

998-125

BIG CHICO CREEK ECOLOGICAL PRESERVE

Proposal Title: Big Chico Creek Ecological Preserve

Applicant Name: River Network (Att'n: Phillip Wallin, V.P.)

Mailing Address: PO Box 8787, Portland, OR 97207

Telephone: (503) 241-3506

Fax: (503) 241-9256

Email: pwallin@rivernetwork.org

Amount of funding requested: \$1,225,666 ^{ok} for 1 years

Indicate the Topic for which you are applying (check only one box).

- Fish Passage/Fish Screens
- Introduced Species
- Habitat Restoration
- Fish Management/Hatchery
- Local Watershed Stewardship
- Environmental Education
- Water Quality

Does the proposal address a specified Focused Action? yes no

Butte Basin tributary area

What county or counties is the project located in? Butte County

Indicate the geographic area of your proposal (check only one box):

- Sacramento River Mainstem
- East Side Trib:
- Sacramento Trib:
- Suisun Marsh and Bay
- San Joaquin River Mainstem
- North Bay/South Bay:
- San Joaquin Trib:
- Landscape (entire Bay-Delta watershed)
- Delta:
- Other:

Indicate the primary species which the proposal addresses (check all that apply):

- San Joaquin and East-side Delta tributaries fall-run chinook salmon
- Winter-run chinook salmon
- Spring-run chinook salmon
- Late-fall run chinook salmon
- Fall-run chinook salmon
- Delta smelt
- Longfin smelt
- Splittail
- Steelhead trout
- Green sturgeon
- Striped bass
- Migratory birds
- All chinook species
- Other: California Red-Legged Frog
- All anadromous salmonids
- Swainson's Hawk
- Western Pond Turtle
- Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo
- Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle

Specify the ERP strategic objective and target (s) that the project addresses. Include page numbers from January 1999 version of ERP Volume I and II:

Big Chico Creek Ecological Zone vision (v.2, p.260)
Central Valley Riparian and Riverine Aquatic Habitats Target 3
and Programmatic Action 3A (v.2, p.270)
 Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives for Species and Species Groups,
 Indicate the type of applicant (check only one box): (v.1, pp.178-180)

- State agency
- Federal agency
- Public/Non-profit joint venture
- Non-profit
- Local government/district
- Private party
- University
- Other:

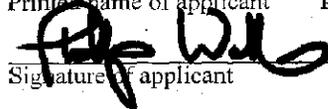
Indicate the type of project (check only one box):

- Planning
- Implementation
- Monitoring
- Education
- Research

By signing below, the applicant declares the following:

- 1.) The truthfulness of all representations in their proposal;
- 2.) The individual signing the form is entitled to submit the application on behalf of the applicant (if the applicant is an entity or organization); and
- 3.) The person submitting the application has read and understood the conflict of interest and confidentiality discussion in the PSP (Section 2.4) and waives any and all rights to privacy and confidentiality of the proposal on behalf of the applicant, to the extent as provided in the Section.

Printed name of applicant Phillip Wallin (for River Network)



Signature of applicant

4.6 Proposal Completion Checklist

Once the applicant has prepared a proposal, CALFED staff suggest reviewing the following checklist to ensure that the proposal meets the requirements of this solicitation package and can be clearly understood by the technical review panels.

- Has the standard cover sheet (Section 4.5) been completed and attached to the front of the proposal? Is it signed?
- Have the page limitations for each section of the proposal been adhered to?
- Have the Minimum Requirements (Section 4.1) been addressed?
- Has local involvement been described and a copy of notification of the county included?
- Did you fill out the contract forms (Appendix D and E)?
- Is the hypothesis/question to be addressed by the proposal described clearly?
- Are the objectives of the proposal described clearly?
- Does the proposal show a clear link to the CALFED priority species and habitats?
- Does the proposal describe how the project meets ERP objectives and Strategic Plan goals?
- Does the proposal describe linkages to previously funded projects or previous phases?
- Does the proposal clearly lay out tasks, products, and timelines?
- Is the monitoring section clear and complete and address the hypothesis for the project?
- Does the proposal contain a budget for each task?

