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# Funding likely for slough study, management plan

By CHELA ZABIN  
STAFF WRITER

Funding for a study and management plan for Watsonville's slough system "looks like sure thing," according to the agency that applied to the Water Quality Control Board for the money.

Max Puckett, a staff member

with the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments, said the water board staff ranked the project, which would evaluate the condition of the sloughs and develop a plan for their enhancement and preservation, third out of eight the board is considering.

In a recent workshop during

which the projects were reviewed, the water board moved it up to No. 2, Puckett said.

The board will submit the project, along with the others it wants to do, to the federal government, which will disburse money for the projects through the Clean Water Act. Puckett called the fed-

eral review "kind of a rubber-stamp process."

"Short of a fiscal crisis, it looks like a sure thing," he said. In fact, the water board told AMBAG that it wanted a little bit more work added to the proposed work plan.

The Watsonville Slough System, which includes Watsonville, Gal-

lighan, Harkins, Hanson, West Struve and Struve sloughs, has been recognized as an important wildlife habitat by various local, state and federal agencies.

But the system has been degraded by development and agriculture, and various measures of its overall health — including con-

taminants in the water and low species diversity in certain parts of the slough — indicate that it is in need of protection.

Under pressure from local environmentalists, in particular the Watsonville Wetlands Watch, the city of Watsonville and the County

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of Santa Cruz agreed to participate in a study and management plan for the slough system. AMBAG offered to coordinate the effort, drew up the work plan and submitted it to the water board for funding.

Jim Van Houten, a member of the Wetlands Watch, said he is happy that AMBAG took the lead in drawing up the plan.

"They are very well-equipped to do the study. I think there's a very good chance that it will be funded," he said. Van Houten said his group's "ultimate goal for the thing is a management plan that will define the best uses, preservation and enhancement of the sloughs. There's really a void there."

The cost of the study and plan is approximately \$90,000. The federal funds will cover 75 percent; matching local funds for the remaining 25 percent are required. Puckett said he believes funding will come through by July of this year.

As proposed, the study and plan will entail a review of existing water-quality studies. It will identify the primary sources of pollution entering the sloughs and look at the impacts of land-use and water-management practices on slough water tables, rates of water movement and sedimentation. It will also include a plan for improving water quality for wildlife and recreation and provide new data for the future development of a master plan for the sloughs.

AMBAG intends to work with faculty and students from UC-Santa Cruz and the Moss Landing Marine Lab, who, it said, have expressed interest in lending labor and expertise to the study. Some local funds for the project may be available from the Santa Cruz County Flood Control District's Zone 7.

Public participation in the project will be included through the formation of a technical advisory committee, which will be made up of representatives from AMBAG, the city of Watsonville, the State Water Resources Control Board, the Soil Conservation Service, Zone 7, California Coastal Commission, Regional Water Quality Control Board, the department of Fish and Game, the Watsonville Wetlands Watch, land owners and others.

The technical advisory committee will hold several public meetings.

Puckett said he is excited about the study and plan. His only concern, he said, is that it really is only a small amount of the work that needs to be done. He hopes the process doesn't end with this one study and plan.

"It's a minimal amount ... it's a start, and it's a good start," he said. He said he hoped "it'll finally lead to more and more happening in terms of restoration and enhancement. I think it'll start to draw some attention."