

SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESTORATION AUTHORITY

Staff Recommendation

June 6th, 2025

HEALING A WOUNDED WATERSHED WITH THE COLMA CREEK COLLECTIVE

Project No. SFB0069-RA0046
Project Manager: Chere Erickson

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$278,660 through the Authority's Community Grants Program to San Bruno Mountain Watch to implement the Healing a Wounded Watershed with the Colma Creek Collective Project in San Mateo County, consisting of community-led restoration on approximately one-quarter to one-third acre at the mouth of Colma Creek; hosting restoration education workshops, watershed field trips, and community-based shoreline restoration events; and collecting and distributing historical Colma Creek Watershed information.

LOCATION: Colma Creek Shoreline, South San Francisco, San Mateo County; Measure AA Region: West Bay

MEASURE AA PROGRAM CATEGORY: Safe, Clean Water and Pollution Prevention Program; Vital Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program; Shoreline Public Access Program.

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Letters](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Photographs](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority adopt the following resolution and findings:

Resolution:

The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred seventy eight thousand six hundred sixty dollars (\$278,660) to San Bruno Mountain Watch ("the grantee") to implement the Healing a Wounded Watershed with the Colma Creek Collective Project in San Mateo County, consisting of community-led restoration on approximately one-quarter to one-third acre at the mouth of Colma Creek; hosting restoration education workshops, watershed field trips, and community-based shoreline

restoration events; and collecting and distributing historical Colma Creek Watershed information (“the project”).

Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Authority the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Authority funding.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
5. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement, operate, and maintain the project.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority hereby finds that:

6. The proposed authorization is consistent with the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Act, Government Code Sections 66700-66706.
7. The proposed authorization is consistent with the San Francisco Bay Clean Water, Pollution Prevention and Habitat Restoration Measure (Measure AA).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority (Authority) authorize a grant of up to \$278,660 through the Authority’s Community Grants Program to San Bruno Mountain Watch (SBMW) to implement the Healing a Wounded Watershed with the Colma Creek Collective Project in San Mateo County, consisting of community-led restoration on approximately one quarter to one third acre at the mouth of Colma Creek; hosting restoration education workshops, watershed field trips, and community-based shoreline restoration events; and collecting and distributing historical Colma Creek Watershed information (“the project”).

The project includes a training program that will host approximately 10 restoration education workshops, 8 watershed field trips, and 8 community-based shoreline restoration events. The goal of the project is to restore parts of Colma Creek while demonstrating that local communities have the power and passion to improve the ecological conditions and character of Colma Creek. In the 1950s, the mudflats and tidal marsh surrounding the mouth of Colma Creek were covered with fill and quickly developed into lots for warehouses and office buildings. Today, the Colma Creek shoreline is littered with trash and is a popular illegal dumping site. Additionally, much of the native vegetation is choked out by swaths of invasive ice plant (*Carpobrotus edulis*). This alteration of the land has removed the natural filtration and flood control services that the marsh

historically provided for residents of the Colma Creek Watershed. As a result of this altered landscape, South San Francisco residents and business owners regularly experience devastating floods.

While many Colma Creek restoration projects have been proposed, as of today most of these projects have not moved past the design phase. The proposed project will act as a small-scale interim restoration project while these larger projects undergo design and planning. Throughout the project, SBMW will coordinate with the larger aforementioned projects to ensure the Colma Creek Collective complements future restoration efforts.