BIG CHICO CREEK ECOLOGICAL PRESERVE

A Proposal to CALFED from River Network

Primary contact:

Phillip Wallin

Director, River Conservancy

PO Box 8787

Portland, OR 97207

Telephone: (503)241-3506

Fax: (503)241-9256

E-mail: pwallin@rivernet.org

Collaborators:

Research Foundation, California State University, Chico

Big Chico Creek Watershed Alliance

National Fish & Wildlife Foundation

**River Network is a private, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization incorporated in Oregon
Tax identification number: 93-0969979**

Executive Summary

River Network requests a grant of \$1,225,666 from CALFED, representing 1/3 of the land acquisition cost for the Big Chico Creek Ecological Preserve, a 2,724-acre site that will be managed by the Research Foundation of California State University, Chico. The site is located on Big Chico Creek in Butte County, ten miles upstream (northeast) from the city of Chico. It adjoins Bidwell Park, the second largest municipal park in the United States.

The Big Chico Creek Ecological Preserve is a multi-purpose project. First, it will protect high-quality habitat for riparian species at risk along five miles of a Sierra Nevada foothills stream. This includes aquatic species such as chinook salmon, steelhead, foothill yellow-legged frog and California red-legged frog, and sensitive terrestrial species such as riparian woodrat, riparian brush rabbit, little brown myotis and others. Second, the project is an essential part of a larger strategy to restore historical levels of chinook salmon on Big Chico Creek, a key east side tributary to the Sacramento River. Third, it will protect a high-quality sample of a Sierra Nevada foothill riparian ecosystem, ranging from ridgeline to ridgeline of the Big Chico Creek watershed and including blue oak forest, foothill grasslands, scrub oak chaparral, oak/pine forest, and riparian woodland. Finally, the Preserve will provide a site for the Departments of Geography & Planning and Biological Sciences at California State University to conduct programs in research, teaching and public education in the areas of chinook salmon restoration and riparian ecosystems.

The Big Chico Creek Ecological Preserve project is a joint undertaking of River Network, CSU Chico, and the Big Chico Creek Watershed Alliance, with funding support from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation and local businesses. The project enjoys strong support from adjoining landowners, all of whom are committed to protecting the Big Chico Creek ecosystem.

River Network holds an option to purchase the Preserve from the private landowner, a willing seller. Thus, the land can be acquired immediately. Funds for the purchase are being sought from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (under the CVPIA, which has committed \$500,000), the state Wildlife Conservation Board, CALFED, the Packard Foundation, and other private funders.

If we are successful in this acquisition, we will move on to Phase II of the project, two adjoining ownerships on Big Chico Creek, which will bring the Preserve to

4,124 acres and five miles of stream. (See map.) Phase II includes an existing house that will be a superb facility for the Research Foundation.

Project Description

Proposed Scope of Work

For the past year, a partnership of River Network, the Big Chico Creek Watershed Alliance and California State University, Chico have been working to establish a Big Chico Creek Ecological Preserve. The scope of the project is to acquire and manage a 4,124-acre wild area that extends along five miles of Big Chico Creek and from ridgeline to ridgeline. The purposes of the project are: to protect habitat for riparian species at risk; to contribute to rehabilitation of Big Chico Creek as a productive stream for chinook salmon; to protect a high-quality sample of a Sierra Nevada foothill riparian ecosystem; and to provide California State University, Chico with an outstanding site and facility for research, teaching and public education.

This proposal requests support for Phase I of the project: purchase of the 2,724-acre Simmons Ranch along 2.5 miles of Big Chico Creek. River Network, a non-profit organization headquartered in Oregon, has put up \$25,000 for a purchase option on the property. If we are successful in funding the purchase, title will be held by the Research Foundation of California State University, Chico. The purchase would occur in January 2000. River Network, which has technical expertise in conservation land transactions, would handle the real estate aspects, culminating in transfer of title to the Research Foundation. The Research Foundation will assume the task of raising an endowment for the Ecological Preserve.

Management of the Ecological Preserve would be vested in the Department of Geography and Planning and the Department of Biological Sciences. Project Director for the Research Foundation will be Professor Donald Holtgrieve, PhD. of the Department of Geography and Planning. He will work closely with Dr. Paul Maslin of the Department of Biological Sciences. A management plan for the Preserve will be developed by a working group that includes the University, the Research Foundation, the Watershed Alliance, neighboring landowners, the California Department of Fish & Game, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the City of Chico, and Butte County.

