



# County of Santa Cruz

Health Services Agency - Environmental Health



## Fish and Wildlife Advisory Commission

(831) 454-2022 TDD/TTY - Call 711 <http://www.scceh.org>

### AGENDA

March 5, 2026, 6:30 PM

Agenda Item #	Start Time	End Time	Description
1	6:30	6:40	Call to Order
2			Roll Call
3			Approval of Minutes
4			Public Comment on Items Not on The Agenda
5	6:40	7:20	Presentation on Wildlife Corridors by Environment California
6	7:20	7:50	Presentation On Paulsen Road Project Proposal, Vote on Possible Letter of Support
7	7:50	8:00	Update from Wildlife Crossing Sub-Committee
8	8:00	8:15	Presentation on 2026 Grants Budget, Vote on Allocation Amount
9	8:15	8:30	Staff Reports Commissioner Reports and Announcements
10		8:30	Adjourn

### **Public Comment**

- None

### **Items of Interest:**

- [Puma protections could become permanent – Santa Cruz Sentinel](#)
- [CA State Parks acquires 153-acres for Big Basin expansion – Lookout Santa Cruz](#)
- [2026 State of the San Lorenzo Symposium on April 11th](#)
- [We Need More Wildlife Crossings in California – Environment California](#)

The County of Santa Cruz does not discriminate on the basis of disability, and no person shall, by reason of a disability, be denied the benefits of its services, programs, or activities. This online meeting is available to anyone with a telephone. If you are a person with a disability and require special assistance in order to participate in the meeting, please contact Sean Abbey at (831) 454-2386 or TDD number (454-2123) at least 72 hours in advance of the meeting in order to make arrangements. Persons with disabilities may request a copy of the agenda in an alternative format. As a courtesy to those affected, please attend the meeting smoke and scent free.

## Commissioner and Public Participation Information

A physical meeting location is available at the **Solarium Conference Room, 1060 Emeline Avenue**. Members of the public can join in person at either location but are encouraged to join virtually using the link below.

PLEASE NOTE: The meeting room is on the second floor, above the Water Quality Lab entrance. The door must remain locked after hours, but staff will be able to provide access to all attendees as they arrive.

Com Berry shall be attending remotely and will be teleconferencing from Black Pot Beach, Hanalei, HI, 96714.

### Microsoft Teams meeting

**Join:** <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/299742265231?p=cV5qBRxlwdoRfuBkii>

Meeting ID: 299 742 265 231

Passcode: zR2WH7Z6

**Click the “Click here to join the meeting” link above.** If you are asked to join Teams with an application, click on “No thanks” and open in the browser. You should not need to download the application to join the meeting.

Please join the meeting a few minutes BEFORE 6:30 pm so that we can start at 6:30 pm. Staff will open the video conference at 6:25 pm. Cameras are optional for members of the public.

If you have questions, contact Sean Abbey at [sean.abbey@santacruzcountyca.gov](mailto:sean.abbey@santacruzcountyca.gov).

### Meeting Roles and Rules:

Jenni Gomez, Chair, will lead the meeting. Chair Gomez will announce each agenda item, identify who will be leading an item and introduce discussion and public comment periods.

Sean Abbey, staff, will assist with roll call, note taking, and tracking who wants to speak. Please allow time for staff to make notes about any decisions. Sean will monitor email during the meeting.

There will be a public comment period for each item and the Chair will invite the public to participate at the appropriate time.



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Meeting Minutes  
December 4, 2025

1. **CALL TO ORDER** – 6:30 pm
2. **ROLL CALL**

District	Commissioner	Status	Commissioner	Status
I	Chris Berry	P	Kevin Butler	P
II	Brian Woodward	E	David Somerton	P
III	Liz Alter	P	Jon Jankovitz	P
IV	Brooke Sampson	P	Daniela Suarez	E
V	Jenni Gomez	P	Joanne Brown	P

P = Present R = Remote E = Excused A = Absent

3. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

- o **Motion to Approve Minutes:** Berry, **Second:** Sampson,
- o **All Ayes:** Minutes approved

