Project Summary Sheet

Project Name: Big Bend Floodplain Protection and Restoration Project (Formerly Todd-Venn)

Tracking No: N/A

Location: North and South Side of the Tuolumne River from river mile 5.7 to 6.6.

County: Stanislaus

Project Sponsor's Name and Address: Tuolumne River Preservation Trust (TRPT), 829 Thirteenth Street, Modesto, CA 95354.

Point of Contact: Patrick Koepele, Tuolumne River Preservation Trust, 209-236-0330

Co-applicant(s): None.

Assembly District: #26 Greg Aghazarian Senate District: #12 Jeffrey Denham

Lead Agency Name and Address (for CEQA): East Stanislaus Resource Conservation District, 3800 Cornucopia Way, Suite E, Modesto, CA 95358

Project Description (including size): The project is located in eastern Stanislaus County approximately 5.5 miles west of the City of Modesto. The project site is located on both the north and south sides of the Tuolumne River from river mile (RM) 5.7 to 6.6. The northern part of the project site is located three-fourths mile south of the south end of Bancroft Road. The southern part of the project site is located just over one-half mile north of Grayson Road, west side of the Laird Avenue alignment. Both parts of the project site are located in unincorporated areas of Stanislaus County. The site is located within portions of Sections 17, 20, and 21, Township 4S, Range 8E., M.D.B.&M.

Project Summary: The TRPT proposes to acquire fee title to and perpetual conservation easements on approximately 167 acres and restore approximately 223 acres of the Tuolumne River floodplain (Venn I, 56 acres, will be restored as part of the overall project). The two properties being acquired, Todd and Venn II, would complement adjacent properties that have conservation easements already in place. Including the adjacent properties acquired previously, there are four contiguous parcels, totaling 363 acres in size. The enhanced area provides for flood damage reduction by facilitating, enlarging, and returning natural fluvial processes to the floodplain. In addition, the restored riparian corridor and its associated shaded riverine aquatic habitat that extends approximately two miles

on the south side of the river and one mile on the north side of the river will provide enhanced habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife species.

Flood Benefits: Acquiring these parcels and removing farm levees will provide increased transitory floodwater storage within the Tuolumne River floodway while restoring natural fluvial processes to the system. The river channel historically occupied the Venn II property in the early 1950's and will be able once again to provide much needed floodwater storage during high flow events after private agricultural berms are breached or no longer maintained.

While Don Pedro Dam is presently operated for a maximum allowable release of 9,000 cubic feet per second (cfs), many stakeholders, including the Turlock and Modesto Irrigation Districts, Stanislaus County, and the City of Modesto, are interested in increasing the maximum allowable release to at least 20,000 cfs (below Dry Creek in Modesto) as an important flood management measure. The January 1997 floods (about 60,000 cfs) highlighted the need for increasing the allowable release on the Tuolumne River. The acquisitions of the Todd and Venn properties is within part of the floodway accommodating higher flows such as the 1997 flood.

Wildlife Benefits: From the confluence with the San Joaquin to River Mile (RM) 10.4 there are few large stands of riparian vegetation, with only a small percentage of valley oak. Acquisition of these properties would allow for the reestablishment of a large riparian forest including the restoration of some valley oak woodland, an important forest in this reach of the river. Reestablishment of these vital habitat types and the associated ecotones (the interface between two habitat types) will attract and support a wide diversity of faunal species. This project would include approximately 20-30 acres of permanent wetland habitat, 200-220 acres of seasonal wetland/floodplain habitat and approximately 2 miles of shaded riverine aquatic habitat in an area that was previously intensely cultivated. It will provide cover, safety, and rearing habitat for fish as well as decreased stream velocities, decreased channelization, and lower thermal input to the water. Reestablishment of the riparian community will improve the vegetative input to the stream and thus improve the availability of nutrients to the food chain, which will benefit all trophic levels from microorganisms up through birds. These processes will improve rearing habitat for San Joaquin fall-run Chinook salmon and other native fish species in the river and for bird species in the riparian vegetation.

Agricultural Land Conservation Benefits: The Todd and Venn II properties are in bottomlands historically and recently flooded during high flow events. The Todd property is frequently saturated and of low soil quality making it difficult to farm profitably. Although farmed in the past, 110 acres of the 125-acre Venn II parcel was fallow. Prior to riparian vegetation planting by this project, preserving these agricultural lands was neither productive nor profitable.

Link to State Interest:

DFG is a participant in the Tuolumne River Technical Advisory Committee (TRTAC), which developed the Habitat Restoration Plan for the Lower Tuolumne River Corridor. This project represents the type of project the plan specifically promotes. The TRTAC has endorsed this project.

1. CALFED has named the Tuolumne River a "Demonstration Stream". CALFED has also funded 10 other channel and floodplain restoration projects on the Tuolumne River.
2. CALFED partially funded the purchase of the NRCS easement on the Venn I property.
3. The East Stanislaus Resource Conservation District is a partner with direct involvement in this project.
4. The project contributes to the expansion of the floodway, which was one of the goals of the Sacramento and San Joaquin River Basins Comprehensive Study (to which DWR was a partner).
5. DWR is a cost-sharing partner in the Corps of Engineer's Tuolumne River Feasibility Study. The Feasibility Study seeks measures to reduce flood damages along the Tuolumne River. This project will contribute to a reduction in flood damages.
6. DWR and DFG's Four Pumps Fish Mitigation Fund has funded several projects on the Tuolumne River, including gravel augmentation and channel restoration. DWR was the project manager for two of these projects.

Wildlife Habitat Conserved, acres: 240 acres

Total area conserved, acres: 240 acres

Total Cost: $ 2,605,619

FPCP Cost: $ 1,906,919

Funding Partners and Share of Cost: In total, there is $698,700 in partner funding for the project.

Working together on one of the parcels (Todd), the East Stanislaus Resource Conservation District (ESRCD) will acquire fee title while the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) will acquire a perpetual conservation easement. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service has contributed $50,000 towards restoration of the Todd property contingent upon securing funds for acquiring the property and at least a matching $50,000 towards restoration. The ESRCD has contributed $22,000 towards land costs on the Todd Property. The NRCS has contributed $98,000 towards land costs on the Todd Property. Also, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has contributed $25,046 and Salida Elementary School has contributed $20,035 towards the education and outreach component on the Todd Property.

On the second parcel (Venn), the NRCS will acquire and hold a perpetual conservation easement on the property. The NRCS is limited to spending a maximum of $2,000/acre on flood-prone farmlands through its Floodplain Easement Program. Therefore, additional partner funds are required. In total, the NRCS will contribute $301,600 towards land costs on the Venn Property. The Fish American Foundation has contributed $40,000 towards restoration on Venn, while the California Wildlife Conservation Board has contributed $146,550 towards restoration on Venn.