Phase II of the project will be purchase of an additional 1,400 acres and 2.5 miles of Big Chico Creek to complete the Ecological Preserve. River Network is currently negotiating a purchase option over this Phase II property, in two ownerships. Included in the Phase II property is a two-story structure that would serve as a teaching, research and public education facility for the Research Foundation and the Departments of Geography and Planning and Biological Sciences. The timetable for Phase II calls for acquisition in January 2001, one year after Phase I.

Location

The Big Chico Creek Ecological Preserve is located in Butte County on Big Chico Creek, ten miles upstream (in a northeast direction) from the city of Chico. It adjoins Bidwell Park, the second largest municipal park in the United States, at the upstream end of the Park. The Preserve (Phases I and II combined) extends for five miles along Big Chico Creek, all within Township 23 North, Range 2 East. (See attached USGS maps.) The Preserve extends across the entire Big Chico Creek watershed, from Musty Buck Ridge on the northwest to the Highway 32

ridge on the southeast that divides the Big Chico Creek watershed from the Little Chico Creek watershed. Access to Phase I of the Preserve is from the south via Highway 32 and Bidwell Park. Access to Phase II is directly off Highway 32. (See map.)

Ecological/Biological Benefits

Ecological/Biological Objectives

The project has four ecological/biological objectives:

- 1) *Protect and enhance habitat for "at risk" riparian species.* A February 1999 survey of the Simmons Ranch (Phase I of the Preserve) prepared for the Research Foundation by Jody Gallaway found that over 140 different wildlife species utilize the property, 13% of which are listed species (including Species of Special Concern). This "middle zone" of Big Chico Creek is crucial to survival of populations of steelhead rainbow trout and spring-run chinook salmon, since adults of the salmon and juveniles of the steelhead spend the summer in the creek. Anadromous populations in Big Chico Creek declined severely during the seventies, but there is great potential for restoration, especially by improvement of fish passage. Other aquatic "at risk" species on the Preserve include amphibians, particularly the California red-legged frog and the Foothill yellow-legged frog, Western skink, California whiptail and Chaparral whipsnake. Mammal species include riparian brush rabbit, dusky footed woodrat, vagrant shrew, western small-footed myotis, little brown myotis and black-tailed hare. Bird species "at risk" include golden eagle, Swainson's hawk, Coopers hawk, Sharp-shinned hawk, American peregrine falcon, spotted owl, yellow warbler and yellow breasted chat.
- 2) *Contribute to restoration of the Big Chico Creek spring chinook salmon and winter steelhead runs.* Big Chico Creek is one of only four streams in the Sacramento Valley that still provide habitat for both spring run salmon and steelhead trout. The creek and its tributaries also serve as habitat for fall- and late-fall-run chinook salmon, the endangered winter-run chinook salmon, and other anadromous species. The Ecological Preserve is part of a larger strategy taking shape to bring back the substantial runs of chinook salmon and steelhead that characterized Big Chico Creek before the 1970's. Protection of critical habitat in this "middle zone" of the creek (between Iron Canyon downstream and Higgins' Hole upstream) is one element of the strategy. Improvement of passage through Iron Canyon is the other critical element, which is currently in the study stage. The Big Chico Creek Watershed Alliance is taking the lead in working with state and federal agencies to develop a restoration strategy.
- 3) *Protect a high-quality example of a Sierra Nevada foothills riparian ecosystem.* The Big Chico Creek Ecological Preserve is a nearly pristine cross-section of a foothills watershed, from ridgeline to stream to ridgeline. It includes four broad habitat types: blue oak woodland, oak/pine forest, scrub oak/Ceanothus chaparral, and riparian areas. Where canopy cover allows, foothill grasslands are present throughout the blue oak forest. The grassland, unlike nearby drainages, is not inundated with exotic grasses like medusahead or Yellow star thistle.

- 4) *Contribute to scientific knowledge, and public awareness, of the natural processes of Big Chico Creek and its watershed.* A key to the importance of this project is the strong commitment by CSU, Chico to manage the Ecological Preserve as a center for research, teaching, and public education. The Research Foundation has been the moving force behind the project, with leadership from Dr. Don Holtgrieve of the Department of Geography and Planning. Chico is the population center of the North Central Valley, and this project offers the means for creating greater public awareness of the processes of a riparian ecosystem and of the struggle to bring back the chinook salmon. The partnership that has been formed by the University, the Watershed Alliance, River Network, local landowners and businesses, the City of Chico, and state and federal agencies is a solid foundation for an enduring program.

