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Martin Slough moves forward with multiple grants

By Natalya Estrada



Martin Slough tidegates are seen after Phase 1 of the restoration project.

The project will help restore coho habitat and help alleviate flooding. Craig Benson — Contributed

The Redwood Community Action Agency's Natural Resources Services Division was awarded five grants from the state and federal government totalling nearly \$3.4 million for estuary and river restoration and rehabilitation projects in Humboldt Bay.

According to RCAA executive director for the Natural Resources Services division, Craig Benson, the grants are highly significant to California wetlands, which contribute to Humboldt County's growing restoration economy.

"This area is one of California's premiere last chances for recovery of several endangered fish, amphibian and flora. As Humboldt County does more successful projects, it puts more granter's eyes on the area," Benson said. "Much of our work since 1993 has been grant funded but as the decades click on there's more competition for these grants so we've had to tweak our proposals to meet the needs of the projects and missions of donor agencies."



*Fish sampling in Martin Slough is done often, as the area is a highly productive transition zone for fish rearing.
Craig Benson — Contributed*

Three of the five grants will fund the Martin Slough Restoration Project, which will restore habitat for coho salmon and other endangered species, as well as help alleviate flooding near downstream agricultural land like the Eureka Municipal Golf Course, which according to Benson has been a long term project that's been in the works for more than a decade.

“It’s a super biodiverse and highly productive transition zone for fish rearing, water quality treatment, flood control and serves as a buffer against sea level rise,” Benson said. “It’s one of the richest habitats for rearing juvenile salmonid and steelhead in all of Humboldt Bay.”

The project is led by the RCAA and aided by work from the California State Coastal Conservancy and the Northcoast Regional Land Trust to obtain both federal and state grants for the watershed and wetland area.

The grants awarded to the project included the Coastal Ecosystem Resiliency Grant from NOAA, as part of their extensive coho recovery and ecosystem goals; the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant from US Fish and Wildlife Service; and the Proposition 1 Grant administered by the State Coastal Conservancy.

The Martin Slough project’s coordinator Elijah Portugal said its a large-scale process and in order to effectively raise funds for it, they separated it into six phases.

“Phase 1 was implemented in 2014 with replacement of the outdated tide gates at the mouth of Martin Slough funded by California Department of Water Resources,” Portugal said. “The three new grants for Martin Slough will fund implementation of phases 3 and 4. Funds were already secured to do Phase 2 from the same California DWR grant that we used for Phase 1.

“We are planning to implement two or possibly three phases this summer,” Portugal continued. “The amount of funding all coming in at the same time for Martin Slough is relatively unique and we are very happy that funders have decided to support this project in a substantial way.”

Larry Riley, a grant manager with U.S. Fish and Wildlife, said Martin Slough was considered a high priority for the department.

“This project in particular will benefit both federally and state listed endangered species that include the coho and steelhead, as well as species that have been de-listed like the bald eagle, northern spotted owl and the red legged frog,” Riley said.

Portugal also said the RCAA feels the projects funded by the grants are critical for increasing watershed health on the North Coast. He also said the grants provide enough funding for sustaining multiple projects beyond the Martin Slough.

“With these grants we will be able to implement a variety of projects throughout the next few years increasing critical habitat, providing flood control and increasing the resiliency of Humboldt Bay ecosystems to climate change and sea level rise,” Portugal said.

The CDFW awarded two grants to Redwood Community Action Agency for two separate projects, one which deals with invasive species in Humboldt Bay and the other for habitat restoration in Freshwater Creek.

Matt Wells, manager for the CDFW grant watershed restoration program, said funding both of these projects will address objectives identified in the [California Water Action Plan](#), will inform future invasive species removal projects statewide, and will improve the ecological function of wetlands in the region.

“Wetland restoration is a huge priority for the CDFW among our statewide suite of priorities. The restoration project to remove invasive spartina will enhance 100 acres of wetlands. Along with the previous efforts, this will address one-third of the total problem of invasive plant species in the region,” Wells said.

“(Both) projects will be implemented through the grant funding but the benefits will be more long term. We hope they sustain the ecosystem areas for up the next 100 years and allow landscape to perform as it did 200 years ago. There has been a huge decrease in wetlands statewide.”

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