

Major Grant Award Kicks Off Ross Valley Watershed Flood Control Projects

December 21, 2011

San Rafael, CA – On December 21, 2011, the California Department of Water Resources announced a major funding award for the Marin County Flood Control District's Ross Valley Watershed Flood Protection program. A \$7.66 million grant has been awarded to fund the \$15.6 million project to retrofit the Phoenix Lake reservoir into a facility that will function as a flood control detention basin in addition to its current use as a water supply storage facility and public recreation area. This project will be developed in partnership with the Marin Municipal Water District, who currently owns and operates Phoenix Lake.

The Phoenix Lake Retrofit is a multi-purpose project composed of five component projects, all located at Phoenix Lake: Flood Damage Reduction; Water Supply; Water Quality; Ecosystem Restoration; and Recreation and Public Access. By seismically retrofitting the dam and constructing other improvements to the hydraulic and recreational infrastructures of the lake, it thus can be operated to serve multiple purposes of flood control, drinking water supply, water quality, ecosystem restoration, and public recreation.

Supervisor Katie Rice, whose district includes Ross Valley, says that "the Phoenix Lake project will benefit the community in multiple ways. It utilizes an existing resource and improves it for the next century; it begins to provide the level of flood control that is needed in Ross Valley; it will improve water quality in the reservoir, improve the trails for public access, improve habitat in the lake and in Ross Creek, and will create jobs during the design and building process."

"This grant is the best example yet of what we've been seeing as a very favorable response to the Ross Valley Watershed plan and philosophy at the state and federal levels," added Rice. "The importance of having the storm drainage fee as a local funding source to use to leverage outside funding cannot be overstated. We are working to do the same with the other major projects in Ross Valley."

Paul Helliker, General Manager of the Marin Municipal Water District, says "MMWD is pleased to be able to support the County in their application for Proposition 1E funding for the Ross Valley flood

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control projects. Now that this funding has been approved, MMWD will work with the County to determine the best means of expanding the benefits that Phoenix Lake provides for water supply, aquatic habitat and recreation to include flood control, as well."

The Phoenix Lake Retrofit grant is funded by the Proposition 1E Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Grant Program - Stormwater Flood Management Grant, Round 1, 2010-2011. Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) is a collaborative effort to manage all aspects of water resources in a region. IRWM crosses jurisdictional, watershed, and political boundaries; involves multiple agencies, stakeholders, individuals, and groups; and attempts to address the issues and differing perspectives of all the entities involved through mutually beneficial solutions. The Ross Valley Flood Control and Watershed program is structured to embrace the IRWM approach positioning the local agencies in the best way to leverage local revenues with outside funds. For the Proposition 1E program, grants are awarded by a competitive process with each application being ranked according to the degree it meets the IRWM objectives. The Phoenix Lake Retrofit project concept and preliminary design was developed as part of the 2011 capital improvement plan study allowing the Flood Control District to respond to grant application invitation in the short response time allowed by the Department of Water Resources. The project is ranked 5th in the state out of 41 applications, 21 of which are being funded.

Part of an Initial Strategy to Build Five Detention Basins in the Ross Valley

The Phoenix Lake Retrofit project is one of five detention basin projects that will be initiated in 2012 and 2013. It will be operated during extreme events and will temporarily store storm water runoff from the extensive upper watershed thereby lowering the flows in Ross Creek and Corte Madera Creek. This reduced flow will match the expected capacity of the remaining federal project in Ross and Kentfield which will prevent flooding there during an event like the 2005 flood once both projects are completed. The Phoenix Lake project is expected to take 5 to 7 years to complete. Similar projects are planned for the rest of the watershed.

The recently completed Capital Improvement Plan Study for Flood Reduction and Creek Management (http://marinwatersheds.org/pubs_reports_ross_valley.html) recommends over 180 small and large projects throughout the Ross Valley that, when completed, will provide a level of flood protection that could contain a flood the size of the 2005 flood. The 2005 flood ranks as the "100 year flood" a term used to designate an event that has a 1% probability of occurring in any year. The other previous flood of this magnitude occurred in 1982.

