually connect the two reserve components (see Exhibit 3). It would also assist in promoting a larger community vision for a continuous swath of protected areas within the Ventura River riparian corridor that would extend from the Ventura River Preserve to the north beyond the Confluence Preserve to Foster Park in Ventura and even the Ventura River estuary. For the past several years, the OVLC and its partners---including the Coastal Conservancy, Ventura Hillsides Conservancy, and the Trust for Public Land---have worked to promote the creation of a river parkway program for the Ventura River, a comprehensive effort to acquire and restore a contiguous corridor of riparian habitat and open space along the 15 miles of the river from Matilija Dam and the City of Ojai to the estuary. By acquiring fee title or conservation easements along the majority of the river, the OVLC and its partners intend to develop a comprehensive program that would protect habitat, create wildlife linkages, provide public recreational and educational opportunities, and reconnect the river to its floodplain.

Acquisition of the Drapeau property, along with the addition of a conservation easement that the OVLC is currently negotiating for a parcel southwest of the Drapeau property (see Exhibit 3), would preserve a significant section of floodplain along this reach, preserving both its habitat value and natural floodplain services, such as such as groundwater recharge and stormwater treatment and management. It would also protect the floodplain and riparian habitat from development, which continues to encroach on much of the Ventura River corridor. The Drapeau property includes valuable habitat for the endangered least Bell's vireo, as well as alluvial scrub vegetation, a plant community that the Department of Fish & Game has characterized as uncommon in the local and regional area.

The stewardship plan to be prepared for the Drapeau property by the OVLC under the proposed grant will analyze the site's resources and prescribe a program for restoration and management of the site. The OVLC's stewardship plan for the property will likely include working with the Ventura County Watershed Protection District to remove *Arundo donax* from the riparian corridor, and then conducting additional ecological restoration of the site. The plan will also address stabilization of sections of streambank along the public bike path that is on the adjacent property, using bioengineering methods rather than hard or impermeable structures. In addition, the plan will likely provide for public access on the Drapeau property along an envisioned trail that would run from the OVLC's Ventura River Preserve to the Confluence Preserve within the riparian corridor.

The OVLC is a 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is preserve, protect and enhance the natural resources of the Ojai Valley, a mission it accomplishes through land acquisition, , restoration, education, and recreation programs. Since its inception in 1987, the OVLC has protected and managed over 1,930 acres of habitat and open space (see Exhibit 4) and has undertaken several large habitat restoration programs, including an extensive restoration of its 58-acre Ojai Meadows Preserve. As demonstrated by its successful completion of several projects funded by the Conservancy, the OVLC has the necessary experience and expertise to implement the proposed project.

Site Description:

The Drapeau property is located in and along the Ventura River in the Oak View area of

unincorporated County, about two miles south of Ojai and seven miles north of downtown Ventura, near State Highway 33 (Ventura Avenue) and Santa Ana Road. The property lies outside the coastal zone but within the Ventura River watershed, an important coastal system that is described in detail below. The site is zoned by the County of Ventura as Open Space (OS-40), and surrounding land uses include open space, agricultural and residential properties. Although vehicle access from a public road to the property is not available, the Drapeau parcel lies east of and immediately adjacent to the 9.5 mile Ojai Valley Trail---a bike, equestrian, jogging and pedestrian path that runs along the River from Fox Street in Ojai to Foster Park in Ventura, where it connects with the 6.3 mile Ventura River Trail to downtown Ventura.

The property is located in the floodplain of the river, and its primary topography is river bottom, but a large portion of the property includes upland riparian forest and alluvial scrub. At least two channels of the Ventura River mainstem run the full length of the property. Along this and other reaches, the river is characterized by braided stream systems that do not always channel into a particular stream course but instead often form new channels in extreme storm events and debris flows. During the winter rainy season, the river is extremely dynamic, but in the summer months the flows along this section of the river are often ephemeral.

The Drapeau site has a history of cattle grazing, and there are several small structures on the site: two tree houses and a water diversion structure that was apparently constructed by an adjacent landowner. But with the exception of those structures and several social trails, there have been few human-induced impacts; the property is in relatively pristine condition with good ecological value.

