



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

R-26-89
June 23, 2026

AGENDA ITEM 3

AGENDA ITEM

Three Coastside Fisheries Improvement and Monitoring Projects: *Lobitos Creek* and *Arroyo Leon Creek* Stream Assessments and Conceptual Designs, and *San Gregorio Creek* Fisheries Monitoring

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Receive a presentation and provide feedback on three proposed coastal fisheries projects.
2. Forward a recommendation to the full Board of Directors, with any Committee feedback, to approve partnership agreements with the San Mateo Resource Conservation District for the Lobitos Creek and Arroyo Leon Creek Fish Passage Improvements Feasibility Projects, and the San Gregorio Creek Fisheries Monitoring Project.

SUMMARY

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) frequently partners with the San Mateo Resource Conservation District (RCD) to protect and enhance habitat in coho and steelhead streams. The Planning and Natural Resources Committee (PNR) will review three upcoming partnership opportunities with the RCD focused on fisheries improvement and monitoring on the coast: 1) *Lobitos Creek* Fisheries Restoration Feasibility Project, 2) *Arroyo Leon Creek* Fish Passage Improvements Feasibility Project, and 3) *San Gregorio Creek* Fisheries Monitoring Project.

The projects on Lobitos and Arroyo Leon Creeks will evaluate habitat conditions and fish passage. Should opportunities for habitat enhancement or fish barrier removal/modification be identified on either stream, conceptual restoration designs may be developed as part of the projects. At San Gregorio Creek, the District will partner with the RCD to install two fish population monitoring stations to identify fish population status, trends, and migrations regionally and within San Gregorio Creek. The fish population data will inform management decisions, guide research and monitoring, and measure upstream restoration activity success. The RCD would lead habitat assessments and design of the fish passage improvements for the Lobitos Creek Fisheries Restoration Feasibility Project and Arroyo Leon Creek Fish Passage Improvements Feasibility Project. These two projects would include \$156,195 in District funding during Fiscal Year 2026-26 (FY27), plus a 10% contingency of \$15,620, for a not-to-exceed District contribution of \$171,815. The San Gregorio Fisheries Monitoring Project would include \$248,000 in District funding, spanning FY27 through FY29.

DISCUSSION

The District owns and manages streams home to federally listed species, including 37 miles of critical habitat for federally endangered coho salmon and 159 miles of critical habitat for federally threatened steelhead within the District's jurisdiction and sphere of influence. Steelhead and coho face many threats within the Santa Cruz Mountains region. The District has assisted in the recovery of these species through habitat enhancement projects. In 2025, the District and the RCD partnered to complete the San Gregorio Creek Fish Habitat Enhancement Project at the Apple Orchard property in La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve and the Little Butano Fish Passage and Habitat Improvement Project in Cloverdale Ranch Open Space Preserve. The District has also contributed to water quality improvements for salmonids over decades through implementation of best management practices that reduce sediment delivery to streams through routine maintenance of trails and roads. Notably, the District has reduced sedimentation in important spawning habitats in San Gregorio Creek and Pescadero Creek watersheds, which the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board designate as sediment-impaired due to the impact of sediment on fisheries.

Lobitos Creek, Arroyo Leon Creek, and San Gregorio Creek are designated as critical habitat for Central California Coast steelhead and coho and therefore represent important streams for fisheries recovery within District lands. Three partnership projects with the RCD aim to advance the District's conservation goals within these watersheds: 1) Lobitos Creek Fisheries Restoration Feasibility Project, 2) Arroyo Leon Creek Fish Passage Improvements Feasibility Project, and 3) San Gregorio Creek Fisheries Monitoring Project. The goals and objectives for these projects are derived from existing Board-approved Resource Management Policies and previously adopted Measure AA commitments. The proposed work will enhance fisheries habitat and monitor fish populations to support Board-approved Resource Management Policy WR-6: *Preserve and enhance fisheries habitats*. Policy WR-6 directs the District to “[r]emove artificial barriers to fish passage where removal will enhance spawning and rearing habitats” and to “[m]onitor sensitive fish species populations in District waters.”

Pending Board approval, these projects are anticipated to begin in FY27. Because the projects at Lobitos Creek and Arroyo Leon Creek are feasibility-level assessments, future approvals for advancing designs beyond the conceptual level or implementing improvements will return to the Board as appropriate.

