



Legislation Text

File #: 19-605, Version: 1

Consider authorizing the submittal of Letters of Interest to the Association of Bay Area Governments to propose the Cache Slough area and the Grizzly Island Road corridor as new Priority Conservation Areas and a boundary adjustment to the Tri City and County Cooperative Planning Area Priority Conservation Area
(Continued from the August 27, 2019 meeting)

Published Notice Required? Yes ☐ No ☒
Public Hearing Required? Yes ☐ No ☒

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION:

The Department of Resource Management recommends that the Board of Supervisors consider authorizing the submittal of Letters of Interest to the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) to propose the Cache Slough area and the Grizzly Island Road corridor as new Priority Conservation Areas and a boundary adjustment to the Tri City and County Cooperative Planning Area Priority Conservation Area (PCA).

SUMMARY:

ABAG is currently accepting Letters of Interest from local counties and cities who wish to propose new PCAs or modify the boundaries of existing PCAs within its jurisdiction. Letters of Interest must be submitted to ABAG by September 16, 2019. Local agency adopted resolutions must be submitted by January 16, 2020.

Update:

This item was continued from the August 27, 2019 meeting as the result of a 2-2 vote. Supervisor Brown made a motion to approve staff's recommendation along with the addition of the three potential County PCAs as identified in the Solano Transportation Authority's (STA) 2016 PCA Study (Putah Creek, Dixon Agricultural Service Area, and Elmira). Supervisors Vasquez and Spering did not support the motion. After further discussion, Supervisor Vasquez made a motion to approve staff's recommendation with the acknowledgement that the three potential PCAs in the STA Study will be reviewed further at the next opportunity to designate new PCAs. This motion was not supported by Supervisors Brown and Thomson. As such, this item was continued to September 10, 2019.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The costs associated with preparing the agenda item and with submission of a Letter of Interest are nominal and absorbed by the Department's FY2019/20 Adopted Budget.

DISCUSSION:

Background

The PCA program was initiated in 2007 by ABAG to identify Bay Area open spaces that: 1) provide regionally significant agricultural, natural resource, scenic, recreational, and/or ecological values and ecosystem functions; 2) are in urgent need of protection due to pressure from urban development or other factors; and 3) supported by local consensus. The PCAs were established at the same time as the locally nominated PDAs

through the FOCUS program, intended to focus growth in areas suitable for development while protecting areas important for conservation and preservation. More recently, Priority Production Areas (PPAs) have been introduced by ABAG which focus on industrial land use planning and job creation. Together, the PDAs, PCAs, and PPAs are integral to the region's long-range planning document, Plan Bay Area, as well as implementation initiatives such as the One Bay Area Grant (OBAG).

The original PCAs in Solano County were approved in 2008 and consisted of: Blue Ridge Hills, Vacaville-Fairfield-Solano Greenbelt, Western Hills, and the Tri City and County Cooperative Planning Area. Suisun Valley was added in 2013. The original PCA's included very general boundaries, with more refined boundaries approved in 2015 (Attachment). In 2015, the Solano Transportation Authority (STA) commissioned a countywide PCA study which reviewed the existing PCAs and analyzed the potential for additional PCAs in Solano County. The study considered the potential for four additional PCAs: Putah Creek, Dixon Agricultural Service Area, Mare Island, and Elmira. While these areas were reviewed and may qualify as PCAs in the future, they were not recommended to be designated at that time, and are not proposed to be added at this time. There are no immediate projects proposed for these areas, for which PCA funding would be beneficial. They also incorporate large amounts of privately owned land and the County has not undertaken sufficient community outreach to feel comfortable designating these areas as PCAs.