Linkages

This project is an outgrowth of the effort that began in 1990 to restore chinook salmon and steelhead runs in Big Chico Creek. A dispute over unscreened pumps in the lower creek led to a study of conditions throughout the watershed and to the organizing of the Big Chico Creek Watershed Alliance. Subsequently, CALFED recognized the Big Chico Creek Watershed as a priority watershed for restoration in its *Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan* (as did the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish & Game in their own management plans). A 1997 CALFED grant led to the writing of the 1998 "Existing Conditions Report" for Big Chico Creek watershed, a project of the Research Foundation of CSU Chico. The Alliance, with support from the Research Foundation and local, state and federal agencies, has undertaken numerous projects, including pump relocation, gravel recruitment, water quality improvement, and protection and restoration of riparian habitat. The impetus for this Ecological Preserve came when the Simmons Ranch came under the control of the owner of Drake Homes, a principal home-builder in Chico. The City of Chico condemned a portion of the ranch and added it to Bidwell Park. The rest of the ranch, which the city could not afford, remained at risk. The Watershed Alliance and the Research Foundation enlisted River Network to work on acquisition of the remainder of the ranch. River Network was able to negotiate a willing-seller agreement with the landowner. In federal FY 1999, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service allocated \$500,000 toward the effort to acquire the Preserve, while the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation made a grant of \$36,000 to River Network toward the appraisal and option payment. Beyond Phases I and II of the project, which involve land acquisition, River Network will work with upstream landowners who have indicated an interest in conservation easements over their land on Big Chico Creek.

This project will assist CALFED to accomplish the following goals in its Strategic Plan for Ecosystem Restoration: 1) *Recovery of at-risk native species*, as described above. 2) *Rehabilitate natural processes*. The project does this by maintaining an upper watershed habitat that delivers nutrients, regulates water temperature, maintains water quality and moderates flood pulses. 4) *Protect functional habitat types*. The project sets aside a prime example of an important habitat type for fish and wildlife values, scientific research, teaching, and increasing public awareness through the involvement of CSU Chico and the Big Chico Creek Watershed Alliance. 6) *Maintain water quality* by protecting a five-mile reach of undeveloped, naturally vegetated stream corridor and uplands.

In the CALFED ERPP, the vision for the Big Chico Creek Ecological Management Unit states, *The vision for the Big Chico Creek Ecological Zone is to increase runs of chinook salmon and steelhead by providing adequate streamflows, providing unobstructed fish passage, protecting and restoring riparian corridors, and maintaining upper watershed health. This could be accomplished by implementing a locally sponsored comprehensive management and restoration program (vII, Page 260).*

ERPP objectives and programmatic actions addressed by this proposal are as follows: The Central Valley Streamflow Objective and Programmatic Target 7, and programmatic action 7a (vII, Page 267). The Central Valley Coarse Sediment Supply Objective Target 1 (vII, Page 268). The Central Valley Riparian and Riverine Aquatic Habitats Target 3 and Programmatic Action 3A (vII, Page 270). Central Valley Dams and Other structure Objectives Target 2, and Programmatic Action 2A (vII, Page 272).

The following Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives for Species and Species Groups are applicable to this proposal: Splittail, Sacramento Winter-run chinook salmon, Sacramento Spring-run Chinook Salmon, Sacramento Late-fall-run Chinook Salmon, Fall-run Chinook Salmon, Steelhead Trout, Swainson's Hawk, Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, California Red-Legged Frog, Western Pond Turtle (vI, pages 178-180).

System-Wide Ecosystem Benefits.

This project is a key element in a holistic, long-term project to maintain and enhance the integrity of a key tributary watershed in the Sacramento River system. The Ecological Preserve project is a component of the whole effort, spearheaded by the Watershed Alliance, to understand watershed processes, build a strong local constituency, cooperate with watershed landowners and interest groups, build public awareness, conserve the best of remaining habitat, and restore historic anadromous fish runs in Big Chico Creek. The Ecological Preserve project ensures that the highest quality habitat in the watershed will be protected for scientific research and public enjoyment. This concerted, long-term effort in the Big Chico Creek watershed is one of the most promising in the Sacramento River basin.