The RCD is a longstanding partner agency with extensive experience conducting fisheries related work in coastal San Mateo County. The District frequently partners with the RCD to protect and enhance habitat in coho and steelhead streams. Additionally, the RCD has a strong history of organizing partnerships across coastal San Mateo County to implement regional monitoring projects and develop shared regional datasets. Their history of habitat restoration and fish passage work in the region, along with their expertise in collaborating with neighboring landowners and key partner agencies, will allow for successful implementation of the projects.

Lobitos Creek Fisheries Restoration Feasibility Project

Lobitos Creek runs through Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve (Attachment 1). As it crosses Verde Road, an existing double box culvert partially restricts fish passage. The double box culvert stretches approximately 30 feet between a large plunge pool at the downstream end of the culvert and a shallower pool at the upstream end of the culvert. During summer and fall, the concrete culvert dries out before the rest of the surrounding stream due to its perched

position, and likely acts as a barrier to fish movement during low flows. The perched position of the culvert also creates a potential velocity barrier for fish swimming upstream at high flows.

The Lobitos Creek Fisheries Restoration Feasibility Project aims to evaluate and improve fish passage and habitat conditions in Lobitos Creek by assessing the existing culvert at Verde Road. Under the proposed Partnership Agreement, the RCD will assess the Verde crossing for impacts to fish passage and overall habitat conditions. Additionally, the RCD will lead interagency coordination with Caltrans to address the downstream Highway 1 crossing, which also blocks fish passage and must be addressed, along with the Verde crossing, to ensure migratory movement of salmonids within this watershed.

Measure AA Portfolio 3 identifies the removal of fish barriers and restoration of Lobitos Creek. Through the assessment of Lobitos Creek and exploration of restoration feasibility, this project aims to lay the groundwork for the completion of this Measure AA commitment. Should unsuitable habitat or impediments to fish passage be identified, concept-level designs for fish passage and/or habitat improvements may be advanced as optional tasks under this project in preparation for advanced designs and implementation using Measure AA funding.

Arroyo Leon Creek Fish Passage Improvements Feasibility Project

Arroyo Leon Creek runs through the Johnston Ranch Uplands property in Miramontes Ridge Open Space Preserve (Attachment 2). Johnston Ranch was acquired by the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) in the 1990s around the same time as Central California Coast steelhead was listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. Subsequently, two dams on Arroyo Leon that once impounded water for farming on Johnston Ranch were decommissioned in 2001 due to concerns from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the National Marine Fisheries Service. The dams were decommissioned and modified to restore unimpeded flows, but the concrete structures remain within the channel and may still function as a barrier to fish passage under certain conditions.

The Arroyo Leon Creek Fish Passage Improvements Feasibility Project aims to evaluate how these relic dam features may affect fish passage and overall stream habitat within the project reach. One relic dam structure is located within Miramontes Ridge Open Space Preserve, and a second relic dam is located downstream on the POST-owned Johnston Ranch Farm Property. Under the proposed Partnership Agreement, the RCD will assess both relic dam sites in coordination with POST.

Measure AA Portfolio 1 identifies the restoration of fish habitat in Miramontes Ridge Open Space Preserve. This assessment of Arroyo Leon for habitat enhancements and fish passage barriers aims to lay the foundation for the implementation of this Measure AA effort. Should fish passage barriers or habitat in need of enhancement be identified as restoration opportunities, concept level designs for fish passage and/or habitat improvements may be advanced as optional tasks under this project in preparation for advanced designs and implementation using Measure AA funding.

San Gregorio Creek Fisheries Monitoring Project

Fish monitoring plays a key role in fisheries recovery and watershed management. Through coordination with existing regional fisheries monitoring efforts, installation of new fisheries monitoring sites in San Gregorio Creek would expand knowledge about salmonid movement within and between watersheds. Development of a population estimate would enable the success

of conservation practices and restoration actions to be measured in a watershed where the District owns and stewards approximately one-third (33%) of the total watershed.

