



**CERTIFICATE OF DETERMINATION
OF EXEMPTION/EXCLUSION FROM ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

Project Title: Butano Farms SFGS Habitat Enhancement Pilot, Butano Farms
Project Location: Butano Farms is 903 acres of open space and livestock grazing property in Pescadero, CA
Assessor's Parcel Numbers: 086080030
City and County: Pescadero, San Mateo County

Description of Nature and Purpose of Project:

The San Mateo Resource Conservation District (RCD), in partnership with Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) and Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), are working to improve habitat for San Francisco garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis tetrataenia*; SFGS) and California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*; CRLF) at Butano Farms in Pescadero, CA. Funding for this project is provided by PG&E.

Butano Farms is part of the Cloverdale Ranch complex located in coastal San Mateo County, CA owned by POST. POST is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that protects and cares for open space, farms, and parkland. POST is supportive of the project and prepared to move forward. Current land use on the property is primarily preserved open space and livestock grazing. The proposed project site is upland of the Butano Creek floodplain restoration site, a recently completed RCD habitat enhancement project that reconnected 100 acres of historic flood plain to the Butano Creek channel.

The proposed project is a 4.75-acre pilot project for Butano Farms Habitat Enhancement. The goals of this project are consistent with the recovery actions outlined in the San Francisco Garter Snake Recovery Plan (1985). The recovery plan concludes restoration of upland, riparian, aquatic habitat, and recovery of CRLF is needed to aid in the recovery of the SFGS. At the project site, dense woody vegetation has encroached on adjacent aquatic and upland habitat areas, including native and invasive species. This encroachment has greatly reduced historic grassland and herbaceous wetlands commonly used for movement, foraging, and breeding by SFGS, CRLF, and a suite of other grassland dependent species. In addition to woody encroachment, upland erosion from gullies that drain into the pond has further reduced both aquatic habitat quantity and quality. During high flows the pond drains to Butano Creek and contributes sediment loads into the watershed which is listed as exceeding total maximum daily load limits for sediment by the Regional Water Quality Control Board. This effort will integrate existing conservation documents, such as the Butano Farms Conservation and Carbon Plan (RCD, 2018) and provide multi-beneficial and long-term solutions. In preparation for a 65-acre enhancement project at the same site, the RCD is conducting a 4.75-acre pilot project for upland habitat enhancement. The experimental component of this pilot project will explore treatment methods for woody encroachment and integrate soil enhancement. This pilot project will inform management actions across the total 65-acre section of Butano Farms and future grassland enhancement projects.

Name of Person, Board, Commission or Department Proposing to Carry Out Project:

San Mateo Resource Conservation District
Kellyx Nelson
80 Stone Pine Road, Suite 100
Half Moon Bay, CA 94019

2019078114

EXEMPT STATUS:

Categorical Exemption, Class 4 and Class 33 [CEQA State Guidelines, Section 15304, Section 15333]

REMARKS: See next page.

Contact Person: Amy Kaeser Telephone: (650) 712-7765 x 121

Date of Determination: 7/17/2019

I do hereby certify that the above determination has been made pursuant to State and Local requirements.

Governor's Office of Planning & Research

JUL 22 2019

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE



Amy Kaeser, Conservation Project Manager
San Mateo Resource Conservation District

REMARKS:

This project aims at testing restoration methods and improving habitat for SFGS. Collectively, the areas included in the project are less than five acres. The future project resulting from this pilot includes 65 acres of upland habitat restoration and several acres of pond and riparian habitat restoration to improve habitat for SFGS and CRLF while also improving water quality and reducing sedimentation. When developed, the future project will undergo CEQA process; a mitigated negative declaration is anticipated.

As described below, this pilot project meets the CEQA criteria for exemption from environmental review under Class 4 (15304) and Class 33 (15333).

Project Description

The Butano Farms SFGS Habitat Enhancement Pilot project aims at improving habitat for SFGS at Butano Farms in coastal San Mateo County, CA. The project covers up to 4.75 acres of restoration activities to identify suitable and effective upland restoration practices to support SFGS habitat. Restoration activities include:

