

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
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Memorandum

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To : Ms. Jennifer Bitting
Regional Water Quality Control Board
Central Coast Region
895 Aerovista Place, Suite 101
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401-7906

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SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401

Date: May 2, 2005

From : Robert W. Floerke, Regional Manager 
Department of Fish and Game - Central Coast Region, Post Office Box 47, Yountville, California 94599

Subject : Ferasci Road Crossing on Santa Rosa Creek, San Luis Obispo County

Santa Rosa Creek is one of San Luis Obispo County's finest steelhead streams, providing several miles of spawning and rearing habitat. The Santa Rosa Creek watershed encompasses approximately 21.3 square miles and provides spawning and rearing habitat for juvenile and adult southern steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus*). Steelhead occurring between the Santa Maria River and the Pajaro River are listed as threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

The Ferasci Road crossing on Santa Rosa Creek is located approximately one-quarter mile upstream from Coast Union High School in Cambria. Vehicles cross the creek via a concrete low-water crossing with several ineffective corrugated metal pipe culverts which are perched well above the water's surface. In April 1972, a slot was cut in the concrete and a Denil fish ladder way was installed to improve fish passage, yet the ladder is susceptible to clogging by debris which further impedes fish passage and requires constant maintenance. Additionally, water passing through the ladder at high velocity seriously inhibits passage of adult steelhead and completely prohibits upstream migration by juveniles; the ladder has even been described as a "fish shredder" by some. Because the crossing is very low in the watershed, less than two miles from the ocean, it severely limits steelhead access to approximately seven to ten miles of excellent spawning and rearing habitat upstream from the barrier. Due to these considerations, the Ferasci Road crossing

was recently ranked by the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and several other agencies as the most important barrier to be removed or modified to facilitate fish passage out of nearly 200 steelhead migration barriers identified throughout San Luis Obispo County.

However, Ferasci Road is actively used and an ongoing agricultural operation depends on the crossing for access across the creek. Therefore, any project to modify the crossing must include provisions for vehicles to cross the creek. The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo, working with representatives from DFG, the State Coastal Conservancy, and the San Luis Obispo County Department of Public Works, have determined that a bridge is the most suitable option for the site. A bridge is also the biologically preferable option, as a bridge would not result in any structure or other obstruction in the stream to catch debris, and would help restore the natural conditions within the channel. The bridge would need to pass 100-year storm flows and be sufficiently strong enough to carry large agricultural and fire trucks. The cost of such a structure has been estimated at approximately \$466,000, including \$76,000 for engineering costs which I understand the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo has already incurred.

We understand that the Cambria Unified School District (CUSD) is interested in funding a supplemental environmental project (SEP) in the amount of approximately \$300,000 to help remove the Ferasci Road crossing. While the \$366,000 that would be provided by the CUSD and the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo would not fully fund this project, the remaining cost would very likely be funded by grants or other endowments that are available for fisheries and/or habitat restoration projects.

We are writing to express DFG's support for this project. Replacing this structure with a more ecologically sound bridge would facilitate the upstream and downstream migration of all life stages of steelhead in this critically important watershed. A bridge would also allow adjacent landowners and vehicles to cross the creek safely during all flow regimes without placing those vehicles at risk of stranding or being washed off the crossing during seasonal high flows that sometimes render the current road crossing impassable and dangerous. In addition to

our support, the removal and replacement of the Ferasci Road crossing is supported by several entities, including but not limited to the State Coastal Conservancy, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries), County of San Luis Obispo, and Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo.

We hope that you and the Regional Water Quality Control Board endorse the CUSD's proposal to remove the Ferasci Road crossing and approve their request for this SEP. Removal of this structure is a critical milestone in the restoration and protection of steelhead populations in the Santa Rosa Creek watershed and a major step to help restore the Central California Coastal steelhead population.

Thank you very much for considering our support on this issue. Should you have questions or comments regarding this matter, please don't hesitate to contact Mr. Mike Hill, Associate Fishery Biologist, at (805) 489-7355, or Mr. Kevan Urquhart, Senior Biologist, at (831) 649-2870.

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