

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GCRCD Withdraws from Historic FAHCE Agreement

SAN JOSE, California - June 11, 2020 - The Board of Directors for the Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District (GCRCD) took official action on Tuesday, June 9, 2020, to withdraw from the Fish and Aquatic Habitat Collaborative Effort (FAHCE) Settlement Agreement due to extended delays in implementing the agreement and expected revenue impacts from COVID-19.

The FAHCE Settlement Agreement was originally negotiated between 10 resource agencies and fisheries organizations to resolve disputes regarding the Santa Clara Valley Water District's (now "Valley Water") use of its water rights on three waterways and their tributaries in Santa Clara County: the Guadalupe River, Coyote Creek, and Stevens Creek. In addition to GCRCD and Valley Water, other parties to the agreement are the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, California Department of Fish and Game, Trout Unlimited, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, California Trout, San Francisco Bay Urban Creeks Council and the Northern California Council of Federation of Fly Fishers. The collaborative effort was designed to remove fish passage barriers and restore and maintain spawning and rearing habitat for the historic Chinook salmon and steelhead populations migrating through San Francisco Bay. Although the agreement was initialed in 2003, it is not scheduled to be signed and become effective until Valley Water secures a change to its water rights following a hearing before the State Water Resources Control Board. The agreement anticipated implementation by 2005. Fifteen (15) years later, Valley Water has not completed the environmental analysis and water rights change petitions needed to move the matter to hearing before the State Water Resources Control Board, preventing implementation of the agreement.

"As much as we regret needing to leave the FAHCE agreement at this time, it is important for our District to redirect and focus its limited resources on projects and programs with more certain timelines and outcomes," said Board President Rick Lanman, M.D. "Fortunately, our contributions will remain impactful since the increased scientific data and analysis assistance we contributed to the process will continue to benefit the resource agencies and other organizations working to prevent Chinook salmon and steelhead from being extirpated from our waterways. We are especially proud of a recent study sponsored by GCRCD, which proved via ancient DNA sequencing of archeological remains of salmonids at the historic Mission Santa Clara, that salmon were historically native to our County."

The Board of Directors approved the action on an unanimous vote of the Directors in attendance, with one Director absent. The withdrawal will take effect immediately unless Valley Water contests the action. At this time it is unknown if the other parties will continue with the agreement.

GCRCD is an independent special district of the State of California dedicated to the conservation of natural resources in Santa Clara County. Working on soil, water, agricultural and wildlife conservation issues beginning in the 1930's, California's resource conservation districts are leaders in locally-led conservation work throughout the State. RCDs implement on-the-ground projects, provide technical assistance, and help educate the public to improve their local communities. GCRCD relies on volunteers, such as our Board of Directors, to help accomplish our mission. For more information, visit www.gcrcd.org.

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