Vegetation communities on the site include alluvial scrub, riparian woodland and oak woodland. The western portion of the property is primarily alluvial scrub, while the eastern portion consists of riparian woodland along the wetted channel and oak woodland along elevated bluffs within the floodplain and steep embankments that transition from the floodplain to upland areas (see Exhibit 6). There are three to five acres of *Arundo donax* on the property, as well as other non-native invasive species such as tree of heaven, castor bean, tree tobacco and scotch broom. Nevertheless, the Drapeau property provides extensive habitat for a variety of species.

The eastern section of the site includes all levels of vegetative cover: a canopy of numerous mature willows, sycamores, cottonwoods and coast live oak; a shrub layer of mulefat, poison oak, squaw bush and California rose; and ground cover of mugwort and non-native grasses. The site also contains alluvial species such as mulefat, deerweed, black sage and buckwheat. Among the aquatic species that have been observed on the site are stickleback, arroyo chub, western toad and Pacific tree frog. Other wildlife documented on or in the vicinity of the Drapeau property include spotted towhee, black grosbeak, yellow warbler, song sparrow, common yellow throats, least Bell's vireo, osprey, red tail hawk, blue heron, green heron, black-crowned night heron, great egret, white-faced ibis, mallard duck, rainbow trout, gopher snake, rattlesnake, coyote, and woodrat.

Watershed Description

The Drapeau property lies within the Ventura River watershed, which encompasses about 226 square miles and is roughly 31 miles long from its headwaters in Los Padres National Forest to its outfall into the Pacific (See Exhibit 2). The mainstem of the river, which originates at the confluence of North Fork Matilija Creek and Matilija Creek, is about 15.6 miles long. Downstream of that juncture, the river's principal tributaries are San Antonio Creek, Willis Creek, Rice Creek, Coyote Creek and Cañada Larga.

Because much of the river corridor has retained its rural character, there are numerous intact examples of riparian cottonwood, California black walnut, sycamore and oak woodlands, as well as chaparral, flood plain, and grassland habitats along the river. Habitats in and near the river sustain one of the highest diversities of vertebrates in Southern California: nearly 300 vertebrate species have been seen in the lower reaches of the Ventura River alone. At least 26 special status species inhabit or utilize aquatic, riparian and wetland habitats in the watershed, including 13 species listed as threatened or endangered and 13 California species of special concern. Listed species include southern steelhead trout, tidewater goby, Least Bell's vireo, Southwestern willow flycatcher, California brown pelican, California least tern, peregrine falcon, Belding's savannah sparrow, ringtail, black-shouldered kite, western snowy plover, California red-legged frog, and the California condor.

The major issue within the watershed has been the dramatic decline of southern steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), a federally listed endangered species. Until the late 1940's the river ran essentially unimpeded to the ocean, and 4,000 to 5,000 adult steelhead would migrate up the river each year to spawn and rear, creating within the Ventura River one of the largest steelhead runs in the state. But in 1948, the Ventura County Flood Control District built the 198-foot high Matilija Dam on the Ventura River to control flooding and alleviate persistent water supply shortages that supposedly plagued the watershed since the 1920s. The dam included no fish passage and thus cutoff access to more than half of the historic steelhead spawning grounds.

Matilija Dam is a 620-foot wide, concrete arch dam located inland of the coastal zone, about 16 miles upstream from the Pacific and just over half a mile from the confluence of Matilija Creek with the Ventura River. Although the dam was constructed with a design reservoir capacity of more than 7,000 acre feet, massive sedimentation has reduced the reservoir's capacity to less than 500 acre feet. Over 6 million cubic yards of silts, sands, gravels, cobbles and boulders are estimated to reside behind the dam, and the reservoir is projected to fill in completely by 2020 if the dam is not removed. The dam is responsible for a variety of adverse effects on stream ecology and wildlife. The sediment trapped by the dam has deprived downstream reaches of the sand, gravel, and more coarse-grained materials needed to sustain a suitable substrate for fish, such as riffle and pool formations, sandbars, and secondary channels. The dam has blocked river flows from the upper watershed and altered natural stream and habitat dynamics. Other problems associated with the dam include the loss of riparian and wildlife corridors between the Ventura River and Matilija Creek, and the deteriorating condition of the dam itself.