The San Gregorio Creek Fisheries Monitoring Project aims to establish baseline data and track long-term trends in coho salmon and steelhead populations within San Gregorio Creek and across coastal San Mateo County. Pending Board approval, a Partnership Agreement will be executed with the RCD to establish two new Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag array monitoring sites within San Gregorio Creek. Array deployment would be coupled with additional fish PIT tagging in the Pescadero and San Gregorio lagoons, funded by the District with in-kind contributions from California State Parks and CDFW. These monitoring sites in San Gregorio Creek would contribute to a larger regional dataset to monitor trends in fish populations and their distribution within and between central California coast streams, complementing existing fish monitoring efforts being led by the RCD in the Pescadero-Butano and Gazos Creek watersheds. In FY27, the RCD would oversee the installation of two arrays in the San Gregorio Watershed and fish PIT tagging. The District's contribution to the project would support maintenance of the San Gregorio arrays through FY29.

The RCD is coordinating site selection for the monitoring sites in San Gregorio Creek with CDFW and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Monitoring sites will be selected on the basis of technical suitability (factors such as channel form and substrate) and practical considerations (factors such as access and power availability). Siting of the arrays will also rely on willing landowners.

Future Direction of Fisheries Restoration

The projects described above have been identified as priority next steps for the District based on the current understanding of regional habitat conditions and data gaps. Stream restoration projects on District lands are often constrained to the upper reaches of watersheds due to District ownership; however, restoring fish passage within lower reaches, such as the focus of the feasibility studies in Arroyo Leon and Lobitos Creek, sets the stage for future restoration work to occur upstream, maximizing benefits to fish populations. By establishing baseline data starting in FY27, data from the San Gregorio Creek monitoring sites will assist the District and conservation partners in understanding long-term trends to forecast how future management actions may benefit coastal fish population recovery.

To identify these future management actions, District staff will implement the Fish Habitat Restoration and Prioritization Framework (80114) project in FY28. The Fish Habitat Restoration Prioritization will inventory and assess the habitat and fish passage conditions across important salmonid-bearing streams in District preserves to identify and then prioritize opportunities for future projects.

Ultimately, recovering listed coho and steelhead will require watershed-scale coordination that extends beyond the boundaries of District lands. The forthcoming Fish Habitat Restoration Prioritization Project will take a multi-watershed view of restoration opportunities by collaborating early and often with regional partners, including the RCD. This coordination will ensure that the District's work supports regional recovery objectives and contributes effectively to multi-agency efforts.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no immediate fiscal impact associated with the recommendation. PNR provides feedback and is considering forwarding a recommendation to the full Board of Directors. Funding to complete the projects in FY27, as well as future fiscal year costs, will be recommended as part of the annual Budget and Action Plan process. Pending board approval of the FY27 Budget on June 24, 2026, there would be sufficient funding for the partnership agreements.

VP01-004 - Arroyo Leon Creek Fish Passage Improvements Feasibility	\$75,925
VP03-004 - Lobitos Creek Fisheries Restoration Feasibility	\$95,890
80112 - San Gregorio Creek Fisheries Monitoring	\$248,000
Total Partnership Costs	\$419,815

None of the three projects are currently funded by Measure AA. Two projects (VP01-004 - Arroyo Leon Creek Fish Passage Improvements Feasibility and VP03-004 - Lobitos Creek Fisheries Restoration Feasibility) are in the feasibility stage and currently ineligible; however, future design and/or capital improvement phases supporting Measure AA Portfolios 1 and 3 may be eligible for Measure AA funding. Estimated costs for future design and implementation eligible for Measure AA funding will be estimated as a part of the feasibility studies in FY27. The third project (80112 - San Gregorio Creek Fisheries Monitoring) will be funded by the General Fund (Fund 10).

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

None

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act and to the following interested parties lists via email: Natural Resources Management, Coastside Protection Area, Miramontes Ridge Open Space Preserve, Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve, Tunitas Creek Open Space Preserve, and La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve. Staff hosted a field visit with the San Mateo County Farm Bureau to seek input from them on the Arroyo Leon and Lobitos Creek Projects, who did not provide specific input on the projects. Moreover, they have been notified of this Committee meeting.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

The proposed project as described herein is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under Sections 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land) and Section 15306 (Information Collection) of the State CEQA Guidelines.

