



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-26-49
Meeting 26-12
April 22, 2026

AGENDA ITEM 3

AGENDA ITEM

Grant Funding Application for Santa Cruz Kangaroo Rat Project

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

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Adopt a resolution authorizing the General Manager to apply for grant funding from the Santa Clara Valley Water District (Valley Water) and negotiate a grant funding agreement up to \$500,000 for the Santa Cruz Kangaroo Rat Habitat Management Plan Implementation Project.

SUMMARY

The General Manager recommends that the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) adopt a resolution authorizing the General Manager to apply for grant funding from Valley Water. This report provides a description of the funding available through Valley Water and the approval process for use of the funds.

DISCUSSION

A new population of the Critically Imperiled Santa Cruz Kangaroo Rat (SCKR) was discovered in Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve (Sierra Azul) in 2019. The Critically Imperiled designation is a California Natural Diversity Database Conservation Status Ranking that indicates the subspecies are at a very high risk of extirpation/extinction from the state. At present, SCKR is not listed as state or federally threatened or endangered. The process of ecological succession, coupled with historic fire suppression, is causing vegetation to encroach on limited habitat for the population within Sierra Azul. This encroachment limits mobility, burrowing, and foraging opportunities for SCKR, reducing long-term viability of both the local population and the subspecies. The broader species of Narrow Faced Kangaroo Rat (NFKR) are facing similar threats and have lost significant portions of their historic population range. Recognizing that the SCKR population at Sierra Azul is geographically isolated and is likely highly susceptible to extirpation or extinction, the District began work to assess habitat conditions to better protect this unique population.

On November 10, 2021, the District Board of Directors (Board) approved Resolution No. 21-40, allowing the District to apply for up to \$295,000 of Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) grant funding towards SCKR research. The grant funding was approved by WCB on April 24, 2022. Under Phase I, monitoring and population assessments support the development of a Habitat and Population Management Plan (HPMP) that will inform future conservation actions for the species performed under Phase II. In addition to the Sierra Azul SCKR population assessment, habitat assessment, and rare plant surveys (R-22-144), these funds were utilized to support a

state-wide genetic species assessment by UC Davis of the NFKR (of which SCKR is a subspecies).

UC Davis's genetic analyses confirmed that the subspecies of NFKR found within Sierra Azul is the SCKR. Furthermore, the analysis of historic specimens indicated that the historic range of SCKR extended through large portions of the Santa Cruz Mountains. SCKR are now only confirmed to be present in Henry Cowell State Park and Sierra Azul. Prior to this study, kangaroo rats in the Mt. Hamilton area of the Diablo Range were considered to belong to the SCKR. However, analyses of museum specimens collected from 1892-1938 from Mt. Hamilton, as well as from a newly identified population at Henry Coe State Park, show that the NFKR in the Diablo Range may be a distinct subspecies (Attachment I). Results indicate that NFKR subspecies ranges have become significantly reduced and isolated when compared to historic distributions. Genetic results support the argument that several populations, including the SCKR found in Sierra Azul and Henry Cowell State Park, should be considered distinct Evolutionary Significant Units (ESU) and awarded threatened or endangered status under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA.) An ESU under CESA can encompass the entire range of a subspecies if that subspecies is geographically isolated within a specific region, as is the case with SCRK in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

The population assessment in Sierra Azul was completed in May 2024, detecting 24 individual SCKR spread across nine trapping sites. Population modeling estimated a total of 23-29 individual SCKR within the trapping areas. Trapping was not conducted in all potential habitat within Sierra Azul since some areas were inaccessible to researchers due to dense vegetation and steep terrain. The number of individuals at each site was considered very low (0-10 individuals per site) with little or no connectivity between habitat fragments.

On January 8, 2025, the Board approved an award of contract with Jodi McGraw Environmental Consulting for the development of the HPMP (R-25-05), which is currently in progress and will be completed in June of 2026. The HPMP will identify opportunities and constraints for implementable site-specific habitat enhancements to increase the population resiliency of SCKR within Sierra Azul.

The Valley Water grant application that is under consideration as part of this Agenda Item will help fund the project's final designs and implementation based on the HPMP. Valley Water requires a resolution from the District's Board of Directors prior to reviewing the project and potentially awarding funds. The resolution (Attachment 1) authorizes the General Manager, or designee, to sign the application for Valley Water funds and to execute a grant agreement for the funding.