A broad coalition of local, state, federal, and private agencies (including the Conservancy) have been working for the past decade to study the feasibility of removing Matilija Dam, to finalize engineering and other designs, and to secure the funding and congressional support needed to

complete the project. Removal of the dam would restore fish passage to historic spawning and rearing habitat for southern steelhead in the upper watershed. It would also restore natural sediment transport downstream and improve sand replenishment at beaches along the coast. The Matilija Dam Ecosystem Restoration Program is one of the largest dam removal projects in the country, as well as one of the largest ecosystem restoration projects ever undertaken by the Corps west of the Mississippi River. When the project is fully implemented, the Ventura River watershed and its related estuarine and ocean habitats offshore will more closely resemble historic conditions.

Project History

The Coastal Conservancy has partnered with other agencies and nonprofit organizations for many years to protect, enhance and restore the Ventura River watershed. Those efforts include over \$7 million in Conservancy grants to help fund the evaluation project, dam removal feasibility study, and habitat restoration program for Matilija Dam; a grant to the Casitas Municipal Water District to fund the design and construction of a fish ladder at the Robles Diversion on the mainstem; a grant to the Ventura County Watershed Protection District to help fund *Arundo* removal on a five-acre parcel along the river near Casitas Springs; and a grant to Santa Barbara Channelkeeper to conduct water quality monitoring and identify habitat restoration opportunities in the Lower Ventura River watershed.

In 2003 the Conservancy awarded a \$3.1 million grant to enable the OVLC to acquire the 1,556-acre Farmont Ranch along the River, a site now known as the Ventura River Preserve. A year later, the Conservancy awarded a \$450,000 grant to assist the OVLC in purchasing fee title to 14 acres and a conservation easement of 16 acres for the OVLC's Confluence Preserve along the river at the mouth of San Antonio Creek. That property includes almost one-half mile of the river and creek, as well as a mature riparian, cottonwood, and sycamore forest.

In July 2005, the governing board of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project approved adding to its work plan a programmatic project for the Ventura River Parkway. Patterned after the Conservancy's River Parkway program for the Santa Clara River in Ventura County, the program involves a multi-phased effort to acquire and restore a series of key riparian parcels along the Ventura River with the goal of creating a contiguous corridor of habitat and recreational open space along the river from Ojai to the estuary. The goal of the Ventura River Parkway Program---to be implemented in partnership with a number of other agencies and organizations---is to create a comprehensive river parkway along the lower 15 miles of the river.

Because of the regional importance of the Ventura River corridor, a comprehensive river parkway program would help restore habitat linkages and connectivity, reconnect creek and river corridors to their floodplains, restore riparian and aquatic habitat, remove invasive species, and stabilize streambanks through environmentally-sensitive measures. In support of that effort, the Conservancy awarded a grant to the Trust for Public Land in 2007 to carry out preliminary planning, stakeholder coordination and property analyses for the River Parkway Program along the lower six miles of the river from Foster Park to the estuary.

The project to be implemented with the funds being requested here would fund another component of the River Parkway project, as well as complement the Conservancy's other efforts

in the Ventura River watershed. The project would also complement other work underway along the River, including that of the community-based Ventura River Watershed Council, which has served as the mechanism for establishing objectives and prioritizing projects for the County’s Integrated Regional Water Management Planning (IRWMP) effort.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$96,000
Total project cost	\$96,000