1. Soil Enhancement (up to 1.25 acres)
Control of water quality concerns such as sediment loading, nutrient loading, and the introduction of pathogens are central to managing and maintaining a healthy pond ecosystem. Sediment loading accelerates loss of water depth and encroachment of emergent vegetation into open water and can cause amphibian egg and tadpole mortality through asphyxiation and can disrupt CRLF and SFGS adult foraging. Nutrient loading can lead to increased vegetation growth which, in turn, can lead to "choking" of the pond and decreased availability of dissolved oxygen. Though there are many mechanisms towards improving water quality, this pilot project focuses on upland soil enhancements to reduce sediment loading and gully erosion activity. Actions towards habitat enhancement will be opportunistic and will utilize products generated by certain invasive species and woody encroachment control.
2. Reduce Invasive Species (1 acre)
Invasive species that occur in high densities in upland; in particular, jubata grass, Douglas fir, and Monterey pine are identified as a high priority for this project. Invasive species have the potential to outcompete beneficial plant species for SFGS and CRLF. Jubata grass is considered an A-1 (highest priority) wildland weed. It is an aggressive colonizer that is known to displace native species occurring in coastal scrub, coastal dunes, and other coastal habitats. Jubata grass typically invades eroded or disturbed soils. The goals of this pilot are to reduce the presence of Douglas fir and Monterey pine to promote grass and shrubland for use by SFGS and CRLF. As an integrated approach to weedy species removal, the mulch generated from this tree removal will be utilized as soil amendment in select areas.
3. Woody Encroachment Control Trials (2.5 acres)
A shrub-grassland matrix provides both cover from predators and open ground necessary for thermoregulation. The San Francisco Garter Snake Recovery Plan (1985) identifies a range of brush densities that are likely beneficial to the species; these include "1 average sized bush/30 square meters to 1 large bush/20 square meters." The target goal will be to achieve between 25-33% cover across the project area. Sustainable and cost-effective brush management is key for SFGS habitat, ranching and grassland conservation. Brush management, however has always been a large challenge for coastal California, due to the lack of prescribed fire and natural ruderal species. There are multiple ways to control woody encroachment. This pilot aims to focus on two possible control methods to understand a) cost effectiveness and b) sustainability. If possible, woody debris generated from control actions will act as additional mulch for soil amendments.

Class 4 (CEQA State Guidelines, Section 15304)

Class 4 consists of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes.

Project activities include removal of some Douglas fir and Monterey cypress to reduce woody encroachment for both agricultural grazing and habitat improvements. No trees will be removed greater than 55 inches in diameter at breast height (DBH), in accordance with the San Mateo County Tree Ordinance; it is anticipated that the size range for trees removed will be a few inches to a maximum of 34 inches DBH. The trees will be removed from an area up to 1 acre in size, located over 2 miles from Highway 1. The trees removed will be chipped onsite and utilized for soil enhancements.

Although native to California, Douglas fir and Monterey pine are considered a weedy species in the scope of this project. Both trees are fast-growing species that type convert shrublands into monocultured forests. The goals of this project include reducing the presence of Douglas fir and Monterey pine to promote grass and shrubland for use by SFGS and CRLF.

Class 33 (CEQA State Guidelines, Section 15333)

Class 33 consists of projects not to exceed five acres in size to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife.

The purpose of this project is to enhance and restore habitat for SFGS and CRLF over a total of 4.75 acres.

(a) There would be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 15065.

Project activities will not result in a significant impact on endangered, rare, or threatened species or their habitat. The project areas are located within primarily upland and some riparian habitat. Implementation of the proposed pilot project will directly improve upland and riparian habitat conditions for CRLF and SFGS, and indirectly improve adjacent aquatic conditions. To the extent possible, temporary and localized impacts to sensitive habitats will be minimized by project timing and labor activities that avoid disturbance to the site and species. Pre-construction surveys will be completed for sensitive species that may occur in the vicinity of the project area. The RCD will implement all conservation measures required in project permits.

The project does not have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment and will not substantially reduce the habitat or threaten to eliminate a native plant or animal community; substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of any endangered, rare or threatened species; or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory.

(b) There are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed.

No hazardous materials are known to the project site or project vicinity.

(c) The project will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.

The proposed project will not result in adverse impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with effects of past, current, and probable future projects. This project will inform a subsequent larger habitat enhancement project within the same area; these two projects will have cumulative positive effects and support goals consistent with actions outlined in existing conservation documents including the Butano Farms Conservation and Carbon Plan (RCD, 2018) and the San Francisco Garter Snake Recovery Plan (1985).

Best management practices will be implemented to avoid construction-related impacts on sensitive resources. The project will not adversely affect farmland, public services, geologic stability, soils, or increase health risks. Overall, the project will result in cumulatively beneficial impact on habitat for sensitive species, soil health and stability, and water quality.