

II. Executive Summary

a. Project Title: LOWER SAN JOAQUIN RIVER FLOODPLAIN HABITAT PROTECTION AND RESTORATION PROJECT (STANISLAUS AND MERCED COUNTIES)

Co-Applicant Names: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Complex and Trust for Public Land

b. Project Description and Primary Biological / Ecological Objectives. The objective of this proposal is to acquire lands and restore riparian and other wetland habitats along the San Joaquin River and east-side tributaries for the benefit of numerous species including Aleutian Canada goose, greater sandhill cranes, western yellow-billed cuckoos, raptors such as the Swainson's hawk and bald eagle, riparian brush rabbit, San Joaquin Valley wood rat, giant garter snake, western pond turtle, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, splittail, and San Joaquin tributaries fall-run chinook salmon. In addition, shorebirds, waterfowl, herons, and neotropical migratory songbirds will benefit from habitat protection, restoration and management actions. Lands acquired by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) in fee title could provide Refuge compatible wildlife-dependent outdoor recreational opportunities such as: wildlife observation, environmental education, photography, and waterfowl hunting.

c. Approach/Tasks/Schedule. Five landowners are involved, all of whom are willing sellers. The proposed project encompasses several components in three distinct phases. This proposal seeks CALFED funding only for Phase I which includes:

- Task A. Acquire 600 acres in fee title (Kelley property, Mapes Ranch [part] using matching funds.
- Task B. Enroll 1,954 acres of private lands (Castle property, Lone Tree Ranch) in conservation easements using matching funds.
- Task C. Restore riparian and wetlands habitat on 2,500 acres of private lands (Lone Tree and San Felipe Ranches) and 300 acres of federal lands (San Joaquin River NWR) using matching funds.
- Task D. Acquire 303 acres in fee title (Arambel & Rose) using grant funds.
- Task E. Acquire 1,242 acres in fee title through purchasing remainder of fee title value of property enrolled in WRP easement (Lone Tree Ranch) using grant funds.
- Task F. Conduct habitat restoration planning, including an engineering study and biological inventories, on newly acquired fee title lands using grant funds.

Phase I (Figures 2 & 3) fee title acquisitions will become part of the immediately adjacent San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge, Merced National NWR, and San Luis NWR (as part of the San Luis NWR Complex) and be administered and managed by the FWS. Conservation easements on private lands in Merced County will be administered by FWS as part of the Grasslands Wildlife Management Area; and Wetlands Reserve Program easements on private lands in Merced County will be administered by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The proposed fee title acquisitions and management will allow widening of the flood-plain, provide transient storage of flood waters, facilitate ground water recharge, and allow riparian and wetland habitat restoration thus accomplishing a measure of downstream non-structural flood protection, as well as water quality, wildlife and fisheries benefits. The proposed conservation easements will perpetually preserve existing grassland and wetlands, and will preclude subdivision and development within the floodplain.

d. Justification for Project and Funding by CALFED. The proposed project will allow for large-scale preservation and restoration of riparian and other wetland habitats along the San Joaquin River and its east side tributaries in San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced Counties. These habitats, which support some of the greatest biodiversity in the State, have been reduced over 95% from historical levels in the Central Valley.

- If fully funded, Phase I of the proposed project will preserve 6 1/2 miles of existing riparian corridor along the San Joaquin River, adjacent oxbows, and a 6 mile portion of the Mariposa Slough and Owens Creek tributaries.
- High quality habitats would be protected and restored, benefitting priority species such as: Aleutian Canada goose, greater sandhill crane, western yellow-billed cuckoo, raptors such as the Swainson's hawk, red-shouldered hawk and bald eagle, riparian brush rabbit, San Joaquin Valley wood rat, giant garter snake, western pond turtle, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, splittail, and San Joaquin River east-side tributaries fall-run chinook salmon. In addition, shorebirds, waterfowl, herons, and neotropical migratory songbirds will benefit from restoration and protection actions.
- Additional benefits include a measure of non-structural flood protection. Flood prone areas would not be as subject to damages during future floods, and an incremental reduction in peak floods on the San Joaquin will be provided as water is stored temporarily in off stream areas.

e. Budget Costs and Third Party Impacts. Phase I total cost of acquisition, restoration planning and restoration is \$6,921,500. A total \$4,779,000 in funds will be provided from other sources, so the FWS is requesting \$2,142,500 in CALFED funds.

Third party impacts have been addressed in this proposal.

f. Applicant Qualifications. The San Luis NWR Complex has a long and successful record of habitat protection, restoration, management and refuge-compatible wildlife-dependent public use. The Sacramento Realty Office of the FWS has acquired property for the 10 major National Wildlife Refuges in California. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national not-for-profit land conservation organization that has successfully assisted public agencies in acquiring lands for over 25 years.

g. Monitoring and data evaluation. Upon acquisition, a preliminary baseline biological inventory will commence. Regular monitoring of habitat restoration projects and compliance checks on easements will be conducted as an operational part of those programs. Reports of progress in acquisition and restoration will be provided to CALFED.

h. Local Support/Coordination with other Programs/Compatibility with CALFED objectives. Overall local support for these kinds of protection, habitat restoration and management of floodplain (riverine and riparian woodlands), fisheries and wildlife habitats is high. These actions fulfill federal directives from the Council of Environmental Quality and Office of Mgmt. and Budget and help meet numerous state and federal agency goals such as non-structural flood protection projects, the Governor's Flood Emergency Action Team (FEAT) report, the San Joaquin River Mgmt. Plan, North American Waterfowl Mgmt. Plan, Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture and the Riparian Habitat Joint Venture, and the Aleutian Canada Goose Recovery Plan.

This proposal is entirely consistent with CALFED Bay-Delta Program non-ecosystem objectives of water quality, water supply reliability, and flood damage reduction.