4. **PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

- o None

5. **SELECT GRANT PROPOSALS FOR FUNDING RECOMMENDATION:** Commissioners discussed funding options and chose to fully fund the top scoring proposals and partially fund the lowest scoring proposal. After submitting individual scores, the average score for each proposal was determined and used to rank the proposals. Using that ranking, funding was recommended as follows:

Mobile Whale Skull Display for Education	\$3,000.00
Ambassador Animal Enrichment	\$3,000.00
Community-Driven River Health Days	\$5,000.00
Resolving Negative Santa Cruz County Human-Wildlife Conflicts	\$7,500.00
WOLF School Salamander Monitoring Project	\$1,500.00

- o **Motion to Recommend Above Funding:** Berry, **Second:** Jankovitz,
- o **All Ayes:** Funding recommendations approved

6. **CONTINUE DISCUSSION ON THE COUNTY [STRATEGIC PLAN 2032](#):** Commissioners reviewed the “Results Statement” for the Focus Area of “Environment, Climate, and Sustainability” and will propose the following statement:

*“Ecosystems and watersheds are restored and protected to support biodiversity, climate resiliency, equitable public health and outdoor recreation, and overall environmental quality.”*

In addition, commissioners will suggest the following metrics for measuring success; water quality (Ex. Region 3 “Basin Plan”), water quantity, acreage of land that is sustainably managed as either open space or working lands, metrics described in existing Species Recovery Plans.

Finally, the commissioners voted to create a sub-committee, consisting of Commissioners Berry, Brown, Butler, and Alter, to continue discussion on this topic, as needed.

- **Motion to create sub-committee:** Alter, **Second:** Berry,
- **All Ayes:** Sub-committee created

7. **PRESENTATION ON RECENT CHANGES TO CEQA:** Staff provided an update on changes made to CEQA as part of the California budget process. Commissioners then discussed the changes to CEQA and other environmental laws.

8. **STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

- **Staff Reports:**
  - Supervisor De Serpa thanked the Commissioner for the Zone 0 Letter and the supporting documentation from the LA Times.
  - A [Gray Fox was trapped](#) in Glenwood preserve which is under an active investigation by CDFW.
- **Commissioner Reports:**
  - **Com Berry:** Would like to request a presentation from the Planning Department on their concerns related to Significant Tree Ordinance expansion letter.
  - **Com Berry:** Will continue trying to identify a presenter on Western Pond Turtle listing in the California Endangered Species Act.
  - **Com Sampson:** There will be a community restoration event on Feb 7<sup>th</sup>, World Wetlands Day, at Struve Slough.
  - **Com Gomez:** Will be meeting with District 5 Supervisor regarding the Significant Tree Ordinance letter.

9. **ADJOURN.** **Motion to Adjourn:** Berry, **Second:** Jankovitz

**All Aye:** meeting adjourned at 8:26 pm



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March 5, 2026

To:

Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors  
701 Ocean Street, Room 500  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

**Re: Letter of Support and Request for Expedited Review — Paulsen Road Resilience and Salmonid Habitat Integration Project, Santa Cruz County**

Dear Supervisors:

The Santa Cruz County Fish and Wildlife Advisory Commission writes in strong support of the Paulsen Road Resilience and Salmonid Habitat Integration Project, proposed by the Santa Cruz County Department of Public Works Transportation Section, and respectfully requests this letter be referred to the appropriate agencies to ensure favorable and expedited consideration of the regulatory review and approvals required to advance this project to construction.

#### **Project Background**

The project proposes to raise and replace the existing low-water road crossing on Paulsen Road over Green Valley Creek in the Pajaro River watershed, near Watsonville, California. The existing crossing is chronically overtopped during storm events, cutting off access for agricultural workers, emergency responders, farm operations, and a predominantly low-to-moderate income community that depends on this road as a critical transportation corridor.

Severe atmospheric river events in early 2023, associated with Presidential Disaster Declaration DR-4699, caused significant damage to the existing crossing and surrounding infrastructure. The project has secured federal Community Development Block Grant — Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding through the California Department of Housing and Community Development to finance reconstruction. This funding provides an opportunity to elevate 1000 linear ft. of the roadway above the winter water surface elevation, allowing for unimpeded travel for vehicles and unobstructed passage for fish. However, this funding carries a firm expenditure and construction deadline, making timely regulatory engagement



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and permitting essential to successfully deploying these disaster recovery dollars for the benefit of both the community and the watershed.

