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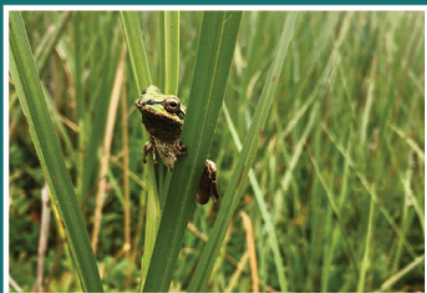


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Restoration Round-Up: Butano Creek Floodplain and Streamflow Enhancement Project

November 29, 2023



by Eric Epstein

From county-level programs to multi-agency statewide permits, our **Accelerating Restoration** program's impact has **grown exponentially** in

three decades. Hundreds of organizations and landowners have used the permits we've helped put in place to restore miles of critical riparian habitat, revitalize our rivers, protect iconic species, and reconnect our surface and groundwater resources.

Sustainable Conservation and our partners celebrated dual milestones last year in securing new permitting pathways. We worked with the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) (USFWS), the [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#), the [NOAA Restoration Center](#) and the [State Water Resources Control Board](#) (SWRCB) to expedite permitting for large and small aquatic habitat restoration projects for all of California.

What does this all mean? More restoration, at scale, more quickly in California. This blog series will highlight recent and future restoration projects that utilized accelerated permitting pathways — both old and brand new!

Read the first two installments of the Restoration Round-Up Series: [Kern Plateau](#) and [Kopta Slough](#)

Butano Creek Floodplain and Streamflow Enhancement

What: Floodplain restoration and flow enhancement

Who: [San Mateo Resource Conservation District](#) in partnership with [Peninsula Open Space Trust](#), [Trout Unlimited](#), and [Fifth Crow Farm](#)

Where: Butano Creek in Pescadero, San Mateo County

Accelerated Permitting pathways used: [CEQA Statutory Exemption for Restoration Projects \(SERP\)](#), [USACE Nationwide Permit 27 – Aquatic Habitat Restoration](#), [Water Board Statewide Restoration General Order \(SRGO\)](#), [CDFW Restoration Management Permit \(RMP\)](#), [USFWS Statewide Restoration Programmatic Biological Opinion \(PBO\)](#), [Central Coast NMFS Programmatic Biological Opinion \(PBO\)](#), [North and Central Coast Federal Consistency Determination \(CD\)](#) with the Coastal Commission.

For more permitting and technical information about the project, check out the [Accelerating Restoration website](#)!



Engineered living riffles, or willow poles, in Butano Creek. Photo Courtesy of SMRCD.

This project takes place along Butano Creek in Pescadero, on a property owned by the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) that is actively farmed by **Fifth Crow Farm**. Fifth Crow Farm is a values-driven organic farm that produces leafy greens, flowers, fruits, and eggs. The farm is committed to sustainable land stewardship and actively contributes to water sustainability by adopting practices such as cover cropping, native hedgerow plantings, efficient irrigation systems, and mobile chicken coops for improved soil fertility. The Butano Creek project is part of a broader initiative to enhance the water flow, connections, and habitats of both the stream and its surrounding floodplains within the **Pescadero-Butano watershed**. The project is designed to benefit Central California Coast coho salmon and Central California Coast steelhead trout while also serving other protected native species like the California red-legged frog and the San Francisco garter snake.

The proposed project has two main restoration elements: floodplain restoration and flow enhancement of Butano Creek. The floodplain restoration primarily consists of lowering the adjacent riparian floodplain to reconnect the stream with 100 acres of historic floodplain. Water entering the floodplain more frequently will offer juvenile salmon and trout more favorable habitat and will also benefit nearby wetlands along with protected reptiles and amphibians. To further improve habitat for wildlife, the project

includes the placement of habitat structures within the newly created floodplain. These structures will also increase habitat complexity, help regulate flow during high water levels, and restore natural processes such as sediment storage.

“Working with the state to get the various required project permits has been incredibly efficient and felt very collaborative,” said **Christina Kelleher, Conservation Project Manager at SMRCD.**



Shown is an elevated farm field at the bottom half, with an inset floodplain above. Photo courtesy of SMRCD.

