




Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

Memorandum

DATE: May 10, 2017

MEMO TO: Board of Directors

THROUGH: Stephen E. Abbors, General Manager 

FROM: Kevin Woodhouse, Assistant General Manager
Kirk Lenington, Natural Resources Manager
Aaron Hébert, Water Resources Specialist

SUBJECT: Funding Donation to State Parks to Support Science Research for Marbled Murrelet Landscape Management Plan for Santa Cruz Mountains

PURPOSE

This memorandum provides an update regarding the District's activities concerning Marbled Murrelets and informs the Board of Directors of the General Manager's intent to grant funds to State Parks. The current FY2016-17 District budget includes \$40,000 of funding, for a 'habitat suitability assessment' that synthesizes existing data, identifies data gaps, and identifies important areas throughout the Santa Cruz Mountains for Marbled Murrelet management and recovery.

California State Parks has been leading development of a Landscape Management Plan for the Marbled Murrelet population in the Santa Cruz Mountains portion of its range. In the Santa Cruz Mountains region, this federally threatened and California state endangered seabird is dependent on old growth redwood habitats for its nesting. Protection and restoration of redwood forest and recovery of Marbled Murrelet were among the highest priorities for Midpen's Vision Plan and Measure AA funding.

SUMMARY

Beginning in the winter of 2015-16, CA State Parks began to organize a regional landscape management plan with local stakeholders and scientists to develop management and recovery priorities for Marbled Murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) and to identify shared management issues and challenges. This planning effort has developed into a formal coordination between the stakeholders that include public land management agencies, private and non-profit land trusts, regulatory agencies, and representatives from the private timber industry and has attracted grant funding from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. A regional habitat suitability assessment, which Midpen's grant will fund, was determined to be the highest ranked funding priority by regional stakeholders and experts and will fill one of the largest data gaps in the planning effort.

The FY2016-17 budget included funding in the Natural Resources Department to support this planning effort. In addition, the draft FY2017-18 budget includes \$50,000 of additional funding for multiple Marbled Murrelet projects on Midpen lands, and some additional funding for the overall management plan in support of the species.

BACKGROUND

The Santa Cruz Mountains are the southern extent of the murrelet’s breeding range. Estimates indicate a population of 200-1000 in the Santa Cruz Mountains and, except for 2016, population growth has been estimated to be negative in each of the last 20 years. Murrelets can be considered an indicator species for ‘healthy’ old growth redwood forests because of their particular habitat requirements of large diameter branches, closed canopies, and remote areas that protect their nests from predation.

The Northwest Forest Plan, developed in 1994 to govern Federal forestland management along the entire West Coast of the United States north of the Golden Gate, incorporates murrelet management and recovery on Federal lands. The Santa Cruz Mountains, ‘Zone 6’ of the murrelet’s range, is outside of the Northwest Forest Plan and therefore has been generally outside of the Federal management of the species. Yet the species locally has been declining and very little action at the State or Federal level has occurred.

Many large landowners including CA State Parks, San Mateo County Parks, Midpen, and other conservation organizations have begun coordinating on developing regional strategies focused on how to best manage lands and habitat for the species.

CA State Parks has received a grant of \$117,000 to facilitate this overall management planning process and fund key actions (see Table 1). State Parks is anticipating budgeting an additional \$100,000 next fiscal year towards the key actions. Midpen is proposing to contribute \$40,000 to CA State Parks to model murrelet habitat and, using regional GIS data, develop a model of the distribution of current and likely future habitat. This effort will be accomplished through a grant to CA State Parks, who will contract directly with a qualified entity, manage the analyses, and incorporate the model into the Plan. Midpen staff will retain a role in reviewing proposals and providing technical comments on the report, while CA State Parks will facilitate the procurement, administer the contract, and manage the project. CA State Parks also spends ~\$548,000/year on murrelet management in their parks through interpretation, trash control, corvid management, and infrastructure upgrades.

Table 1. State Parks Marbled Murrelet Management Plan and Actions Funding Table

Funding Source (Management Plan)	
Section 6 Grant \ US Fish and Wildlife Service	\$117,000
Office of Spill Prevention and Response	~\$50,000
MidPen Grant for Habitat Suitability Analysis	\$40,000
Funding Source (State Parks Actions)	
State Budget	\$368,000
Office of Spill Prevention and Response	\$180,000