



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-24-51
Meeting 24-11
April 24, 2024

AGENDA ITEM 6

AGENDA ITEM

Five-Year Contract with the San Mateo Resource Conservation District for Administration of the United States Geological Survey San Gregorio Creek and Butano Creek Streamgages

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION *den*

Authorize the General Manager to execute a contract with the San Mateo Resource Conservation District for an amount not to exceed \$86,640 for the operation and administration of the United States Geological Survey San Gregorio Creek and Butano Creek streamgages over a five-year period.

SUMMARY

The General Manager recommends executing a contract with the San Mateo Resource Conservation District (RCD) in the amount of \$86,640 for the operation and administration of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) San Gregorio Creek and Butano Creek streamgages over a five-year period. The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) would partially fund the San Gregorio Creek streamgage, while the remaining costs for both streamgages would be equally divided among the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District), Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), and San Mateo County Office of Sustainability (OOS), with each party contracting directly with the RCD. The District has contributed to cost-share agreements to fund the operation of the San Gregorio Creek streamgage since 2009. This year, the USGS has agreed to install a new streamgage on Butano Creek if funding can be procured. By funding both gages over the next five years under the administration of the RCD, stream monitoring will continue to support a wide range of conservation and community resilience projects in coastal San Mateo County. There are sufficient funds in the adopted Fiscal Year 2024-25 (FY25) budget to cover the initial phase of the recommended action through the fiscal year. Funding for future years' budgets would be requested as part of the annual Budget and Action Plan process.

DISCUSSION

Streamgages provide real-time data on streamflow and water level. They enable a wide range of benefits to communities, landowners, and public agencies related to fisheries and watershed restoration, drought monitoring, flooding impacts and early warning systems, water conservation, and agricultural or domestic water uses. Despite the disproportionately high vulnerability of coastal zones to climate and land-use impacts, most coastal areas in the United States lack streamgages. In coastal San Mateo County, the small network of existing streamgages has proven essential in creating flood resiliency and facilitating effective watershed management planning, but is at risk of decommissioning as federal funding of streamgages has declined.

At the same time, the need for stream monitoring has grown sharply as weather extremes, development within stream corridors, and unsustainable water uses (over-allocation of consumptive water use) challenge coastal stream management. The USGS now works with more than 1,400 partners nationwide to maintain and expand streamgage networks, and since 2009 the District has played a significant role as a funding partner to maintain the San Gregorio Creek streamgage through cost-share agreements with the USGS, RCD, POST, OOS, American Rivers, Trout Unlimited, and San Gregorio Environmental Resource Center.

Following federal budget cuts of streamgage funding since the 1990s, the USACE appropriated funds to allow streamgages with non-federal funding sources, including the San Gregorio Creek streamgage, to remain in operation as long as those funding sources did not lapse for more than one year. Federal funding for the San Gregorio Creek streamgage has been retained over time because the District has contributed funds either by contracting directly with the RCD or entering into Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with the RCD and other agencies, but the most recent MOU with POST and OOS expired September 30, 2023. As such, if the District, POST, and OOS funds can be secured, the USACE will extend its commitment to partially funding the San Gregorio Creek streamgage through the next five years.

The San Gregorio Creek streamgage has operated through most years since 1969 and provides critical data in a vulnerable watershed: San Gregorio Creek is designated critical habitat for federally threatened steelhead and endangered coho, listed under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act as impaired by both sediment and bacteria, and adjudicated under the San Mateo County Superior Court 1993 Decree due to historically excessive water diversions. Streamgage data collected over the next five years would assist the District with its ongoing efforts to restore fisheries, reduce sedimentation, and protect water rights for conservation grazing leases, fire protection, pond management, instream aquatic habitat, and public recreational uses.

Similar conditions in Butano Creek make it well-suited for gaging. Past land-use practices within the watershed like hillside row-cropping in the 1930s have accelerated erosion rates, leading to its listing under Clean Water Act Section 303(d) as impaired by sediment and by the California Coastal Commission as a Critical Coastal Area. Lower in the Butano Creek watershed, rapid channel aggradation has contributed to flooding in and around the town of Pescadero. Butano Creek is also critical steelhead habitat, and restoration projects aimed at improving instream habitat and floodplain connectivity have relied on a temporary, consultant-owned streamgage funded by the RCD through grants and support from POST and nearby landowners. The USGS has committed to installing an improved, permanent gage to expand the network of publicly available streamflow data in San Mateo County.

The proposed cost share (Table 1) divides operating and administration fees for the San Gregorio Creek and Butano Creek streamgages equally among the District, POST, and OOS, with an overall cost reduction for the San Gregorio Creek streamgage equal to the USACE partial contribution. Each of the three parties would be responsible for \$17,328 per year for five years. The USGS would own and operate the streamgages, and costs to maintain or repair them are included in the annual fees. The data would be made publicly available on USGS-hosted websites, enabling landowners to set real-time alerts based on streamflow for water rights compliance or flood warnings. The RCD would perform fiscal administration of the funds, including annual invoicing and reporting, and has received permission from landowners for the installation and maintenance of the gages.

