

CALFED BAY DELTA PROPOSAL
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

a. GRAYSON RIVER RANCH PERPETUAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT
AND HABITAT RESTORATION

Lead Agency: East Stanislaus Resource
Conservation District (ESRCD)
Co-applicant: Friends of the Tuolumne

b. The Grayson River Ranch (approximately 140 acres of riparian habitat) perpetual conservation easement and habitat restoration project has received partial funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The NRCS Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) has approved \$311,000 through the WRP. This application requests funds to complete the easement purchase and fund the restoration.

This property is floodplain that has been farmed until this year. It flooded in January 1997. The adjacent property is apple and cherry orchards. The primary objective is to restore a naturally self-sustaining riparian floodplain. Restoration would return the property to native vegetation including cotton woods, box elder, valley oak, willows, and others.

The property is adjacent to 1.2 miles of river on the south bank of the Tuolumne River, 5.1 miles upstream from the confluence with the San Joaquin River. It is within 5 miles of the new San Joaquin River Wildlife Refuge and would complement the refuge in the future with mature, large trees for roosting and nesting as well as feeding territory. It may also become habitat for brush rabbits and other mammals because it is isolated from regular human impact and approximately one mile north of Grayson Road.

This project addresses CALFED objectives for Riparian and Riverine Aquatic Habitat and several Species Groups Visions including chinook salmon, steelhead trout, neotropical migratory bird guild, and several others detailed in pages following.

c. When the remaining funding is secured and the easement purchase is complete, the NRCS will assist with and approve the design plan. Planning will determine if the most effective method of restoring the hydrology is to create a backwash that allows most of the property to flood seasonally, or if the levee should be removed in part. The design and recontour plans will restore the natural hydrology and thus allow the vegetation to flourish. Planting could begin within months.

d. The Grayson River Ranch is ideal property because its width allows opportunity to restore a full riparian community and floodplain function. It has elevation changes which will allow for a wide variety of plant species. The Tuolumne River has a healthy self-sustaining run of fall chinook salmon. This project will enhance the habitat for migrating fall-run salmon and for salmon

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and steelhead smolt rearing. It will also increase habitat for migrating and resident birds. It is an ideal property, also, due to its proximity to refuge properties. This property will act as a filter for agriculture runoff and thereby improve water quality. The project will restore habitat, conserve land within the floodplain, focus on salmon and steelhead trout habitat, and provide broad ecosystem benefits.

e. The cost is reasonable and has been offset by NRCS WRP. The total cost is expected to be \$1,043,000 and will be offset with \$311,000 WRP funds.

Because of its conformation, flood waters enter the property and leave the property without threatening adjacent landowners. There should be no negative impacts to any third party.

f. The East Stanislaus Resource Conservation District (ESRCD) is a relatively new RCD. However, it is supported by Mike McElhiney, an experienced NRCS District Conservationist. The ESRCD is anxious to work with the NRCS to improve the environment and sustainable farming in our county. As an RCD it brings to the project all the technical expertise available through a Memorandum of Understanding with the NRCS. Friends of the Tuolumne is a local 501(c)(3) non-profit. They have been very active locally in Tuolumne River fishery and habitat issues. They are active in the Tuolumne River Technical Advisory Committee (TRAC) and are signatories the 1995 Don Pedro Dam FERC Settlement Agreement.

g. Monitoring is a responsibility of the NRCS. The NRCS performs annual inspections of the project. More detailed monitoring has been budgeted. Evaluation of the project will be reported annually to the TRAC for several years to help them in their efforts to restore the river. The monitoring will address the effectiveness in recreating a self-sustaining floodplain and the health of the revegetation.

h. This project is fully compatible with all CALFED objectives in its location, scope, and targeted species, especially fall run chinook salmon and steelhead trout. It is ideal riparian property that could be restored to a full riparian community. The hydrology will allow it to be self-supporting for a wide range of aquatic and terrestrial species--both of plants and animals.

It is of substantial interest to the community and has been endorsed by several organizations including the Tuolumne River Technical Advisory committee. (See the attached letters of support.)

The TRAC (a technical committee resulting from the 1995 FERC Settlement Agreement) has compiled a restoration plan for the 52 miles between the San Joaquin River and La Grange Dam. This project was ranked 9 points out of a possible 10 for the restoration plan.