The anticipated source of funds for the proposed grant to the OVLC is an appropriation to the Conservancy of funds from the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 50; Water Code Sections 79500-79586), which authorizes the use of such funds to protect coastal watersheds through projects that acquire and restore land and water resources. The proposed project will help accomplish those objectives by acquiring and restoring valuable riparian and floodplain habitat in the Ventura River watershed. Proposition 50 also authorizes the use of funds for associated planning costs. Thus, funding of the stewardship plan for restoration and management of the property is an appropriate use of these funds. As required by Proposition 50, the proposed project is consistent with local and regional plans (Water Code Section 79507), including the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board’s Basin Plan for the Coastal Watersheds of Los Angeles and Ventura Counties, which identifies the Ventura River as an impaired water body and mandates the protection of beneficial resources in the region’s coastal watersheds. (For further analysis of the project’s consistency with local and regional plans, see the discussion in the section on “Consistency with Local Watershed Management Plan/State Water Quality Control Plan” below).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 8 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31350-31356), regarding reservation of significant coastal resource areas.

Public Resources Code §31350 vests authority in the Conservancy to ensure the reservation of significant coastal resource areas that would otherwise be lost to public use. Under Section 31351, the Conservancy may cooperate with nonprofit organizations (such as the OVLC) to ensure the reservation of interests in such properties for park, recreational and wildlife habitat purposes in order to meet the objectives of a certified local coastal plan or, if the property is located outside the coastal zone, with other local plans. The Drapeau property is located outside the coastal zone. However, as discussed below under the section “Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies,” the acquisition of the Drapeau property would be consistent with the policies of the City of Ventura’s certified Local Coastal Program that stress protection of the natural attributes and wildlife of the Ventura River; protection of sensitive wetland, riparian, and oak woodland habitat areas; and both preservation of the Ventura River in its existing semi-natural state, as well as its restoration to natural conditions. In addition, the proposed acquisition

would help further goals in the Ojai Valley Area Plan of the County's General Plan (2005), specifically, those to "protect significant biological resources within the Ojai Valley in order to maintain natural ecosystems and also preserve the natural beauty of the area" [Goal 1.4.1 (1)]; and to "balance the preservation of wetland habitats with the need to adequately protect public safety and property from flooding hazards" [Goal 1.4.1 (2)].

The proposed authorization is consistent with PRC §31352, which states that the Conservancy may award a grant to a nonprofit organization for a purpose specified in Section 31351 if (as is the case with this project) that organization is unable, due to limited financial resources, to acquire such property. Without the Conservancy funding proposed here, the OVLC would lack the funding needed to acquire the Drapeau property.

The proposed authorization is also consistent with Public Resources Code §31111, which authorizes the Conservancy, in implementing Division 21, to award grants to nonprofit organizations to prepare plans. As a private, nonprofit organization qualified under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, OVLC is qualified to receive a grant from the Conservancy.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2007
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 4, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project would protect over 53 acres of significant coastal watershed land. Consistent with the strategies identified in the Strategic Plan, this project would assist in connecting existing protected lands to help provide large, contiguous blocks of habitat and protect habitat and wildlife corridors for landscape-level conservation of natural communities and scenic or recreational resources. The OVLC has been identified as an appropriate entity to own and manage the property.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective C** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project would preserve wildlife corridors from coastal to inland habitat areas along the Ventura River.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective B** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project would assist the OVLC and other partners in the creation of a river parkway for the Ventura River.

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

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on September 20, 2007, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

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

2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The project is supported by Ventura County Supervisor Steve Bennett, Assemblymember Audra Strickland, Congressman Elton Gallegly, the Ventura Hillside Conservancy, and Surfrider Foundation, as well as other environmental organizations and community groups in the Ojai and Ventura area. Letters of support are provided in Exhibit 7.
4. **Location:** Although the proposed project is located outside the Coastal Zone, it would add another segment to the Ventura River Parkway Program and help support the goal of that program to create a contiguous corridor of habitat and recreational open space along the river from Ojai to the estuary. In addition, conservation of the Drapeau property would benefit coastal resources by protecting coastal drainages and providing habitat to special status species that are dependent on areas in the Coastal Zone.
5. **Need:** Without the proposed grant from the Coastal Conservancy, the OVLC would not have the funds needed to acquire the Drapeau property.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** This project will add to and potentially connect with other components of the OVLC’s Preserve network, as well as with other components of the Ventura River Parkway Program. The OVLC’s Preserves provide critical habitat for a number of special status species in the Ventura River watershed. They are also the site of numerous nature walks, community restoration work, and natural history educational programs conducted by the OVLC, area schools, and other partners in the Ojai community, Ventura County, and Southern California.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** The OVLC has been advised that unless escrow closes on the proposed purchase of the property by or shortly after the end of December 2008, then the sellers intend to seek another buyer for the property.
8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** Acquisition of the Drapeau property will help address issues of natural floodplain management, watershed and coastal resource protection, habitat protection and restoration, endangered species recovery, and public recreation and access.
9. **Innovation.** The continued implementation of a river parkway program for the Ventura River provides a creative and exemplary approach to address a variety of resource and recreational issues along one of the most important river systems in Southern California.
10. **Readiness:** The OVLC and the sellers have negotiated a purchase and sale agreement for the properties and are prepared to close on their sale by the end of the December 2008 if adequate funding can be secured.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** For over a decade, the Coastal Conservancy has been involved in helping protect and restore the Ventura River watershed. In addition to its considerable investment in the Matilija Dam Ecosystem Restoration Program, the Conservancy has assisted the OVLC in funding its acquisition of both the Ventura River and Confluence Preserves. The Conservancy has also been one of the driving forces behind the development and implementation of a river parkway program for the Ventura River.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is consistent with the policy goals of the certified Local Coastal Program (LCP) of the City of San Buenaventura (the City of Ventura), as amended in 1990. The City's LCP includes policies which stress protection of the natural attributes and wildlife of the Ventura River (3.1), protection of sensitive wetland, riparian, and oak woodland habitat areas (e.g., policies 12.1, 12.4 and 12.6), and both preservation of the Ventura River in its existing semi-natural state and its restoration to natural conditions (Policy 13.1).

The project would also promote several major regional goals and Ventura County objectives in the Regional Strategy of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project. The project would promote at least four of the six Regional Goals of the Wetlands Recovery Project: restoring stream corridors in coastal watersheds, recovering native habitat and species diversity; integrating wetlands recovery with other public objectives; and promoting public access and education related to coastal watersheds. The project would also help fulfill a key Ventura County objective in the Regional Strategy: preserving the existing floodplain of the Ventura River and reconnecting the river to its floodplain where feasible.

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN/
STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN:**

The proposed project is consistent with the objectives and strategies for the Ventura River watershed in the Integrated Regional Watershed Management Plan (IRWMP) of the Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County (2006). They include ones to protect and restore viable ecosystems, restore habitat connectivity and integrate floodplain management with ecosystem and recreational objectives. And one of the principal regional priorities for the Ventura River watershed in the IRWMP is the development and implementation of projects to acquire land for habitat protection, landscape linkages and natural floodplain management.

Acquisition of the Drapeau property is also consistent with the Los Angeles RWQCB's Basin Plan for the Coastal Watersheds of Los Angeles and Ventura Counties (1994), whose regional objectives for wetlands mandate (among other things) (a) the protection of natural hydrologic conditions necessary to prevent significant adverse effects on aquatic flora and fauna; and (b) the preservation of existing habitats and associated populations of wetland flora and fauna, including the protection of wildlife corridors, food supplies for fish and wildlife, and natural substrate characteristics to support flora and fauna.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The funding of the acquisition of the Drapeau property is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15313 and 15325 of 14 Cal. Code of Regulations (CCR). Section 15313 exempts acquisition of lands for fish and wildlife conservation purposes and for preserving access to public lands and waters where the purpose of the acquisition is to preserve the land in its natural condition. The acquisition is similarly exempt pursuant to 14 CCR Section 15325 because it involves a transfer of ownership in order to preserve existing natural conditions and open space.

The funding of the preparation of the stewardship plan is exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 CCR sections 15262 and 15306. The former exempts planning studies for potential future action and the latter exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities. Preparation of the stewardship plan involves analysis of the property's resources and creation of a program for restoring and managing the site. Thus, funding of this plan falls within these exemptions from CEQA.

Upon Conservancy approval of the proposed authorization, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the project.