NEXT STEPS

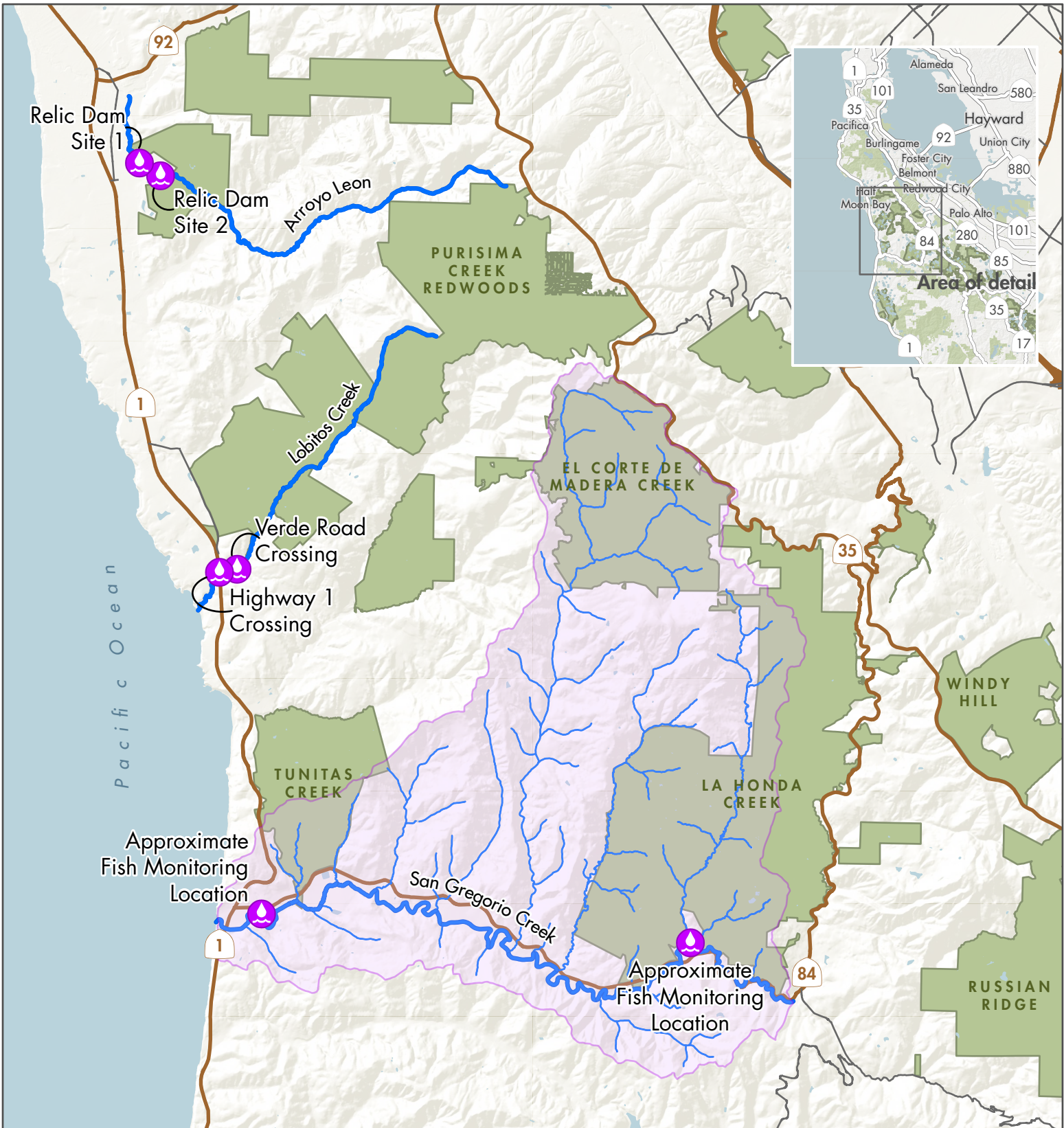
If supported by the PNR, the proposed partnership projects would be brought to the full Board of Directors. If approved by the Board all three projects are anticipated to begin in FY27.