The report identifies 4 other publically-owned sites that are suitable for retrofit as detention basins: Lefty Gomez Field and Loma Alta Open Space Area in Fairfax, and Memorial Park and Red Hill

field in San Anselmo. These projects, in conjunction with creek capacity improvements, will decrease flood flows and the resulting flood damage from an event like the 2005 flood. The detention basin projects are high priority projects as they provide benefit for the most number of properties. The Flood Control District will be developing and releasing the “Requests for Proposals” (RFPs) in 2012/13 to select engineering design teams through a competitive process. The aim is to begin the design and environmental permitting work in 2013.

In addition to the detention basins, the Flood Control District will be working with the Towns of Fairfax, San Anselmo, and Ross, to replace bridges over the creeks to increase conveyance. Currently, seven (7) bridges are eligible for \$16 million in federal funding and the District is working with the towns to secure that funding and to increase eligibility for funding for up to 13 other bridges in the Ross Valley that need to be replaced or retrofitted to improve conveyance. The first bridge projects will take 5 to 7 years to complete.

In cooperation with the Friends of Corte Madera Creek, the District is assisting in 2 fish passage projects by providing partial funding for technical work and developing a strategy for enhancing marsh lands in the tidal areas of Kentfield and Larkspur. These improvements have significant importance as habitat areas for threatened or endangered species (Clapper Rail, Steelhead Trout) and as buffers for sea level rise. Over the last few years, the Friends of Corte Madera Creek have secured over \$1.6 million dollars for habitat improvements and technical studies, all of which directly benefit the watershed flood control effort.

A dredging of the lower Corte Madera Creek channel in Kentfield, Greenbrae, and Larkspur is currently envisioned for the 2015-2017 timeframe. Details for the amount of dredging to be done will involve the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers who built the channel and require ongoing maintenance to remain eligible for flood damage funding.

Economic and Recreational Benefits

In addition to providing facilities for flood control, the detention basin projects will also provide other benefits for the communities. The three recreational fields, Lefty Gomez, Memorial Park, and Red Hill, and the Loma Alta open space area will all benefit directly from the flood fee revenue. The projects will improve and upgrade these facilities as the detention infrastructure is added to provide the ability to store large amounts of water to reduce flooding during events like the 2005 flood. These events happen infrequently so the recreational parks and Open Space area will maintain their current function 99% of the time. These projects will redirect over \$17 million in flood fee revenue back to the communities as they improve the facilities with new drainage and enhanced fields, restoring habitat, improve and/or add trails, and provide up to 185 local jobsⁱ and other economic benefits in the process. This “return to the

source” approach to the use of the flood fee revenues is one of the principles being followed by the Flood Control District. The engineering and environmental firms that worked on the Capital Improvement Plan Study for Flood Reduction and Creek Management were all Marin County companies.

The Phoenix Lake Retrofit project and the other major efforts of the Ross Valley Flood Control and Watershed program reflect the commitment of the County and the Towns of the Ross Valley to an innovative watershed approach that integrates flood protection with environmental stewardship and improvement. This program is receiving recognition from state and federal agencies as well as academic and private sector experts as being “cutting edge” and “built for success” in the 21st century. A program website has been set up and includes interactive features to illustrate watershed conditions and information. Watershed descriptions, maps, science content, technical documents, and project updates and program information are available at <http://marinwatersheds.org/rossvalleywatershed-org/index.html>

ⁱ <http://www.dot.gov/recovery/docs/090609jobestimates.htm> “Estimates of total employment will also be based on expenditure data, consistent with guidance from the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA). Total employment includes not only direct and indirect jobs, but also induced jobs. CEA estimates that total employment is increased by one job-year for every \$92,000 in direct government spending. We will therefore take the expenditure data and divide by \$92,000 to estimate the total job-years of employment created. To estimate job-months of total employment, we will divide expenditures by \$7,667 (i.e., \$92,000/12).”