

I. Executive Summary

C1017

Project Title: South Napa River Wetlands Acquisition and Restoration Program

Project Description/Ecological Objectives: The proposed acquisition and restoration of over 600 acres of historical wetlands adjacent to the Napa River from four different private property owners represents a unique opportunity for restoration of native marshland habitat in the North Bay. The properties proposed for restoration comprise some of the most important potential restoration sites in the San Francisco Bay estuary and will, when restored, improve habitat quality for several federally-listed species, including the Delta smelt and Sacramento splittail. The Stanly Ranch wetlands at the southern boundary of the project area and the Stewart and Ghisletta properties to the north (See Exhibit 3) have long been acquisition targets of the Napa County Land Trust and the State Department of Fish and Game (DFG) due to both their importance as historical wetlands and that they are at risk of development and annexation into the City of Napa. Once these lands are acquired, proposed restoration will modify or remove levees and other structural interventions to restore and enhance natural wetland functions. These activities will promote habitat goals specific to this region.

Justification for Project and CALFED Funding: All of the wetlands proposed for acquisition are immediately adjacent to the DFG's Napa Marsh Project and all are contemplated for acquisition in DFG's current master plan. The proposal focuses on species and habitats whose restoration will result in achieving the CALFED mission to "restore ecological health and improve water management for beneficial uses of the Bay-Delta system..." The CALFED objective of "improving and increasing aquatic and terrestrial habitats and improving ecological functions in the Bay-Delta to support sustainable populations of diverse and valuable plant and animal species" is clearly addressed by this proposal. Furthermore, this project site is located at the "crossroads" of three distinct sources of development pressure - the City of Napa immediately to the north, the City of American Canyon (3 miles to the south) and the Napa Airport Industrial area (1 mile to the southwest), the latter projected by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) to be the fastest growing employment center in the Bay Area (See Exhibit 1).

An additional benefit will accrue as a by-product of this project. The proposed Napa River Flood Protection Project - which has evolved from a classic Army Corps of Engineers concrete-oriented, channelization project (1995) into a community-based, environmentally-sensitive plan - will require the acquisition of portions of these properties to expand the floodplain and marshland ecosystem as a key component of the new plan. The Flood Protection Project is currently undergoing environmental review. However, the acquisition and restoration project being proposed here will provide its primary benefits independent of the flood control project.

Applicant Qualifications: The Napa County Land Trust (NCLT) seeks to "acquire and preserve natural resources and wildlife areas for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations, to preserve and protect historic sites, to educate the public about the wise use of natural resources and to work with other organizations having similar purposes."

In response to growing development pressures, the NCLT was formed in 1976 by a group of residents who cared about the Napa Valley and shared concerns about the protection of agricultural lands, wetlands, woodlands, watersheds, wildlife habitat, and open space lands that together sustain ecological diversity and a rural way of life. The NCLT is a member-supported, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with an annual operating budget of \$250,000 funded primarily by membership dues, charitable contributions from individuals, businesses, and foundations, and income from a small endowment.

Working primarily in the private sector, with no ongoing support from any taxing authority or government agency, the NCLT has succeeded in permanently protecting over 11,000 acres of open space and agricultural land to date thanks to dedicated volunteer leadership and financial support from loyal members. Operations are carried out by a 15-member Board of Trustees and a professional staff of five.

Approach/Budget/Schedule: Our initial application (during Phase 1 of CALFED) proposed a 3-phase approach to this project. A portion of our request was granted (\$1 million of the \$2 million requested). This proposal is requesting funding for the acquisition and restoration of these four parcels. In each of the three initial phases, we proposed to acquire property - simultaneously transferring title to DFG - with restoration activities to be performed on these properties once title is conveyed. These activities will include the breaching and/or removal of existing levees and the design and construction of new setback levees along the boundaries between wetlands and uplands, among others. The initial phase, partially funded by CALFED, will proceed during late 1998 and early 1999. The remaining acquisitions, if funded, would proceed in 1999.

Project costs are delineated in two ways - first, *Acquisition & Restoration*, and second, *Administrative*, with the latter category including staff time, overhead, and professional services (e.g. appraisers, attorneys, title and escrow fees). Recent appraisals estimate that existing wetlands should be valued at \$2,500 per acre while uplands which are plantable as vineyards are valued at approximately \$34,000 per acre. Other lands which have not been clearly delineated (i.e. as wetlands) or are of questionable value as vineyard lands average approximately \$15,000 per acre. Including an estimated total of \$500,000 for restoration activities, as well as \$92,237 (less than 2.5%) for administrative activities, it is estimated that the total cost of the proposed project is \$4,056,717 for the acquisition and restoration of 633 acres (about \$6400 per acre).

Monitoring and Data Evaluation - The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) will take fee title to the property upon purchase and will maintain it in perpetuity and, in the event that the Napa River Flood Control Project is implemented, would provide flood easements on these properties to the Napa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District ("District"), comprised of the County Board of Supervisors, the Mayors of the five municipalities in the County, plus one additional City Council member from the City of Napa.

Local Support and Coordination: Local support is extensive and is documented by the enclosed resolution of the Flood Control District of July, 1997. The proposed CALFED project, while beneficial on its own merits, would also provide a great deal of benefit to the Napa River Flood Control Project. This project has been redesigned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - in accordance with the "Living River" principles and parameters articulated by the "Community Coalition for a Napa River Flood Management Plan". In 1995, a Corps project was designed which was soundly rejected by both the community at large and the federal, state, and regional resource agencies (e.g. Bay Area Water Quality Board, State Fish and Game Department, etc.). Since that time, the Coalition was formed, which included representatives of those resource agencies, among many other diverse interests. The project is currently awaiting the finalization of the Army Corps General Design Memorandum and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/Report.