At the time of the designation of the original PCAs, there was no funding program in place that provided money toward development or enhancement of PCAs. However, in 2013, MTC allocated \$1.25 million in OBAG funding to each of the four north bay counties to utilize toward their PCAs. In 2016, another \$2 million was allocated to north bay counties. OBAG funds are intended to align with the region's focused growth strategies, including targeting PDA development, local road maintenance, bicycle improvements, and PCA related projects that further open space opportunities, infrastructure improvements, recreational value, and natural resource values. To date, Solano County has utilized approximately \$2 million in OBAG funds to provide infrastructure improvements in the Suisun Valley PCA.

Staff believes that there are sufficient lands designated as PCAs, with the addition of the recommendations in this report. Staff is concerned that future funding opportunities may be diluted by being too expansive with the County's PCA designations.

It's important to note that PCA designations do not change zoning, general plan designations, or other land use controls or voter initiatives applicable to the geographic area encompassed by the PCA. Local agencies retain full control over land use decisions. The designation of PCAs does open up funding opportunities for improvement and preservation projects in the identified areas.

Proposed New and Adjusted PCAs

Cache Slough (New)

The Cache Slough area is located in the southeastern portion of Solano County. The boundaries are generally described as the unincorporated area of Solano County within the legal Delta boundary as defined by the 1959 Delta Protection Act, except for Ryer Island. Cache Slough is within the Primary Zone of the Delta Protection Commission's Land Use & Resource Management Plan pursuant to the 1992 Delta Protection Act. The Solano County General Plan designates the area as Agriculture with a Resource Conservation Overlay and a Priority Habitat Area. The Cache Slough area is approximately 65,586 acres (or 102.5 square miles). The existing land uses in the area are predominately cattle ranching and crop production. Designation of this area as a PCA may provide for future funding to utilize for infrastructure improvements and preservation of agricultural lands.

Grizzly Island Road Corridor (New)

Grizzly Island Road is a county road located primarily within the Suisun Marsh. The Suisun Marsh comprises approximately 85,000 acres of tidal marsh, managed wetlands, and waterways in the southern part of the County. It is the largest remaining wetland in the San Francisco Bay and includes more than ten percent of the state's remaining wetland area. The Marsh is also a wildlife habitat of nationwide importance. It plays an important role in providing wintering habitat for waterfowl of the Pacific Flyway and, because of its size and estuarine location, supports a diversity of plant communities. These provide habitats for a variety of fish and wildlife, including several rare and endangered species. Recognizing the importance of the Suisun Marsh, the legislature passed the Suisun Marsh Preservation Act of 1974. The Act provided for the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) and the Department of Fish and Wildlife to prepare the Suisun Marsh Protection Plan to preserve the integrity and assure continued wildlife use of the Suisun Marsh.

Grizzly Island Road provides public access to multiple recreational areas, such as Rush Ranch, Belden's Landing County Park, and lands owned and operated by the State of California that are used regularly for bird watching, hiking, hunting, and fishing.

Designation of the Grizzly Island Corridor as a PCA may provide future funding for infrastructure improvements or improvements to any of the existing publicly used recreational areas (trails, fishing access, bicycle routes, etc.).

Tri City and County Cooperative Planning Area (Boundary Change)

As stated, the Tri City and County area was one of the county's original PCAs. Solano County is proposing a boundary adjustment, expanding the boundary of the PCA further east. The adjustment is intended to incorporate the proposed Pacific Flyway Center, a project by the City of Fairfield to create an open space land preserve with an interpretive nature center and ecological educational facility. The project is located east of Interstate 680, south of the Gold Hill Road overcrossing, and adjacent to Ramsey Road, and includes land both in the city and in the county. Incorporating this area into the existing PCA will allow available funding to be used for infrastructure improvements needed to serve the facility.

ALTERNATIVES:

The Board could choose not to authorize the submittal of any Letters of Interest and not make any changes to the existing PCA system. The Board could also consider other potential PCAs, not included in staff's recommendation. These alternatives are not recommended because staff's recommendation reflects specific areas that currently provide public benefit or may have need for additional infrastructure improvements in the near future.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

ABAG is the approving agency for any new PCA or PDA proposals or boundary changes to existing PCAs/PDAs.

CAO RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION