

San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission

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TO: Commissioners and Alternates

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SUBJECT: Staff report and recommendation on a contract with Aquatic Science Center to provide technical training on nature-based solutions and wetland restoration to BCDC staff
(For Commission consideration on February 19, 2026)

SUMMARY

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) awarded the Commission a \$300,000 grant to increase BCDC staff's capacity to permit and implement habitat restoration projects, with an emphasis on nature-based solutions and climate adaptation projects. Up to \$40,000 of the total award is programmed for contracting with a facilitator to provide training for staff on topics related to nature-based solutions and wetland restoration. Staff propose to enter into a \$40,000 contract with Aquatic Science Center (ASC), a Joint Powers Authority created by the State Water Resources Control Board and the Bay Area Clean Water Agencies and administered and staffed by the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI), to develop and deliver the training.

STAFF REPORT

Background

In January 2025, NOAA awarded the Commission \$300,000 of a \$900,000 grant to the California State Coastal Conservancy as part of the California Coastal Zone Management Program's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Non-Competitive Funding Cooperative Agreement grant program. The purpose of the award is to increase BCDC staff's capacity to plan, permit, and implement habitat restoration projects funded by the BIL within the Commission's jurisdiction, with a focus on developing projects that prioritize coastal resilience, factor anticipated climate change effects, and target partnership and engagement with underserved communities. The award period spans calendar years 2025 through 2027.

The grant work plan allocates funding across four tasks:

1. Planning for staff training and capacity building (Year 1)
2. Conducting staff training (Years 1–3)
3. Implementing improvements to the regulatory process to streamline permits (Years 1–3)
4. Processing and issuing permits (Years 1–3)



The goal of the training in Tasks 1 and 2 is to increase staff knowledge and understanding of topics related to nature-based solutions and wetland restoration. The grant work plan allocates \$40,000 in Year 1 of the grant to contract with an outside entity to develop and deliver staff training in these areas. As a result, after assessing priority training needs related to nature-based solutions and wetland restoration, BCDC sought an outside partner with expertise in those topics to provide training tailored to BCDC staff.

The Aquatic Science Center (ASC) is a Joint Powers Authority created by the State Water Resources Control Board and the Bay Area Clean Water Agencies. It is administered and staffed by the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI). In part, ASC is designed to provide science support to public agencies involved in environmental planning and decision-making.

ASC/SFEI has developed expertise in nature-based solutions and wetlands restoration through work on numerous reports, tools, and initiatives, including among others:

- The Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Science Update (2015)
- The San Francisco Bay Shoreline Adaptation Atlas (2019)
- The Baylands Habitat Map (2020)
- The Baylands Resilience Metrics (2025)
- The Regionally Advancing Living Shorelines project (2024–2028)

Drawing on this expertise, ASC/SFEI worked with BCDC staff to develop a training plan that meets BCDC's identified training needs, to be delivered in summer and fall 2026. The plan consists of three sessions:

- **Introduction to the Bay: What shapes restoration and nature-based solutions choices:** This session would focus on the physical and ecological setting of San Francisco Bay, including the processes and constraints that drive nature-based solutions siting, design, and permitting choices. Likely topics include the physical and biological conditions in the Bay and subembayments, including factors such as tides, sediment, waves, habitats, wind, and erosion, and shoreline typologies and how they influence the feasibility of wetland restoration and nature-based solutions.
- **Nature-based solutions: What they are and where they are suitable:** This session would focus on describing nature-based shoreline approaches, what the best available science says about suitability, and how nature-based solutions align with regional habitat goals. Likely topics include types of nature-based solutions and use cases; suitability by setting, considering factors such as elevation, depth, substrate, exposure, access/constructability, operations and maintenance, and key environmental considerations; key questions when considering the appropriateness of a nature-based solution at a given site; and alignment with foundational regional habitat planning efforts.

- **Basics of restoration: The design process:** This session would focus on the steps in the design process for living shorelines projects, from concept through 100% design. Likely topics include the typical restoration design stages and decision points, and appropriate questions for regulators to ask at each stage; case studies from around the Bay illustrating factors that influence design of restoration projects; and lessons learned from permitting living shorelines projects in the Bay.

Under the proposed contract, ASC would deliver all training and provide all deliverables by December 31, 2026, unless both parties agree to extend this timeline.

Selection Process

State of California contracting procedures allow state agencies to contract with Joint Powers Authorities to provide technical services without going through a competitive bidding process. The \$40,000 contract does not require approval by the Department of General Services because BCDC has delegated authority up to \$50,000.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommend that the Commission authorize its Executive Director to enter into a \$40,000 contract, terminating December 31, 2027, with Aquatic Science Center to develop and deliver technical training to BCDC staff on topics related to nature-based solutions and wetland restoration. Staff further recommend that the Commission authorize the Executive Director to amend the contract as necessary, including revising the amount or duration of the agreement, so long as the amendment does not change the amount more than ten percent or involve substantial changes to the services provided.