The proposed replacement structure is a prefabricated open-bottom elevated causeway system that raises the roadway above the 100-year flood elevation while spanning the full active channel. Because the structure is open-bottomed, it preserves natural streambed substrate, allows unimpeded channel migration, maintains natural water velocities, and provides excellent fish passage conditions—directly addressing the passage barriers and hydraulic disruption caused by the existing crossing.

### **Ecological Design and Salmonid Habitat Considerations**

The project has been designed with salmonid habitat restoration as an explicit co-benefit. Green Valley Creek and the broader Pajaro River watershed support Central California Coast steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), a federally and state listed threatened species. The proposed replacement crossing is intended to improve or eliminate barriers to upstream and downstream fish passage, reduce fine sediment delivery to the stream channel, and improve overall channel and riparian conditions relative to the existing structure.

Importantly, this project does not stand alone. Immediately downstream, the recently completed rehabilitation of College Lake has restored natural hydrology and habitat conditions that had long been degraded by its former use as an irrigation impoundment. Immediately upstream, a scheduled bridge replacement and planned culvert replacements will open additional spawning and rearing reaches currently blocked by complete or partial barriers to fish passage. Together, these three coordinated investments represent a complete end-to-end restoration of what is understood to be the northernmost significant spawning and rearing corridor for the Central California Coast steelhead — a rare, protected, and ecologically irreplaceable anadromous population. This project is the essential middle link in that chain.

The Commission recognizes that CDFW's review will include consideration of a Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement under Fish and Game Code Section 1602, and we respectfully urge CDFW to prioritize early engagement with County project staff so that LSA Agreement negotiations can proceed on a timeline consistent with the project's construction window. Similarly, we encourage NMFS, USFWS, USACE, and the Central Coast RWQCB to engage collaboratively and early with County staff as ESA consultation, Section 404 permitting, and water quality certification processes proceed.



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#### **Commission's Position**

This project is directly aligned with the Commission's adopted mission to protect and restore ecosystems and watersheds in Santa Cruz County for the benefit of biodiversity, climate resilience, and community well-being. The Commission has reviewed this project and finds that its ecological design intentions are consistent with salmonid habitat recovery goals for the Casserly Creek watershed and the region.

We respectfully request that this letter be referred to all receiving agencies in order for this project to receive the expedited attention that its ecological merit, community need, and federal funding deadline warrant, and that your agencies engage in early and coordinated review to the greatest extent possible.

The Commission thanks you for your partnership in advancing projects that serve both people and fish.

Respectfully submitted,

**Jennifer Gomez**, Chair  
Santa Cruz County Fish and Wildlife Advisory Commission

#### **Receiving Agencies:**

California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Bay and Delta Region 3 Office  
NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, West Coast Region – California Coastal Office  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, San Francisco District  
Central Coast Water Quality Control Board  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office

*Adopted by vote of the Commission at its regular meeting of March 5, 2026*



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### Public Grants Program Budget Discussion

March 5, 2026

This table shows the revenue and expenditures from the Fish and Game trust fund in fiscal year 2025-26 and how much money is currently available in reserve. The reserve is used when the amount of revenue collected that year is less than the amount expended by the Public Grants Program (PGP).

Fiscal Year	Expenditures and Revenue	Reserve Fund Total
Start of 2025-26		\$34,270
	PGP Grant allocations	- \$20,000
	CDFW Fines	+ \$2,178
	Interest on trust fund	+ \$733
	Judgement Settlements	+ \$0
Expected end of 2025-26		\$17,181

For the fiscal year 2026-27, the **budget approved for the PGP was \$10,000**. This ensures that the grant program does not issue grants that cannot be covered by existing funds. Assuming similar revenue in 2026-27, the reserve would be reduced to around \$10,000.

Should the PGP be paused in 26-27, these funds could be applied to next cycle, accrue more interest, and possibly allow for a larger grant cycle in 27-28. The \$10,000 that was approved for the 26-27 budget would be kept for emergency requests only.