Compatibility with Non-Ecosystem Objectives.

By maintaining the integrity of a five-mile segment of a tributary stream, the project directly supports CALFED's non-ecosystem objectives, specifically water quality, flood moderation, and watershed management. The project does not appear to conflict with any CALFED non-ecosystem objective.

The project offers major benefits to third parties by supporting the quality of life of the greater Chico community. This Ecological Preserve, in conjunction with Bidwell Park, will be one of (if not the single) most outstanding municipal riparian parks in the nation and a major amenity for a population center in the North Central Valley. The project also benefits the taxpayers of Butte County by avoiding the need to extend services to new development along Big Chico Creek.

Technical Feasibility and Timing

The only other option for preservation of the Simmons Ranch and its upstream neighbor would have been acquisition by the City of Chico for addition to Bidwell Park. This option was rejected because of the City's bad prior experience in condemning the landowner, and because the City lacked funding for a new purchase.

The purchase of the Simmons Ranch by River Network, and transfer to the Research Foundation, depends only on funding. A purchase option agreement is in place, title is clear, the Foundation is prepared to take on management, and local stakeholders support the project.

Monitoring and Data Collection Methodology

The Research Foundation of CSU Chico has not yet developed its management plan for the Ecological Preserve. Methodology for monitoring and data collection will be a component of that management plan.

Local Involvement

Attached is a copy of the letter to the Planning Director of Butte County regarding the Big Chico Creek Ecological Preserve project. City and county officials are aware of the project through their participation in the Big Chico Creek Watershed Alliance.

The project is a partnership among River Network, the Research Foundation of CSU Chico, and the Big Chico Creek Watershed Alliance. Numerous organizations and government agencies are stakeholders in the Alliance. Other supporters of the project are the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Reclamation, California Department of Fish & Game, the Sacramento River Preservation Trust, Sierra Pacific Lumber Co., Sierra Nevada Brewing Co., the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation.

River Network has been in close touch with most of the landowners in Big Chico Creek canyon. The owners of the Phase I property (Dan Drake of Drake Homes and the Simmons brothers) have given River Network an option to buy the land. Jack Henning, principal owner of the Phase II property, is very supportive of the project and willing to sell his land as well. Other supportive landowners are Jim Crane, Steve White and his family, Ken Grossman (owner of Sierra Nevada Brewing) and Sierra Pacific Lumber. Other landowners are aware of the project through the Watershed Alliance. Key landowners are participating in the Preserve planning process with the Research Foundation, the Watershed Alliance, the City and the County.

