

Project Summary Sheet

Project Name: Upper Pajaro River

Tracking No: 4003

Location: Pajaro River between CA 152 and US 101

County: Santa Clara & San Benito

Project Sponsor: The Nature Conservancy

Point of Contact: Lloyd Wagstaff, (415)-281-0447, lwagstaff@tnc.org

Co-applicant(s): None.

Assembly District: 28

Senate District: 12 & 13

Project Description (including size): Purchase of easements or fee title for three properties totaling 1,141 acres along and adjacent to the Pajaro River and around and adjacent to San Felipe Lake. The purpose is to protect against urbanization, maintain and enhance agricultural productive capacity, rehabilitate natural processes, improve or maintain water quality, and provide long-term protection of native species including carnivores, neotropical birds, western pond turtles, amphibians, fish, and deer. Easement (or possibly fee title on streambeds) for the 197-acre Torres property, on the river and Llagas Creek, would allow enhancement of the riparian and shaded riverine aquatic habitats, with continuance of irrigated row crop agricultural use. Fee title will be sought for the Gonzales property, 144 acres in a critical wildlife corridor, perhaps to continue agricultural use as pasturage but to eliminate past row crop use and to devote low lying areas adjacent to the river (most of the parcel) to year-round grasses and wetland vegetation. Easement for the 800-acre Paxton parcel, around San Felipe Lake, would provide for it to continue as pasturage and wetlands.

Flood Benefits: These and adjacent properties, including semi-permanent San Felipe Lake and intermittent Soap Lake, function as transitory flood storage areas. 100-year flood peaks for the downstream areas including Watsonville and Pájaro are attenuated by an estimated 25 percent. This project would preserve transitory storage for about 10% of the floodplain. The properties are embedded in the 8,000 acres included in the Upper Pájaro River Floodplain Initiative, which is actively seeking to preserve floodplain use for the area. Flood benefits are not quantified as reduced peak flows or flood damage, but in terms of avoiding increases by protecting against urbanization. The project would also preserve current erosion/sedimentation patterns, which result in most sediment remaining in the area instead of moving downstream.

Agricultural Benefits: Lands within the project are now unincorporated and zoned for agriculture. They are in counties with a right to farm ordinance. All but five acres are under Williamson Act contracts. The project is consistent with LAFCO in Santa Clara County. Most agricultural use will be preserved, with reversion or continuation of areas adjacent to the river and in some buffer zones to natural processes. Restriction of land to agricultural use will help maintain the local agricultural community, its economic viability, and its agricultural zoning designations. Without the project, it is likely that these lands will be subject to continual development pressure.

Agricultural Land Conserved, acres, if any: A majority of the total area of 1,141 acres, and nearly all of the area currently used for agriculture. Application is no more specific than this.

Wildlife Benefits: The project will enhance the use of the properties as part of a wildlife corridor between the Diablo and Santa Cruz Ranges and an aquatic linkage from upland streams to Monterey Bay. Existing wetlands and riparian corridors will be conserved. Riparian areas will be protected with buffers. The project is a piece of larger conservation planning being pursued by several organizations including the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority, The Nature Conservancy, and the Land Trust for Santa Clara County. Preservation of San Felipe Lake will protect a unique sag pond wetland used by many species. The Pájaro River will continue to support a large number of native fish and invertebrates, including a (probably native) steelhead population. Both the Pájaro River and San Felipe Lake are designated National Audubon Society Important Bird Areas, and preservation of the areas will prevent loss of bird habitat. Important terrestrial species that will be assisted are California red-legged frog, California tiger salamander, Coast Range newt, Western pond turtle, deer, coyotes, and bobcats.

Wildlife Habitat Conserved, acres, if any: All of the area not used for agriculture.

Total area conserved: 1,141 acres.

Other Benefits: The project will maintain infiltration of water in flood detention areas, fence cattle out of riparian areas, and continue support of the agricultural community to the benefit of underrepresented populations.

Total Cost: \$ 4,471,000

FPCP Cost: \$ 3,271,000

Funding Partners and Share of Cost:

Local government	\$ 700,000
Federal grant, if approved	<u>500,000</u>
TOTAL	\$1,200,000