FISCAL IMPACT

Upon review and approval by Valley Water, this funding opportunity would have a positive impact of up to \$500,000.

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

November 10, 2021: Board approved [Resolution No. 21-40](#), allowing for the submittal of a grant application for the Santa Cruz Kangaroo Rat Habitat and Population Management Project. ([R-21-154](#), [Minutes](#))

December 14, 2022: Board authorized the General Manager to enter into an agreement with Nomad Ecology for related botanical surveys and habitat assessments ([R-22-144](#), [Minutes](#))

January 8, 2025: Board authorized the General Manger to enter into an agreement with Jodi McGraw Environmental Consulting to create a Habitat and Population Management Plan (HPMP) to increase the population resiliency of Santa Cruz kangaroo rat within Sierra Azul ([R-25-05](#), [Minutes](#))

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

Submitting grant applications to secure funding is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Valley Water requires grantees to comply with CEQA, and to certify that the CEQA analysis for any project encompasses all aspects of the grantee's work that will be completed with grant funds.

NEXT STEPS

If approved by the Board, District staff would complete and submit a Valley Water grant application for the Santa Cruz Kangaroo Rat Habitat Management Plan Implementation. Upon review and approval by Valley Water, District staff would work with Valley Water staff to develop a grant agreement for grant funding, and the General Manager would execute the agreement.

Attachment:

1. Resolution authorizing the General Manager to apply for Valley Water grant funding and to enter into a grant funding agreement.

Responsible Department Head:

Stefan Jaskulak, Chief Financial Officer, Administrative Services

Prepared by/contact person:

Danny Morrison, Management Analyst II, Administrative Services

RESOLUTION NO. 26-____

RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT APPROVING THE APPLICATION FOR A SANTA CLARA VALLEY WATER DISTRICT GRANT FOR THE SANTA CRUZ KANGAROO RAT HABITAT MANAGEMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT AND AUTHORIZING THE GENERAL MANAGER TO ENTER INTO A GRANT FUNDING AGREEMENT

WHEREAS, the Santa Clara Valley Water District (“Valley Water”) has enacted the FY2026 Safe Clean Water Grant Program (Safe Clean Water), which provides funds for Education Grants, Planning Grants, and Stewardship (Program) Grants; and

WHEREAS, the Santa Clara Valley Water District’s Office of Civic Engagement has been delegated the responsibility for the administration of the grant program, and establishing necessary implementation procedures; and

WHEREAS, said procedures established by the Santa Clara Valley Water District require the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, as a grant applicant (“Applicant”) to certify by resolution its approval to apply for and accept grant program funds; and

WHEREAS, the District intends to enter into a Grant Agreement with the Santa Clara Valley Water District; and

WHEREAS, the District intends that the Santa Cruz Kangaroo Rat Project will complete design and implementation work for improvement of habitat for the Santa Cruz Kangaroo Rat in the area of its Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District as follows:

1. The Board authorizes the General Manager or designee to submit an application for grant funds from the Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program.
2. The Board authorizes the General Manager or designee to accept grant funds from the Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program, upon approval of grant funding for the Project by Valley Water.
3. The Board certifies that the District has or will have sufficient funds to operate and maintain the Project(s);
4. The Board certifies that the District will maintain an accounting system that:
 - a. Accurately reflects fiscal transactions, with the necessary controls and safeguards;
 - b. Provides good audit trails, especially the source documents; and
 - c. Provides accounting data so the total cost of each individual project can be readily determined.

- 5. The Board certifies that the District will review and enter into a Grant Agreement with Valley Water; and
- 6. The Board authorizes the General Manager or designee to conduct negotiations, execute, submit and sign all documents including but not limited to applications, agreements, amendments, payment requests, and other documents which may be necessary to administer grant funding for the proposed project, except as such authority is limited by state law and the policies of the District.

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PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District on _____, 2026, at a regular meeting thereof, by the following roll call vote:

AYES:
NOES:
ABSTAIN:
ABSENT:

ATTEST:

APPROVED:

Margaret MacNiven, Secretary
Board of Directors

Zoe Kersteen-Tucker, President
Board of Directors

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Hilary Stevenson, General Counsel

I, the District Clerk of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of a resolution duly adopted by the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District by the above vote at a meeting thereof duly held and called on the above day.

Maria Soria, District Clerk