SBMW believes that the key to successful restoration of Colma Creek lies within its community. In 2024, SBMW partnered with Rise South City to establish the Colma Creek Collective, a robust, multi-generational network of people in northern San Mateo County dedicated to caring for the Colma Creek Watershed. The project will work with Rise South City to develop and implement a Watershed Stewardship Training Program. SBMW will lead the restoration efforts and Rise South City will recruit South San Francisco community members. The Watershed Stewardship Training Program will provide some paid opportunities for participants to learn about community-led restoration through a series of educational workshops and community events. As a part of the Watershed Stewardship Training Program, the collective will engage in the following activities:

- Developing and implementing approximately 10 community-led restoration training workshops for 15 participants, selected via an application process. Workshops will be a mix of in-the-field activities and indoor presentations.
- Developing and hosting 8 watershed field trips for local school students, preceded by a preparatory classroom visit.
- Coordinating 8 public-facing, community shoreline restoration events publicized as “Day by the Bay.”
- Removing approximately 1,250 square meters of invasive plants and approximately 200 pounds of trash along the San Francisco Bay Trail.
- Propagating and planting approximately 2,250 native plants.
- Digitizing and organizing approximately 500 maps, photos, and other items of historical importance relating to Colma Creek. Records will be accessible to the public via the San Bruno Mountain Archives.
- Developing and distributing approximately 500 copies of a Colma Creek informational booklet (offered in English and Spanish) throughout the South San Francisco Community.
- Colma Creek Collective actively participating in quarterly meetings of the Colma Creek Citizens Advisory Committee.

Not only will this project engage the South San Francisco community through a participatory model of stewardship, but it will also improve broader public access to the San Francisco Bay. A segment of the Bay Trail runs through the land stewarded by the Colma Creek Collective. Colma Creek Collective will make this portion of the Bay trail more accessible by removing trash piles and restoring the landscape. Additionally, the “Day by the Bay” community gatherings will encourage more people to engage with and care for Colma Creek and the San Francisco Bay.

Established in 1995, SBMW aims to care for San Bruno Mountain through conservation, ecological restoration, education, and advocacy in partnership with local communities. In 2022 and 2023, SBMW was subcontracted to lead school field trips and public tours of the Colma Creek Watershed as part of the Colma Creek Restoration and Adaptation Project. After the success of that program, in 2024, SBMW partnered with Rise South City, a South San Francisco based environmental justice nonprofit to create the Colma Creek Collective. That year, SBMW and Rise South City secured funding from Silicon Valley Community Foundational to begin the Colma Creek Collective. With this Authority grant, SBMW hopes to expand the capacity of the Colma Creek Collective, allowing them to increase the number and type of events offered to the community. Additionally, the project may help SBMW build organizational capacity as they learn to navigate government grants.

Site Description: The project will occur at the mouth of the Colma Creek in South San Francisco, where the creek merges with the navigable slough and meets the San Francisco Bay. This area was historically a salt marsh, however, in the mid-twentieth century, the area was filled and transformed into lots for industrial, commercial, and office buildings. While much of the marsh has been filled, small sections of wetland habitat and upland transition zones still exist. However, much of the earth is covered in bare dirt, invasive species, and ornamental trees and shrubs. A portion of the San Francisco Bay trails runs through the project site.

The project location occurs within a census tract classified as an SB535 Disadvantaged Community and low-income community. This tract is in the highest percentile for pollution burden and in the 87th percentile for impaired waters. In addition to these ecological burdens, this area is in the 69th percentile for asthma.

The project occurs on land owned by the City of South San Francisco and managed by the City of South San Francisco Parks and Recreation Department. SBMW has obtained permission from these entities to conduct this project on their land. The project activities will occur on five acres of land or less.

PROJECT FINANCING

San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority	\$278,660
SBMW and Rise South City	\$29,100
Project Total	\$307,760

CONSISTENCY WITH AUTHORITY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION, THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESTORATION AUTHORITY ACT:

The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Act, Government Code Sections 66700-66706, authorizes the Authority to award grants to private entities, including owners or operators of shoreline parcels in the San Francisco Bay area, excluding the Delta primary zone, for eligible projects in the counties within the Authority’s jurisdiction. The project is consistent with Section 66704.5(a) because San Bruno Mountain Watch is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and the project will occur along the San Mateo County shoreline, a county within the Authority’s jurisdiction. The project is consistent with Sections 66704.5(b)(1), (3) because the project will restore and enhance tidal wetlands and improve public access to the Colma Creek Shoreline as part of a project to restore and enhance tidal wetlands. The project is consistent with Section 66704.5(e), which allows grants awarded under Section 66704.5(a) to support “all phases of planning, construction, monitoring, operation, and maintenance” of eligible projects under Section 66704.5(b), because the grant supports implementation of eligible project activities.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES:

