




Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

DATE: March 9, 2022
MEMO TO: Board of Directors
THROUGH: Ana Ruiz, General Manager 
FROM: Julie Andersen, Senior Resources Management Specialist
SUBJECT: Alma Bridge Road Wildlife Connectivity Project Cooperative Agreement

SUMMARY

Based on community science and newt advocacy efforts and the results from the recently completed [Alma Bridge Road-Related Newt Mortality Study](#) (Study), Santa Clara County (County) as the owner of the Right-of-Way known as Alma Bridge Road and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) whose mission is “*to acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity, protect and restore the natural environment, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education*” are working together to provide wildlife passage (specifically for California newt) across Alma Bridge Road adjacent to Lexington Reservoir in Santa Clara County.

BACKGROUND

In November 2017, the District was notified of newt mortality observed along Alma Bridge Road near Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve. To date, community science volunteer efforts have documented over 20,000 dead newts on Alma Bridge Road since monitoring began in 2017.

In response, District staff have been working with newt advocacy groups (Sierra Club, Audubon, Center for Biological Diversity, Community Science Volunteers), researchers (US Geologic Survey and US Davis Road Ecology Center) and agency partners (Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), Santa Clara County Roads and Airports (County Roads), Santa Clara County Parks (County Parks), Valley Water, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to better understand the issue.

During the winter of 2020-21, the District and POST funded a Study that builds upon newt mortality data collected by community science volunteers to determine the level of impact on the local newt population from road mortalities (vehicle strikes). The intent of the Study was to better understand the issue, provide additional perspectives on existing conditions, facilitate collaboration with partner agencies/underlying landowners, and identify the appropriate scope and scale to address newt mortality.

The Study found a 39.2% road-based mortality rate of newts during migration to and from the reservoir for breeding. Through modeling, the Study predicts this level of mortality may result in a reduction of the population and possible local extirpation in approximately 57 years. Additional details of the Study and its findings were presented to the Board as an informational item on December 08, 2021. Study results have been shared with partner agencies, newt advocacy

groups, community science collaborators, researchers, legislators representing the Study area, and the public.

In February of 2022, Santa Clara County (under the signing authority of the County Roads Director) and the District (under the signing authority of the General Manager) entered into a Cooperative Agreement (Attachment 1) for providing wildlife passage across Alma Bridge Road. Phase I of the Project is the solicitation, selection, and management of a Consultant team to investigate possible options to reduce newt mortality.

DISCUSSION

County Roads has expertise and ownership responsibility for maintaining County roads and infrastructure. The District has Natural Resources staff with expertise in wildlife and habitat connectivity. Working together, these two agencies have a strong interest in affecting change to reduce newt roadkill on Alma Bridge Road.

Working under the Cooperative Agreement, the District is leading initial efforts with technical oversight and support from County staff. The District recently prepared and released a Request for Proposals and Qualifications (RFPQ) soliciting design, engineering, and environmental services from a Consultant (or team of Consultants) for identifying and selecting one or more corrective actions to provide safe passage for California newts, rough skinned newts and other semiaquatic species across Alma Bridge Road. The consultant scope of work includes preparation of an Alternatives Analysis, Preliminary Designs, Cost Estimates and a proposed California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) compliance strategy for the Project. Based on the feasibility and cost of alternatives proposed, the County and District would consider amending their Cooperative Agreement to complete future phases of the project, including environmental assessments, CEQA, final designs, permitting, and implementation.

Although the County is not currently providing funding for initial efforts, they intend to work with the District in identifying funding for subsequent work, including the construction of new crossing infrastructure. The County is supporting initial work by providing County permits at no cost to complete studies and fieldwork within the Alma Bridge Road Right-of-Way and adjacent County owned lands.

The Fiscal Year 2021-22 (FY22) budget allocates \$120,000 for VP22-001 - *Alma Bridge Road Newt Mortality and Population Study* to implement actions, including the planned Consultant scope of work, that will result in a future capital project to install one or more wildlife crossing structures and associated directional fencing along Alma Bridge Road. Separately, the District currently has \$5,372,133 available through Measure AA Portfolio 22 *Sierra Azul: Cathedral Oaks Public Access and Conservation Projects* which supports a wide variety of projects but a portion of which may be available to fund part of the construction (capital) work. Depending on final cost estimates, additional funding may be needed. Many different funding opportunities are being explored in conjunction with the County, including grant funds from Valley Water, Santa Clara County Fish and Game Commission, and the Wildlife Conservation Board. Once full costs are estimated, more refined grant requests will be developed to offset and/or supplement District funding.

Prior items pertaining to this issue have been brought before the Planning and Natural Resources Committee (PNR) during the Beatty Parking Area and Trail Connection Project or as informational items (FYIs) to the full Board on the following dates:

- [PNR meeting \(R-20-07\) on January 14, 2020](#)
- FYI on [July 8, 2020](#)
- [PNR meeting \(R-20-83\) on August 4, 2020](#)
- [Board Agenda Item \(R-20-104\) on September 23, 2020](#)
- [FYI dated December 8, 2021](#)

This item is not (yet) a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act. The execution of a Cooperative Agreement is not subject to CEQA. Part of the planned Consultant scope of work will be to recommend a CEQA approach for the Project. The Project is currently in the planning and feasibility phase for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted or funded, but are anticipated. Once the CEQA approach and lead agency for this Project are determined, this information will be provided to the District Board.

NEXT STEPS

District staff, in collaboration with County staff, will complete the RFPQ process and select a Consultant to carry out the feasibility studies and prepare an Alternatives Analysis, Preliminary Designs, Cost Estimates, and a proposed California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) compliance strategy to reduce newt mortality across Alma Bridge Road. An award of contract by the District Board is expected in May 2022. Ongoing discussions with Project stakeholders will continue as the Project progresses.

Attachment(s):

1. Cooperative Agreement
2. Project Location Map