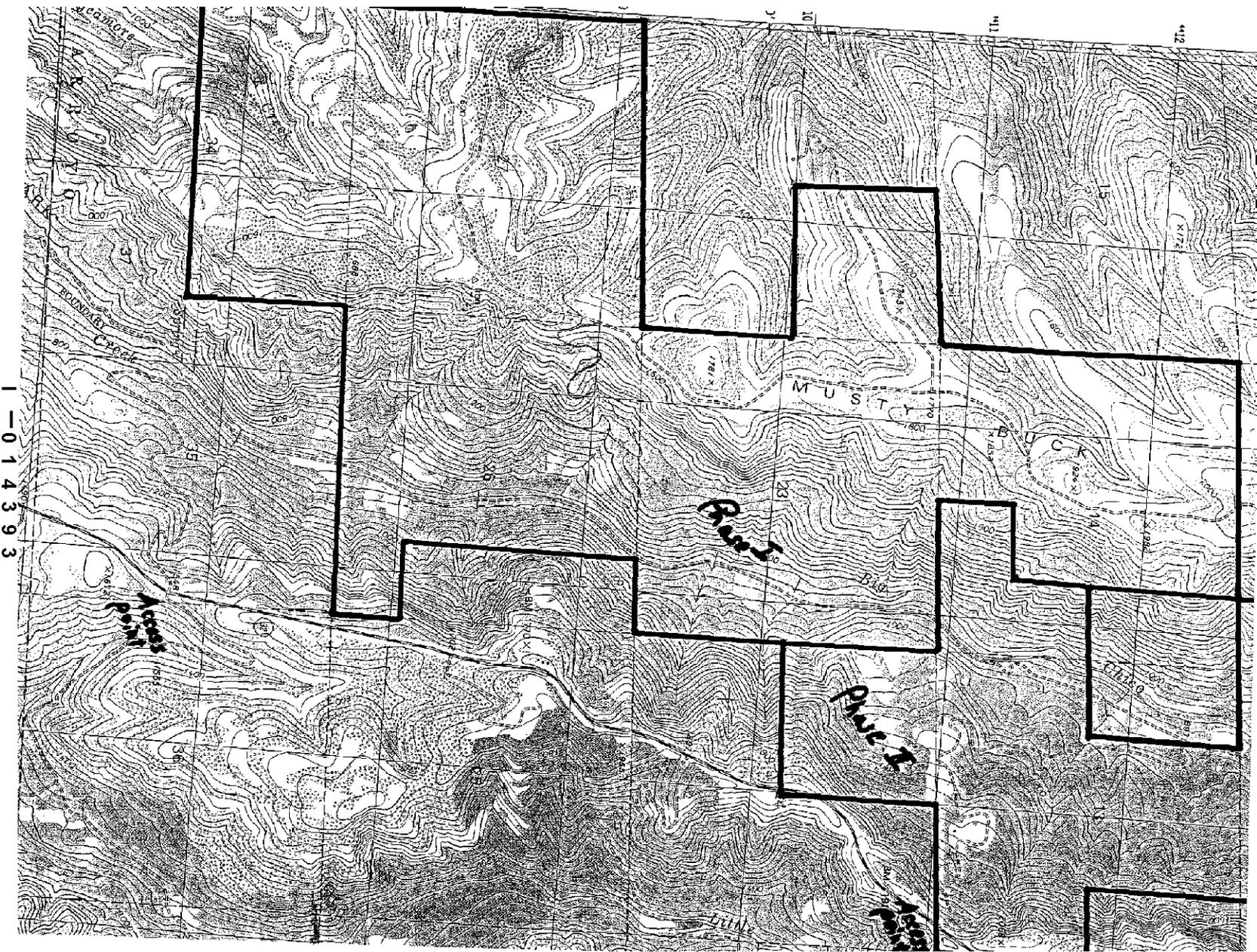
Public outreach has been (and will be) conducted through regular meetings of the Big Chico Creek Watershed Alliance.

We foresee no negative third-party impacts from the project.

1980 to 1988. In 1988, he founded River Network in Portland, OR to provide technical support to citizen river and watershed organizations across the country. In 1997 he stepped down from the Presidency to become Director of the River Conservancy program. Wallin negotiated the purchase agreement for the Simmons Ranch and is responsible for identifying funding sources for the project and completing the purchase of the property.

The Research Foundation, established in 1940, is a private, non-profit corporation which acts as fiscal agent for California State University, Chico on all externally funded projects. The Research Foundation is currently working with over 150 different agencies and is familiar with the regulations required by state and federal agencies, and those in the private sector. Project staff and associates form an efficient team of professional scientists and engineers who are experienced in all major components of the environmental field. The Research Foundation will be responsible for holding title to the Big Chico Creek Ecological Preserve, managing the property, and conducting programs of research, teaching, and public education.

Dr. Donald Holtgrieve is Project Co-Director, representing the Research Foundation. Dr. Holtgrieve is Professor of Geography and Planning at CSU-Chico, teaching courses on water resources and environmental planning. Dr. Holtgrieve has been the recipient of many grants and awards focusing on water quality and watershed management. He has supervised over 200 projects in the last 25 years and has extensive experience in directing grants awarded by both State and Federal agencies.



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*Helping People Organize
to Protect and Restore
Rivers and Watersheds*

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April 15, 1999

Tom Parillo
Butte County Planning Department
25 County Center Drive
Oroville, CA 95965

Dear Mr. Parillo:

In compliance with the requirements of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program's Ecosystem Restoration program and Strategic Plan 1999 Proposal Solicitation Package, we are formally notifying you of the submission of a grant application that resides within the boundaries of Butte County.

The proposal involves the acquisition of the Simmons Ranch in Big Chico Creek canyon for the purpose of establishing a Big Chico Creek Ecological Preserve, to be managed by the Research Foundation of California State University, Chico.

If you would like to discuss this proposal, please call my office at (503)241-3506, or call Professor Don Holtgrieve at 898-5780.

Very truly yours,

Phillip Wallin
Director, River Conservancy