The project will support the *Safe, Clean Water and Pollution Prevention Program*’s purpose to remove pollution, trash and harmful toxins from the Bay to provide clean water for fish, birds, wildlife, and people by conducting trash clean-ups along the Colma Creek Shoreline.

The project will support the *Vital Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program*’s purpose to significantly improve wildlife habitat that will support and increase vital populations of fish, birds, and other wildlife in and around the Bay by removing invasive vegetation and planting native marsh vegetation.

The project will support *Shoreline Public Access Program*’s purpose to enhance the quality of life of Bay Area residents, through improved public access, as part of and compatible with wildlife habitat restoration projects in and around the Bay, by offering a Watershed Stewardship Training Program for community residents that will offer volunteer community events, local school field trips, and community-based restoration workshops. These events will encourage the community to participate in restoring Colma Creek while expanding the community’s understanding of Colma Creek’s ecology.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA:

1. **Greatest positive impact.** The proposed project supports a community-led, participatory model of watershed restoration, where South San Francisco community members are empowered to make positive changes to the Colma Creek Watershed. The project will result in the removal of approximately one quarter to one third acre of invasive species followed by the planting of approximately 2,250 native plants. SBMW keeps a record of their invasive species removal as well as native plantings through ArcGIS. In addition to these maps, SBMW has a qualified Ecological Restoration Specialist on staff to guide restoration decision making.

2. **Greatest long-term impact.** The goal of this project is to demonstrate that local communities have the power and passion to improve the ecological condition and character of the Colma Creek Shoreline. Through educational workshops and community days, this project will give community members the tools they need to aid in the restoration of Colma Creek and other ecologically sensitive sites. An added benefit is that community members will feel more connected to Colma Creek after participating in the program. As a result, community members may be likely to participate in restoration efforts after the project ends.
8. **Leveraging resources and partnerships.** SBMW will work directly alongside Rise South City to implement this project. Rise South City is a South San Francisco based non-profit that works to build climate-resilient communities by uniting frontline communities, allies, and organizations toward resilient, regenerative, and equitable neighborhoods. Together, SBMW and Rise South City worked to create the Colma Creek Collective. They will continue to work together to manage the Colma Creek Collective and expand the number of community members who participate in restoration of Colma Creek.

SBMW has and will continue to work with a design firm to ensure the proposed restoration activities will build on the efforts carried out in 2022 and 2023 as part of the Colma Creek Restoration and Adaptation Project and not conflict with the envisioned footprint of future large-scale restoration actions that may be implemented.

3. **Economically disadvantaged communities.** The project occurs in census tract 6081602300, this tract is classified as an SB 535 Disadvantaged Community and low-income community. The aim of the project is to engage members of this community and offer a Watershed Stewardship Training Program, which includes some paid opportunities for youth and adults to learn how to implement community-led ecological restoration. The project will empower the community to connect with and improve the health of their watershed, while teaching important restoration skills.
4. **Benefits to the economy.** The project will provide stipends to 15 Colma Creek Watershed residents who participate in the Colma Creek Collective Watershed Stewardship Training Program.
5. **Engage youth and young adults.** The primary objective of the Watershed Stewardship Training Program is to engage South San Francisco community members through hands-on restoration of the Colma Creek, workshops, public events, and high school field trips and preparatory classroom visits to South San Francisco Unified School District and Jefferson Union High School District.
6. **Monitoring, maintenance, and stewardship.** SBMW uses ArcGIS to map and log invasive species removal and native plantings throughout the Colma Creek Watershed. In addition to mapping vegetation, SBMW completes survivorship surveys for new plantings as well as photo point monitoring at select sites. Under the project, SBMW will conduct short-term restoration along the Colma Creek shoreline. However, the goal of the project is to build community support and encourage community members to care for the creek long past the completion of the project.

