August 8, 2008

Public Notice for Water Quality Certification and/or Waste Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects)

Northcoast Regional Land Trust, Wood Creek Tidal Marsh Enhancement Project
WDID No. 1B08060WNHU
Humboldt County

On April 3, 2008, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from the Northcoast Regional Land Trust (applicant), requesting Federal Clean Water Act, section 401, Water Quality Certification (certification) for activities related to the Wood Creek Tidal Marsh Enhancement Project located between Myrtle Avenue and Freshwater Slough near Eureka. The proposed project will cause disturbances to waters of the United States associated with wetlands, Wood Creek, and Freshwater Slough in the Eureka Plain Hydrologic Unit No. 110.00.

The proposed project is located within a triangular shaped 54 acre seasonal wetland pasture that is owned by the applicant. The wetland pasture is bound by private property to the east, Myrtle Avenue to the south and west, and a dike along the south bank of Freshwater Slough to the north and west. Wood Creek is a perennial stream that flows north under Myrtle Avenue and joins Freshwater Slough at the west end of the Freshwater Farms pasture.

The primary purpose of the proposed project is to restore tidal hydrology, expand brackish marsh wetland habitat, and to remove the wooden gate portion of the Wood Creek tidegate located at the mouth of Wood Creek. The existing tidegate is the primary barrier to salmonid and tidewater goby access into the Wood Creek watershed. The proposed project does not involve removing the large concrete portion of the tidegate structure; therefore, some tidal muting will remain after the barrier is removed. A goal of the tidal marsh project is to promote the formation of dense stands of Lyngbye's sedge on wetland benches and Tufted hairgrass on tidal hummocks. This configuration of brackish marsh vegetation has been observed at other locations around Humboldt Bay and is suited for the muted tidal regime at the project site. The project is not only designed to restore estuary habitat within the Humboldt Bay watershed at a meaningful scale, the project is intended to provide additional opportunities for research and monitoring to advance the state of wetland restoration science, and to increase the ability to implement successful habitat restoration projects in the future.

In addition to tide gate removal activities, the proposed project includes excavating approximately 3,900 linear feet of tidal creek channels and 3,700 square feet of pond areas to increase a variety of habitat types on the property. Excavated spoils will be used to enhance topography and plant species diversity by constructing tidal hummocks and small inset floodplain benches along the slough channels. After the channel earthwork is complete, several 10 to 20 linear foot sections of the right bank of Wood Creek will be removed to connect flows to the constructed slough channels. Several log habitat structures will be installed in the new slough channels. Approximately 100 linear feet of Wood Creek will also be dewatered for a brief period during installation of a new bridge that will replace an existing degraded culvert at a cattle crossing.

Compensatory mitigation is not required for the proposed project. The project is designed to expand the existing 1.4 acres of brackish marsh habitat within the property to between 23 and 29 acres of enhanced brackish marsh. Noncompensatory mitigation for this project includes the use of Best Management Practices for sediment and erosion control and for the operation of heavy equipment in wetlands, streams and slough channel areas. Once the earthworks are complete, disturbed areas will be revegetated with native marsh plant species or seeded with pasture grass. Access and traffic on the site will be minimized and the compacted ground surfaces will be scarified as needed after the project is completed to reverse any unwanted compaction.

The applicant has applied for authorization from the United States Army Corps of Engineers to perform the project under Nationwide Permit Number 27, pursuant to Clean Water Act, section 404. The applicant has also applied for a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement from the California Department of Fish and Game. Humboldt County Community Development Services has prepared a draft mitigated negative declaration for the proposed project in order to comply with CEQA. The Regional Water Board has considered the draft environmental document and any proposed changes incorporated into the project or required as a condition of approval to avoid significant effects to the environment. The environmental document is scheduled for adoption by Humboldt County on September 4, 2008.

The information contained in this public notice is only a summary of the applicant's proposed activities. The application for Water Quality Certification in the Regional Water Board's file contains additional details about the proposed project including technical reports, maps, and design drawings. The application and Regional Water Board file are available for public review.

Regional Water Board staff are proposing to regulate this project pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act (33 USC 1341) and/or Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act authority. In addition, staff will consider all comments submitted in writing and received at this office by mail during a 21-day comment period that begins on the first date of issuance of this letter and ends at 5:00 p.m. on the last day of the comment period. If you have any questions, please contact staff member Dean Prat at (707) 576-2801 within 21 days of the posting of this notice.