Attachment(s)

1. Coastal Fisheries Improvement and Monitoring Projects Overview Map
2. Arroyo Leon Project Location
3. Lobitos Creek Project Location
4. San Gregorio Creek Project Location

Responsible Department Head:
Kirk Lenington, Natural Resources






Prepared by / Contact person:
Jacqueline Van Der Hout, Water Resources Specialist III, Natural Resources Department



Coastal Fisheries Improvement and Monitoring Projects

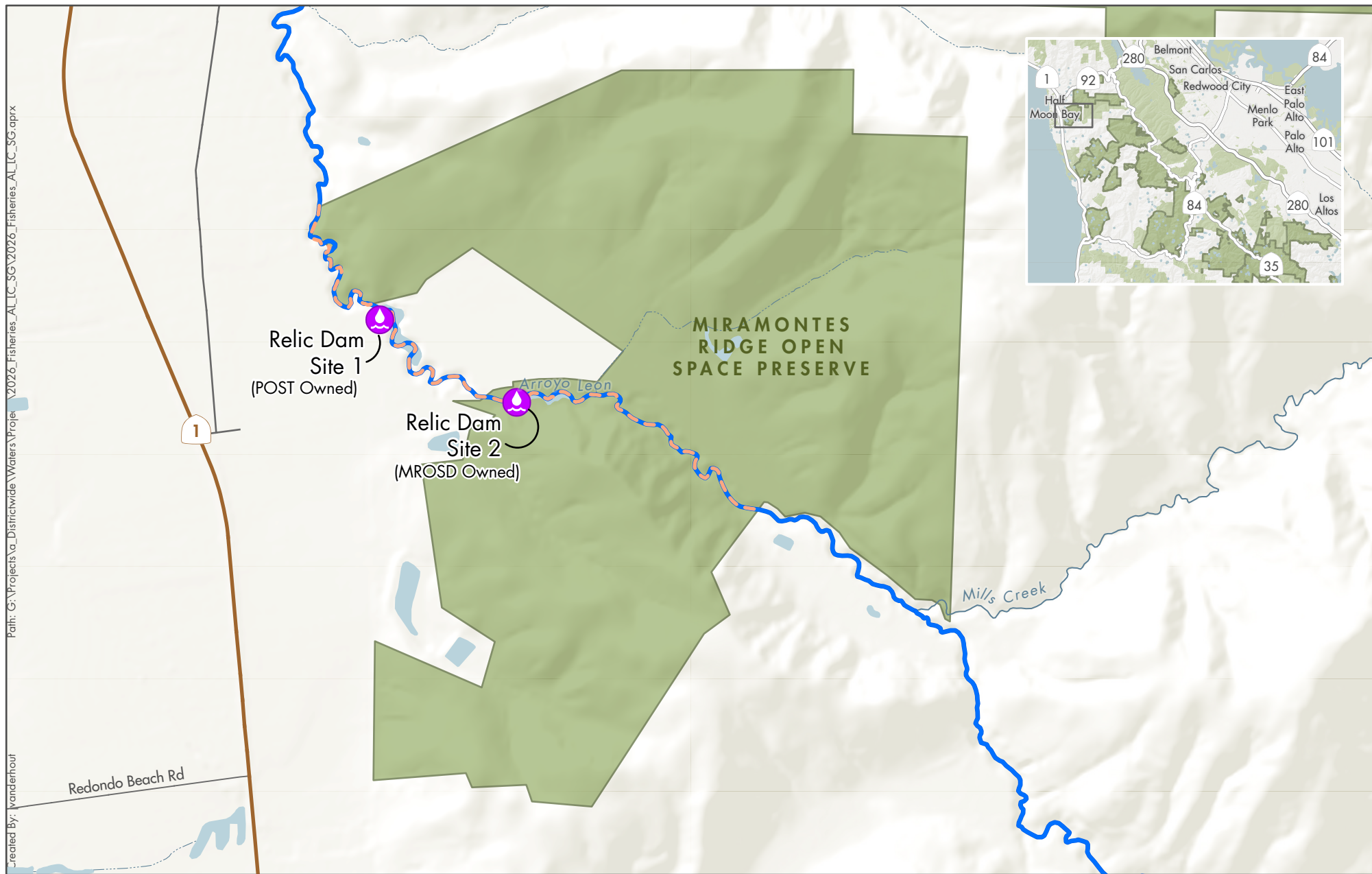
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
-  Proposed Project Site
-  Stream
-  Easement over MROSD Fee
-  Preserve boundary
-  San Gregorio Watershed