7. **Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.** The proposed project is consistent with the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program's Criteria:

The proposed project complements the Authority-funded Colma Creek Restoration and Adaptation Project, which planned for large scale restoration of Colma Creek and was completed in 2024. The Colma Creek Restoration and Adaptation Project resulted in a draft 35% design package. Healing a Wounded Watershed with the Colma Creek Collective will provide interim restoration and build community support of Colma Creek restoration while the larger restoration project prepares for phase 2 and navigates planning and completion of design work. Due to the small-scale nature of this project, it can be implemented in a timely manner.

8. **San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's Coastal Management Program.** The project is consistent with San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's Coastal Management Program.

Tidal Marshes and Tidal Flats: The project will help restore tidal marsh habitat by removing invasive plants and replanting native species. This will create improved habitat for marsh wildlife, especially migratory birds.

Water Quality: The project will work to restore the tidal marsh surrounding Colma Creek by removing invasive species and replanting native species. These efforts will improve water quality. Additionally, the grantee will remove trash from the creek, thereby reducing point source pollution.

Environmental Justice and Social Equity: The proposed project will engage the South San Francisco community in creek restoration and educate the community on the importance of Colma Creek and its surrounding wetlands. The project will host community events, provide 15 stipends to Colma Creek Watershed residents who participate in the Colma Creek Collective Watershed Stewardship Training Program, and host field trips for local schools.

9. **San Francisco Bay Joint Venture's Implementation Strategy.** The project goals and approach are consistent with San Francisco Bay Joint Venture (SFBJV) project criteria regarding restoring tidal wetland habitat and engaging the community around stewardship of those landscapes. The larger, SFBRA funded, Colma Creek Restoration and Adaptation Project is currently listed on the SFBJV project list.

CONSISTENCY WITH AUTHORITY'S INTERIM TRIBAL CONSULTATION POLICY:

The proposed project is consistent with the Authority's interim tribal consultation policy. On March 27, 2025, the Authority sent tribal consultation letters to eight tribes within San Mateo County. Additionally, SBMW consulted with a tribe to create the Colma Creek Collective watershed restoration curriculum. SBMW plans to consult with this tribe for future curriculum development.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The restoration and hands-on learning components of the project are categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to Section 15333 (Small Habitat Restoration) of Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR), which exempts projects that do not exceed five acres in size to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife, including projects to restore or enhance habitat that are carried out principally with hand labor and not mechanized equipment; and categorically exempt from review under CEQA, pursuant to Section 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land) of Title 14 of the CCR, which exempts minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation that do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes, including new gardening and minor temporary use of land having negligible or no permanent effects on the environment. The proposed project consists of restoration through invasive species and trash removal, native species plantings, and hands-on training and events. Thus, the project involves maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat on 5 acres or less; and public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation with no removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes. Consistent with the above, there will be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat; there are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed; and the project will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past, current, or probable future projects.

The booklet, archive, and classroom components are not a “project,” as defined under Section 15378 (Project) of Title 14 of the CCR, because organizing and digitizing information, developing and distributing informational booklets, and preparatory field trip classroom visits do not have potential to result in either a direct physical change or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment. If deemed a “project,” these components are exempt from CEQA, under Section 15061(b)(3) (Common Sense) of Title 14 of the CCR, because they can be seen with certainty as having no possibility of having a significant effect on the environment, and the classroom component is categorically exempt from CEQA, under Section 15301 (Existing Facilities) of Title 14 of the CCR, because preparatory field trip classroom visits would involve use of existing public or private structures or facilities with negligible or no expansion of existing or former use of structures and facilities.

Upon approval of the project, Staff will file a Notice of Exemption.