

Santa Cruz Integrated Regional Water Management

Project: Watsonville Slough Farms Wetland Restoration Project
Grantee: Regional Water Management Foundation
Lead: Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County (RCD)
Location: Watsonville
Funders: California Department of Water Resources (Prop. 1 Integrated Regional Water Management Implementation Grant Program); Santa Cruz County
Amount: \$400,305 (DWR Grant); DAC project, no match required
Year: 2021-2025
Status: Prop. 1 Round 1 Implementation Grant Awarded June 27, 2020

Purpose:

The Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County will implement this project as part of a broader strategy to improve ecosystem resiliency through the restoration of approximately 13 acres of wetland and adjacent upland habitat. The project will protect the surrounding area from flooding.

Issues Addressed:

The primary enhancement strategy of the project recovers wetland hydrology and function by managing sediment inputs from farmland with the construction of a sediment detention basin to benefit the function of the surrounding 13 acres. More specifically, this project will address increased rates of runoff and impaired water quality emanating from development taking place upstream in the City of Watsonville and from adjacent farmland. The project will also provide additional storage capacity for the runoff which also serves to reduce potential flooding.

Summary:

This project is the second and final phase of implementing the Ecological Restoration Plan for the Bryant Habert and Wait properties. Acquired in 2012, the properties add 45-acres to the 441-acre property owned by the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, referred to as the Watsonville Slough Farms. These land acquisitions were prioritized by State, local organizations, and the community due to their regional significance in linking and transforming the habitat fragments of existing conservation lands into an area large enough so that ecological processes can become self-sustaining.

The Project aims to recover wetland hydrology and function by creating topographic variability on farmland that was previously leveled for agricultural production. The resulting restored topographic variability, will provide a variety of hydroperiods to improve ecosystem health and resiliency, retain flood flows in support of neighboring agricultural and DAC communities, and support conditions suitable for wildlife.

Results:

Benefits of this Project include restoring, protecting, and enhancing wetland function to increase flood attenuation as well as ecosystem and climate resilience. The Project will also provide benefits to listed species of concern, will promote biodiversity and water conservation through wetland recharge, and will increase agricultural viability in an underserved and disadvantaged region. Specific to flood protection and water quality benefits, the restoration of wetland function and the re-creation of topographic variation on land which had previously been laser leveled for farming, will create depression areas that will store flood waters and allow them to infiltrate into the ground, improving recharge and aquifer levels.