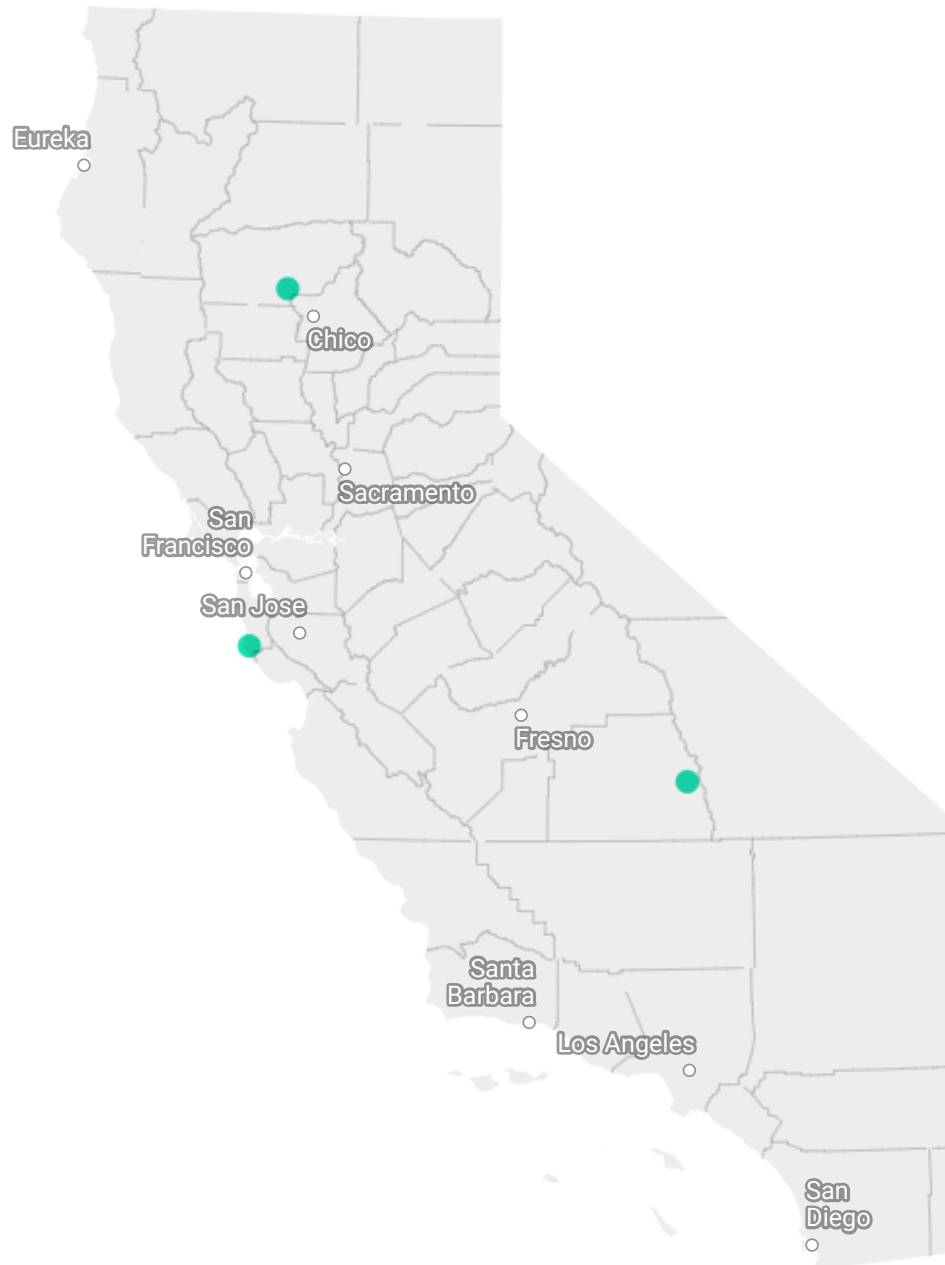
The second objective of the Butano Creek Backfield Floodplain project is to increase the water flow in the creek during the dry season (June-October). The farm depends on the creek for irrigation in late summer and early fall, which is also when the amount of water in the creek is lowest. The project aims to balance these competing demands by improving off-stream storage during the wet season to eliminate the need for dry-season diversions. To achieve this, the project proposes expanding an existing off-channel storage pond and implementing a new water diversion agreement that will restrict

water diversions during the dry season, allowing more water to remain in the stream. Adopting this practice will also help Fifth Crow Farm's agricultural operation become more sustainable and resilient to climate change and extreme weather patterns. All in all, these efforts will increase dry-season flows by an estimated 124%. A more substantial flow throughout the year will help protect migration patterns for native salmonids and will benefit the health and resilience of the entire length of Butano Creek and its endpoint in Pescadero Marsh.

"This project is particularly exciting because the set of permitting pathways that SMRCD was able to use is the culmination of the work that Sustainable Conservation and our partners have been doing for years," said **Stephanie Falzone, Senior Project Manager of the Accelerating Restoration program at Sustainable Conservation.** "San Mateo RCD maximized the use of efficient permitting tools for restoration, including the State Water Board and USFWS tools that are part of Sustainable Conservation's **Statewide Restoration Permitting Initiative** and from our partners at the **California Department of Fish and Wildlife.**"

Restoration Round-Up Map

Locations of the 3 restoration projects featured in the blog series



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