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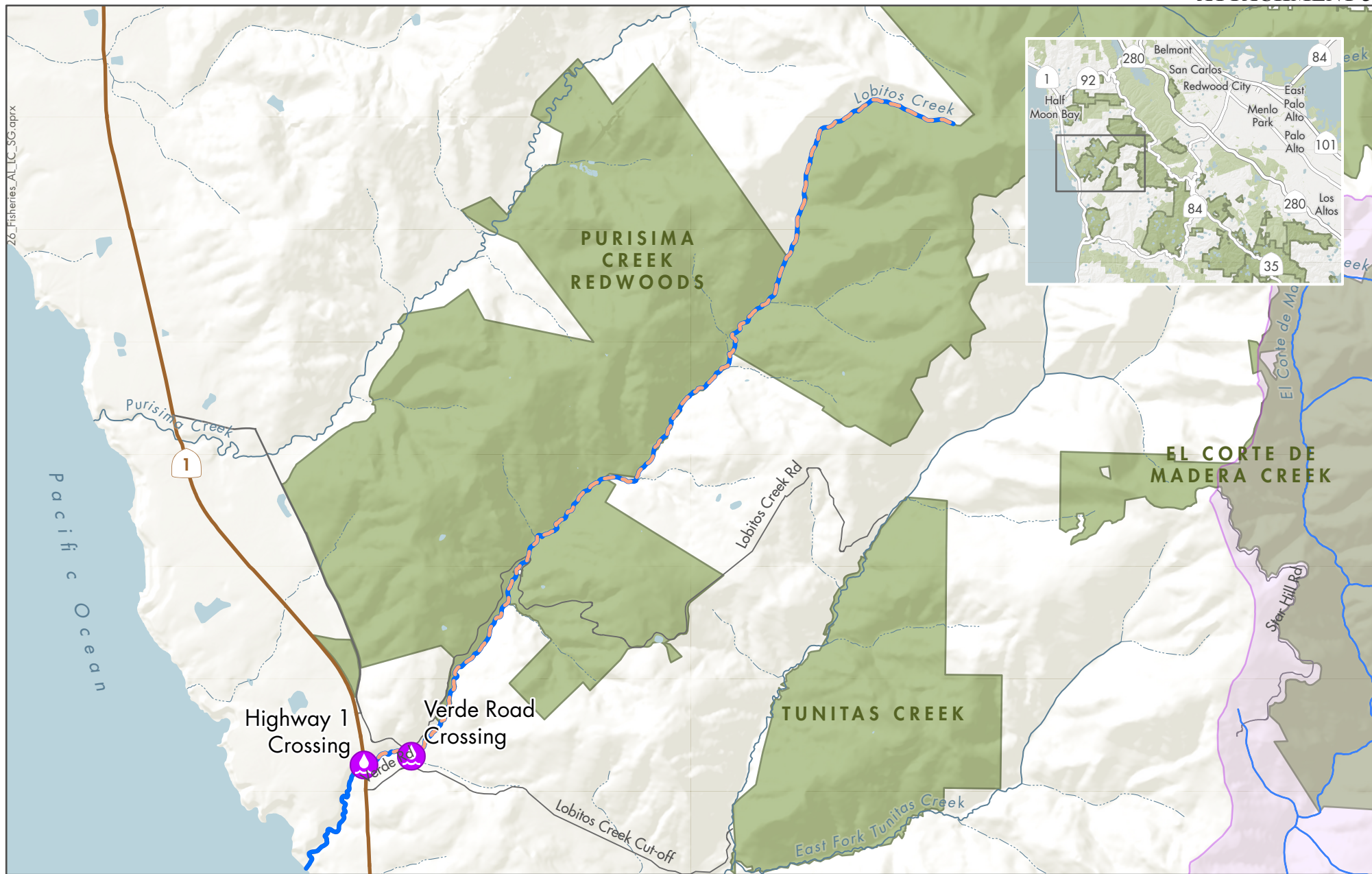


Arroyo Leon Creek Fish Passage Improvements Feasibility Project






-  Proposed Project Site
-  Stream Assessment Areas
-  Stream
-  Preserve boundary
-  San Gregorio Watershed

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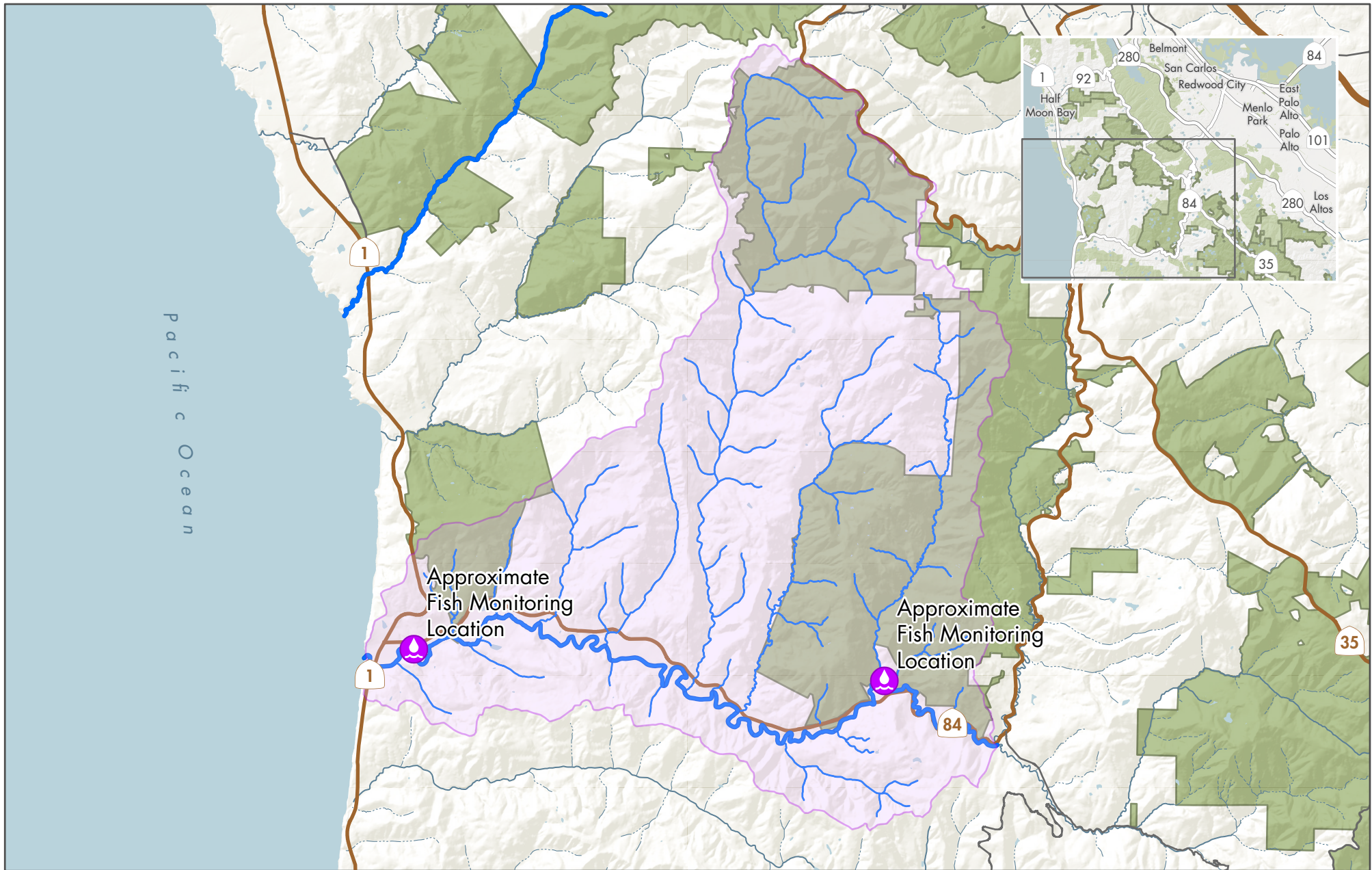


Lobitos Creek Fisheries Restoration Feasibility Project





-  Proposed Project Site
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-  Stream
-  Preserve boundary
-  San Gregorio Watershed

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San Gregorio Creek Fisheries Monitoring Project

-  Proposed Project Site
-  Stream
-  Preserve boundary
-  San Gregorio Watershed

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