# Item 6c - Exhibit 3: Letters of Support

John Laird, Secretary for Natural Resources
Chair, Ocean Protection Council
California Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814

July 13, 2018

Re: Eel River Estuary and Centerville Slough Enhancement Project - SUPPORT

Dear Mr. Laird

The Wiyot Tribal Council is writing to express our support of the proposed Eel River Estuary and Centerville Slough Enhancement Project on the Eel River Estuary Preserve ("Preserve"). The project will restore critical salmonid habitat to the Estuary and create coastal public access opportunities in our community, while also providing important habitat restoration jobs within the County. Fisheries in the Eel River are vital to the Wiyot. We see the project as an important component of the estuary-wide efforts currently underway to restore tidal wetlands, cold-water fish habitat and a functioning coastal ecosystem.

The Preserve is owned and managed by The Wildlands Conservancy, a California non-profit public-benefit corporation dedicated to the preservation and restoration of landscapes and ecosystems across the state. In cooperation and consultation with numerous agencies, tribes and individuals, as well as other community partners, the project has been formulated to benefit the estuarine ecosystem and the community-at-large. The Wiyot Tribe has been monitoring sturgeon, lamprey, and salmonid use of the Eel River Estuary, and is contributing information that will be used in final project design.

The project will reestablish access for salmonids, including coho and Chinook salmon and Steelhead trout, and other aquatic species to 150 acres of restored tidal wetlands and off-channel rearing habitat. The project will also restore 1.25 miles of historic slough networks, including the reconnection of Russ Creek to the Estuary. In the dry months, fresh water input from Russ Creek will reduce stream temperatures and provide refugia to migrating salmonids. The project will also provide key public access to the Eel River's south spit and estuary, and free outdoor education opportunities for our community.

The Wiyot Tribal Council sees this project as a positive addition to the North Coast quality of life, and another important step towards restoring habitat in the Eel Delta. Whether the metric is restoring native species habitats, or expanding coastal access opportunities for the community, this is an effort we support. We appreciate the Commission's consideration and urge your approval of this project.

Sincerely,

Theodore Hernandez
Wiyot Tribal Chairman

1000 Wiyot Drive • Loleta, California 95551 • (707) 733-5055 • (800) 388-7633 • FAX (707) 733-5601

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
West Coast Region
1655 Heindon Road
Arcata, California 95521-4573

JUL 10 2018

Refer to NMFS No: 10012WCR2018AR00017

Honorable John Laird, Secretary for Natural Resources
Chair, California Ocean Protection Council
California Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Mr. Laird:

The purpose of this letter is to express NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) California Coastal Office's support of the proposed *Eel River Estuary and Centerville Slough Enhancement Project*, an important component of restoration of the Eel River Delta.

The Eel River estuary is of utmost importance to Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed coho salmon, Chinook salmon, and steelhead throughout the Eel River basin. Estuaries are important transition zones for juvenile salmonids transitioning from freshwater to saltwater. Functioning estuaries provide productive feeding areas and refuge from predators, increasing growth and survival of smolts entering the ocean. These functions are particularly important given the degraded habitat conditions, and predation and competition from non-native Sacramento pikeminnow, in many parts of the Eel River.

Currently, the Eel River estuary is severely impaired due to past diking and filling of tidal wetlands, which resulted in the loss of approximately 60 percent of the estuary. Most of the remaining estuarine habitat is degraded. Actions to restore the Eel River estuary ecosystem rate among the top priorities for all three salmonid species identified in their respective Federal ESA recovery plans. In short, restoration of the estuary is absolutely critical to the recovery of ESA-listed salmonids in the Eel River basin.

We respectfully encourage you to support the *Eel River Estuary and Centerville Slough Enhancement Project* in order to allow for restoration of the ecosystem and to aid in the recovery of Eel River ESA-listed salmon and steelhead. Please direct questions regarding this letter to Julie Weeder at (707) 825-5168 or via e-mail at julie.weeder@noaa.gov.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Jahn
South Coast Branch Chief
California Coastal Office

CALIFORNIA TROUT

February 20, 2018

Honorable John Laird, Secretary for Natural Resources
Chair, California Ocean Protection Council
California Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: CalTrout's Support for the State Coastal Conservancy Grant Application for the Eel River Estuary Project

Dear Chairman Laird,

California Trout (CalTrout) is pleased to support the State Coastal Conservancy's application for the Eel River Estuary and Centerville Slough Enhancement Project, and to recommend the Project be considered for full funding and move forward into implementation. This Project marks a critical step forward for this historic restoration effort, joining several other projects in the Eel River Delta and Estuary region making considerable progress in improving fishery habitat and ecosystem function, as well as providing public access in this critical piece of the Eel River.

As you may be aware, In 2012, CalTrout submitted grant applications to two State Agencies, including the Coastal Conservancy and CA Department of Fish and Wildlife, on behalf of our project partners – The Wildlands Conservancy, and supported by our technical team of restoration design and environmental compliance experts. Restoration grants totaling $1.2 million have been awarded to CalTrout to complete restoration designs and engineering plans, prepare a CEQA Environmental Report, and fulfill all regulatory permit requirements.

The focus of the project has always been *to restore a balance in natural resource and preserve agricultural land uses* in one of the most significant expanses of the Eel River Estuary. The Eel River Estuary is recognized as one of the most ecologically important tidal marsh habitats in California. It is the third largest estuary in the State and, along with Humboldt Bay, the only substantial tidal marsh habitat between San Francisco and Coos Bay. This landscape has been subjected to over 150 years of land conversion, isolation from the Eel River and saline waters by tide-gates and levees, and operated as a monotypic seasonal wetland cattle pasture. The consequences to this isolated landscape, as well as to the surrounding Eel River estuary, have been severe to the native fish, wildlife and plant species of the estuary.

For more than four years, our Project team has sought to propose viable solutions to the existing condition of natural resource degradation and consequent impacts to Public Trust resources. Feasible and balanced solutions in this heavily managed setting are incredibly

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**Phone:** (415) 392-8887 **Fax:** (415) 392-8895 **E-mail:** info@caltrout.org

challenging Our Project established a central principle of enhancing natural resources, alleviating winter flooding conditions, and increasing agricultural productivity without risking any impacts to the surrounding private properties and their ongoing cattle grazing uses. The opportunity to also address the threat of sea level rise, and build in increased resiliency and adaptation in this region is also significant.

Our Project has not only met our Project Goals and Objectives stated in the FINAL EIR, but has exceeded our expectations by offering the best balance of natural resource enhancement project elements across this landscape with no demonstrable risks or impacts to the surrounding lands. The Proposed Project will accomplish the most meaningful steps to the protection and enhancement of Public Trust resources on this landscape since the lands were originally "reclaimed" by the ranchers so many decades ago.

In 2017, CalTrout, in partnership with the UC David Center for Watershed Sciences, released an in-depth report that details the status of 32 types of salmon, steelhead, and trout that are native to California. The ***State of Salmonids II: Fish in Hot Water*** identified critical threats to the several salmon and steelhead species that inhabit the Eel River, including the State (CESA) listed Coho salmon, the CA Coastal Chinook salmon, and Winter Steelhead. Each of these species has declined in part from severely altered estuary habitat, and each would benefit from a healthier estuary. In fact, significant investment of restoration funds in the Eel River estuary is essential to the recovery of these species.

We wish to sincerely thank our project funders and partners: the State Coastal Conservancy and CA Department of Fish and Wildlife, the landowner The Wildlands Conservancy, our Project design team of Kamman Hydrology and Engineering, GHD Inc., HT Harvey and Associates, LACO Associates, Roscoe and Associates.

And we thank you for your consideration for supporting the next and most important phase of this project.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Darren Mierau
California Trout
North Coast Director

CALIFORNIA TROUT

360 Pine Street, Fourth Floor, San Francisco CA 94102
**Phone:** (415) 392-8887 **Fax:** (415) 392-8895 **E-mail:** info@caltrout.org

# THE WILDLANDS CONSERVANCY

*Behold the Beauty*

February 16, 2018

Honorable John Laird, Secretary for Natural Resources
Chair, California Ocean Protection Council
California Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SUPPORT for the State Coastal Conservancy ERECSEP OPC grant application

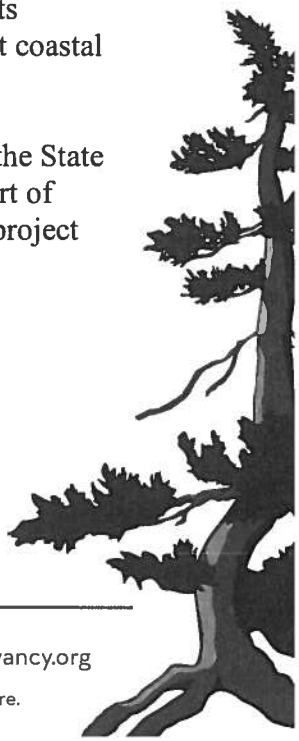
Dear Chair Laird,

Your consideration of the proposed Eel River Estuary and Centerville Slough Enhancement Project (ERECSEP) represents a unique and brilliant opportunity for restoration of the Eel River Estuary natural resources, development of public access on our Preserve, and application of coastal resilience planning and sea level rise adaptation in a highly dynamic environment.

Even prior to purchase of the Connick Ranch in 2008, The Wildlands Conservancy (TWC) recognized the extraordinary opportunity for landscape-scale restoration of the entire Eel River watershed. A 1974 DFG, now California Department of Fish and Wildlife, analyzed the properties at the mouth of the Eel River, and found Connick Ranch, now the Eel River Estuary Preserve, to be the keystone for restoration of diverse species, particularly salmonids.

Additionally, the property offers tremendous opportunity for sea-level rise adaptation and coastal resilience planning. This project is unique in being the first habitat restoration project analyzed under the Coastal Commission's Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance, adopted August 12, 2015. That analysis was presented to Commission staff and received their encouragement for its thoroughness and the project's consistency with the Coastal Act. This design will protect coastal resources and help address the area's vulnerability to sea level rise.

In 2012, after preliminary studies and with our Board support, TWC invited partners of the State Coastal Conservancy and California Trout to collaborate with us on the project. As a part of those early grant awards, project design, permitting (in progress) and a CEQA certified project have been accomplished.



39611 Oak Glen Road, Building 12, Oak Glen, CA 92399 | (909) 797-8507 | info@twc-ca.org | WildlandsConservancy.org

The project seeks to undo 150 years of adverse impacts to fish passage south of an extensive levee system and the largest tide gates in Humboldt County. In addition, the design will increase floodwater storage, improve and accelerate drainage from highly productive agricultural lands, improve water quality and in-stream flows, protect agricultural resources, and restore an entire wetland vegetation community that has been reduced to a monotypic seasonal wetland cattle pasture.

A few of the project components include:

1) Dune enhancements with native species and reconstruction of the dynamic nature of the dune system;
2) By incorporating dune enhancement, elevated marsh plain, controlled reinstruction of tidal prism, the project area will offer habitat improvements and carbon sequestration features for decades to come;
3) Expand aquatic habitats within an Inner Marsh area (150 acres, more or less) that will provide refugia and enhanced nutritional opportunities for T/E Species such as coho and chinook salmon, steelhead, tidewater goby, longfin smelt, Dungeness crab, among other notable species;
4) Create functioning wetlands from non-functioning wetlands with the restoration of significant tidal function, diminished for nearly two centuries by impacts from the Reclamation Act era land use;
5) Public access to nearly 3.5 miles of remote northern California beaches and opportunities for nature viewing and outdoor education;
6) Agricultural resources on our Preserve and adjacent privately owned ranches will be better protected from sea-level rise by improved drainage and greater flood storage capacity as a result of the project.

The Wildlands Conservancy continues to rely on, and is grateful for, input from various stakeholders in the project area, and appreciate the cooperation and support of all for this world-class restoration project. With past funding from FRGP, the State Coastal Conservancy, NRCS Wetland Reserve Easement restoration funding, the NCWC award, and finally, the Prop 1 and other grants pending approval in the first quarter of this year, OPC funding participation will add to the longer-term SLR planning essential for Coastal California.

Sincerely,

Dan York
Vice President, The Wildlands Conservancy

PACIFIC BIRDS
HABITAT JOINT VENTURE

Creating the Ideal Environment for Bird Habitat Conservation

February 21, 2018

Honorable John Laird, Secretary for Natural Resources
Chair, California Ocean Protection Council
California Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Honorable Laird:

I am writing to register Pacific Birds' support of the Eel River Estuary and Centerville Slough Enhancement Project as proposed by The California State Coastal Conservancy. Pacific Birds is an international partnership of federal, state, provincial, local, and non-governmental organizations working to conserve important habitats for migratory birds from the north coast of California to Alaska and out to island habitats in the Pacific, including Hawaii. We have been working with our partners to protect and restore coastal wetlands in Mendocino, Humboldt and Del Norte counties since 1991.

This project supports a major conservation priority of Pacific Birds – *Sustaining Estuaries of the Pacific Northwest*. The goal of our priority is to support conservation of coastal wetland habitat in the Pacific Northwest in the face of large scale landscape changes, with an emphasis on issues related to climate change. Within the proposed project area, low laying areas are already prone to dune breach events and flooding, and to the future impacts of sea level rise. Numerous goals within the proposal directly support sustaining important coastal habitats:

- Enhance agricultural land management, capacity and uses by increasing resiliency to sea level rise and reducing salt water influences to pastures, enhancing drainage and establishing avulsion management areas for Russ Creek and Shaw Creek
- Enhance tidal processes by restoring tidal prism and improve reliability of tide gate infrastructure to provide adaptability for sea level rise and varied land management
- Enhance dune formation to increase resiliency to sea level rise

Multiple neighboring conservation areas, like the Ocean Ranch Project, the Salt River Ecosystem Project, and the Eel River Wildlife Area, form a complex of functional wetlands that together provide critical foraging, roosting, and breeding areas for wetland dependent birds including, migratory waterfowl and shorebirds. Almost the entire global population of Aleutian Canada geese stage in the proposal area. One of the goals of the proposal is to improve the quality of agricultural pasture which will directly benefit geese by providing valuable foraging areas. Migratory shorebirds of conservation concern, including Pacific golden-plover, long-billed curlew, marbled godwit, ruddy turnstone, black turnstone, and dunlin use the area and will benefit from wetland enhancement and reestablishing dune configuration.

Thank you for your consideration of this project and our support, along with many fish habitat partnerships, for the habitat values that will benefit numerous fish and wildlife species.

Sincerely,

Bradley Bales
U.S. Coordinator
Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture
503-544-7980 /
bradley_bales@pacificbirds.org

August 2, 2016

Ms. Melanie Gange
Habitat Restoration Division
Coastal and Marine Habitat Restoration
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Dear Ms. Gange:

This is a letter of support from three of our nation's 19 national fish habitat partnerships (FHP) — the Pacific Maine and Estuarine FHP (PMEP), the California Fish Passage Forum (Forum), and the Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI) — in support of the Eel River Estuary and Centerville Slough Enhancement Project ("Project"). The California State Coastal Conservancy serves as the lead agency for the project, and they seek funding and support through the FY16 Coastal Ecosystem Resiliency Grants Program, Competition Identification Number 2582590.

The Project is located in the historic Centerville Slough-Salt River complex of the Eel River Delta. Occidental Marsh, a complex estuarine marsh located at the mouth of the Eel River, declined in the late nineteenth century when the construction of the largest tide gate in Humboldt County completely excluded tidal exchange from the Project site. The tide gate resulted in the complete exclusion of aquatic resources from the marsh within. The resulting loss of tidal prism caused much of the marsh to fill. Other channels and depressions were deliberately filled for reclamation purposes. Ultimately, the Occidental Marsh disappeared entirely.

The Occidental Marsh, a complex estuarine marsh located at the mouth of the Eel River, declined in the late nineteenth century when tidal exchange was prevented from entering the Project site through installation of the largest tidegate in Humboldt County. The tidegate resulted in the complete exclusion of aquatic resources to the marsh within; the resulting loss of tidal prism caused much of the marsh to fill. Other channels and depressions were deliberately filled for reclamation purposes. Ultimately, the Occidental Marsh disappeared entirely.

The Project will restore tidal exchange and aquatic habitat within more than 100-acres of newly restored marsh plain and a newly reexcavated Centerville Slough. These actions will benefit a variety of species, particularly salmonids and marine organisms, such as

Dungeness crab, longfin smelt and more, all of which will experience a dramatic increase in available habitat.

With respect to bird life, the estuarine wetland complex of Humboldt Bay, Mad River Estuary, and Eel River Delta is second only to San Francisco Bay in size or importance for waterfowl in coastal California, providing low-lying seasonal wetlands, tidal marsh or mudflat, sloughs and deep-water estuarine habitats, and rare floodplain riparian forest. The Project site is heavily used by migratory waterfowl, including Aleutian Cackling Geese, Tundra Swans and numerous duck species.

The project will also provide substantial agricultural benefits to these working lands. The Project will improve drainage efficiency and manage sediment loads more effectively, enhance the ability of the site to support a working landscape by increasing resiliency to sea level rise and reducing salt water influences to pastures, enhance tidal processes by restoring tidal prism and improve the reliability of tidegate infrastructure. The Project will also enhance dune formation to increase resiliency to sea level rise, enhance freshwater pond habitat for waterbirds and other species and suppress invasive species. Perhaps most importantly, the Project includes a long-term adaptive management plan that enables agricultural operators and restorationists both the capacity to permit and conduct land management activities in an era of sea level rise.

The project is part of a much larger, multi-decadal, multi-landowner and agency partnership effort to restore tidal marsh and historic tidal slough to the Eel River Delta, a 2014 national designated Waters to Watch. This is one reason that both PMEP and the Forum, like NOAA, have contributed funding to projects within the Eel River Delta during the past several years. In 2014, PMEP and the Forum worked with partners to host a public-private landowner event focusing on the Eel River Delta restoration, highlighting the conservation gains of the past decades while honoring the value of these lands as working landscapes.

Notably, the Eel River estuary is the southernmost extent of the coastal cutthroat trout range, and Russ Creek is the lowermost tributary in the Salt River/Eel Delta complex. Reconnecting Russ Creek to Centerville Slough, an outcome of the Project, will reestablish a long tidal to freshwater ecotone and provide a wetland prism that includes freshwater wetland and riparian habitat while restoring habitat connectivity for anadromous fish.

We believe the Project aligns well with the Coastal Ecosystem Resiliency Grant solicitation, which seeks to strengthen the resilience of coastal ecosystems and support and contribute to the recovery and sustainability of fisheries under NOAA's jurisdiction, including threatened and endangered anadromous fish, marine species that use the estuary as well as other native fish and wildlife resources.

The Eel River was once one of California's most important anadromous fish streams, ranking second in coho salmon and steelhead trout production, and third in Chinook salmon production. Combined salmon and steelhead runs in the Eel River exceeded 1 million adult fish in good years. This project will contribute substantially to the reversal of

habitat declines that have been occurring for almost 150 years — primarily human activities that degraded physical and biological conditions in the ecosystem.

Two other key and complementary habitat enhancement projects are underway in the Eel River Delta—the Salt River Ecosystem Restoration Project and the Ocean Ranch Project. All are important, and all offer unique improvements to the ecosystem and agricultural economy of the region.

The National Marine Fisheries Service has listed Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast (SONCC) coho salmon (1997), California Coastal Chinook salmon (1999), and Northern California steelhead (2000) as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. The Final NMFS SONCC Coho Salmon Recovery Plan (NMFS 2014) describes Eel River coho salmon and identifies needed recovery actions, and designates the lower Eel River as a core population in the recovery of SONCC coho salmon ESU. NMFS has prepared a draft Coastal Multispecies Recovery Plan for Chinook salmon and steelhead, as of October 2015, which includes analyses of those two species in the Eel River. The California Fish and Game Commission also listed coho salmon as threatened in 2005. The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon (2004) describes Eel River coho salmon and identifies recovery tasks for populations within the Eel River basin. This proposed project addresses many of the recovery action steps described in the Final SONCC Recovery Plan.

In summary, our partnerships view estuarine restoration in the Eel River Delta as a necessary precursor for the recovery of a variety of listed species, and a prudent and habitat-oriented adaptation to sea level rise, which also benefits important agricultural resources in the Coastal Zone. Therefore, we enthusiastically support NOAA funding the Project as a cornerstone project that will significantly advance the goals of the Coastal Ecosystem Resiliency Grants Program. This Project addresses a suite of limiting factors for native anadromous fish in the region, while honoring the legacy and culture of working landscapes. The project continues to advance the decades of work and cooperation with private landowners and the conservation community. And the project greatly strengthens the resiliency of this portion of the California coast in the face of changing environmental conditions.

If you have any questions of our partnerships, please don't hesitate to ask. And thank you for the opportunity for us to provide our support to this important conservation initiative.

Sincerely,

Fran Recht

Fran Recht, Chair
Pacific Marine and Estuarine FHP

Lisa DeBruyckere

Lisa DeBruyckere, Coordinator
California Fish Passage Forum

Therese Thompson, Coordinator
Western Native Trout Initiative

# PACIFIC COAST FEDERATION of FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS



**Please Respond to:**
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☐ **Northwest Office**
P.O. Box 11170
Eugene, OR 97440-3370
Tel: (541) 689-2000
Fax: (541) 689-2500

April 5, 2017

Charlton H. Bonham, Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
1416 9th Street, 12th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Director Bonham,

The Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations strongly supports the proposed Eel River Estuary and Centerville Slough Enhancement Project (ERECSP), an historic opportunity to join the great effort already in motion to restore the Eel River estuary. Together, the Salt River Ecosystem Restoration Project, the Ocean Ranch Project and the ERECSP will provide crucial improvements to ecosystem restoration, sea-level rise planning, monitored public access to the beach and greater future security for agricultural lands adjacent to the project areas.

This portion of the Eel River estuary was acquired by The Wildlands Conservancy (TWC) in 2008 with the long-term vision of fish and wildlife habitat enhancements and creating capital improvements for public access.

The ERECSP will restore the 1,200-acre Connick Ranch, an area of the estuary identified as the top acquisition and restoration priority by the State of California as published in a DFG study more than forty years ago. With project design and permitting funds from CDFW, the SCC and our partners CalTrout, TWC and other project participants have set out to realize the shared vision of a restored complex estuarine environment. The State Coastal Conservancy, as Lead Agency under CEQA, certified the EIR for the proposed project by Board vote on February 2nd of this year.

Benefits will include restoring channel streams and tidal marsh to habitats that support many listed species; improving fish passage between restored estuarine habitats and inland waters for anadromous species (Chinook and Coho salmon and Steelhead) that depend on these habitats for overwintering and rearing; and enhancing tidal processes by restoring tidal prism to the Inner Marsh, and improving and maintaining tidegate infrastructure to provide adaptability for sea-level rise. Additional enhancements include facilitating safer seasonal access for agricultural land management and providing public access and nature study opportunities.

We respectfully encourage you to fund this important project.

Sincerely,

Noah Oppenheim
Executive Director

Humboldt County Resource Conservation District
5630 South Broadway Eureka, CA 95503
Phone (707) 444-9708 ext. 117 Fax (707) 442-7514
hcrcd@yahoo.com

Mr. Charlton H. Bonham, Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
1416 9th Street, 12th Floor
Sacramento, CA

Dear Director Bonham:

I am writing in support of the grant proposal being submitted by Wildlands Conservancy for the Eel River Estuary and Centerville Slough Enhancement Project to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Proposition 1 Grant Program.

The Eel River Estuary and Centerville Slough Enhancement Project is a historic opportunity to restore the 1,200-acre Connick Ranch and adjacent proprieties. This restoration project will protect and restore the coastal wetlands within the Eel River Delta, restore anadromous fish habitat, improve drainage efficiency to enhance agricultural productivity, and offer public access opportunities.

We respectfully encourage you to support this important project for the restoration of a valuable estuary and watershed, and for the agricultural improvements the project provides.

Sincerely,

Jill Demers
Executive Director