Table 1. Coastal Stream Monitoring Budget, Water Years 2024-2028

	Butano Creek Streamgauge	San Gregorio Creek Streamgauge	Totals
USGS Cost Estimate	\$150,366	\$98,633	\$248,999
RCD Administration Fees Estimate	\$5,460	\$5,460	\$10,920
Cost Share Percentage Per Party	33%	33%	33%
Total Cost Per Party Over Five Years	\$51,942	\$34,698	\$86,640
Total Cost Per Party Per Year	\$10,388	\$6,940	\$17,328

FISCAL IMPACT

If approved, the first payments would be made in FY25. Funds for future year costs will be recommended in future fiscal year budgets as a part of the annual Budget and Action Plan process.

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

September 23, 2015, Board Meeting: Award of contract to the San Mateo Resource Conservation District to provide funding for the United States Geological Survey streamgauge on San Gregorio Creek ([R-15-137, Minutes](#))

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

Funding of the streamgages is categorically exempt under section 15306 (basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities that do not result in major disturbances to an environmental resource) of the California Environmental Quality Act.

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval by the Board of Directors, the General Manager will enter into a contract with the San Mateo Resource Conservation District to fund a portion of the costs for the operation of the United States Geological Survey San Gregorio Creek and Butano Creek streamgages.

Attachment(s)

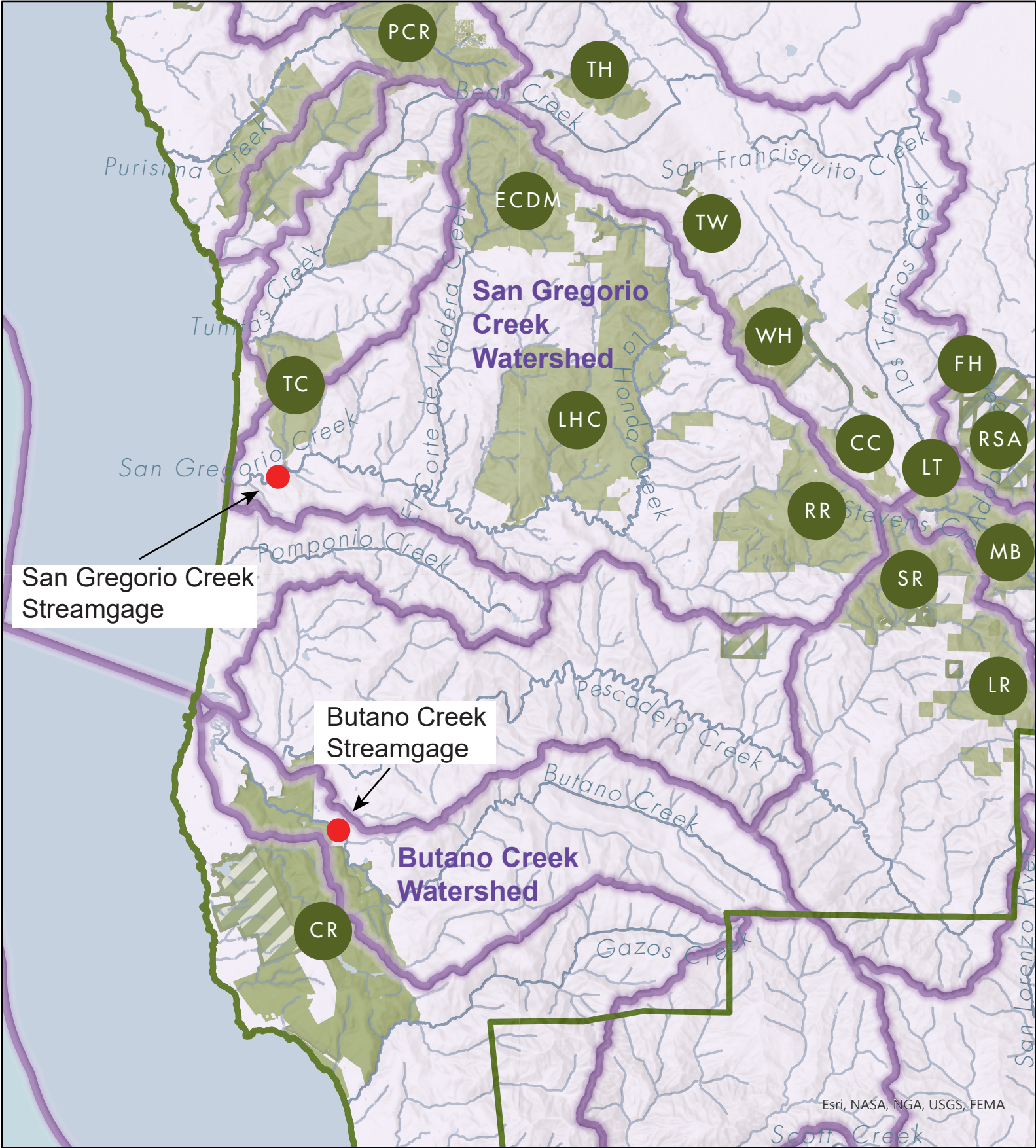
1. Map of streamgauge locations.

Responsible Department Head:

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Prepared by/Contact person:

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San Gregorio Creek Streamgage

Butano Creek Streamgage

San Gregorio Creek and Butano Creek Streamgages

ATTACHMENT 1

Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District
(Midpen)
4/11/2024

-  HU12 Watersheds
-  Preserve Boundary
-  MROSD Easement & Mgmt



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA