

Forest Legacy Project

Lindsay Creek Conservation Easement

Humboldt County, California



FUNDING HISTORY

FY 2023 Forest Legacy Program Funding	\$4,500,000
FY 2023 Non-Federal Cost Share	\$1,250,000
FY 2023 Project Costs	\$5,750,000
FY 2023 Project Acres	2,816
Forest Legacy Funding To Date	\$0
Total Project Costs	\$5,750,000
Total Project Acres	2,816



Tract Name	Size (ac)	Tract Cost	FLP Funding	Non-Fed Cost Share	Status
Lindsay Creek	2,816	\$5,750,000	\$4,500,000	\$1,250,000	Draft 2023

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Lindsay Creek Conservation Easement project (LCCE) would conserve 2,816 acres of mature mixed conifer working forestland in the Lindsay Creek (LC) watershed. LC represents one of the most pristine and important salmonid streams in the larger Mad River watershed providing habitat for federally and state threatened California Coastal Chinook salmon, Northern California steelhead trout, and Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast coho salmon. The property also provides habitat to coastal cutthroat trout, a California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Species of Special Concern (SSC). The property acts as the eastern portion of the two-part McKinleyville Conservation Strategy (MCS), which includes the recently funded and adjoining 553-acre McKinleyville Community Forest (MCF), collectively owned and managed by Green Diamond Resource Company (GDRC) as a highly productive and sustainable redwood, Douglas fir, and Sitka spruce forest. The LCCE will prohibit development, create a 269-acre late-seral reserve (LSR), and make permanent agreements that mandate stream buffers, basal area retention requirements, steep slope protection, road improvement and monitoring requirements in excess of the California Forest Practice Rules.



Looking westward over conifer forests within the Lindsay Creek property. (Photo by GDRC)

PROJECT FEATURES

Important

- **WATERSHED PROTECTION:** A tributary of the Mad River, LC supports one of California's few remaining wild populations of endangered coho and Chinook salmon. LC provides some of the highest quality and most productive coho habitat throughout the entire Mad River watershed.
- The State Water Resources Control Board listed the Mad River as impaired under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act due to sediment and high temperatures. As the first tributary to the Mad River, the LCCE would prevent development and water diversions that could negatively impair the watershed.

- Over 6 linear miles of adjacent riverine wetlands and 23.9 acres of freshwater forested and emergent wetlands are contained within the projects riparian reserve system providing ecological values such as natural water quality improvement, flood protection, and erosion control.
- The Mad River estuary is listed as a 'Critical Coastal Area' by the State Coastal Commission and provides climatic refuge for estuarine-dependent species, such as coho, Chinook, and steelhead; Lindsay Creek flows into the Mad River just upstream from tidal influences.
- The establishment of the LCCE over the 2,816 acres of intact, sustainably managed, mixed-conifer forestland will act to minimize future water pollution by preserving over 25% of the entire 11,150-acre LC watershed.
- T&E SPECIES HABITAT: The property supports 2 federally-threatened northern spotted owl (NSO) territories with observations previously occurring across 11 locations within the property. The current NSO activity center is located in the adjacent Van-Eck forest, located immediately outside the LCCE.
- The property offers habitat for threatened or rare species including the Pacific fisher and NSO, which rely heavily on continuous stretches of mature conifer and mixed hardwood forests for habitat, currently threatened in the area by excessive human development and logging.
- Amphibians and reptiles classified as Species of Special Concern by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife have been observed within the property boundaries, including the western pond turtle, foothill yellow-legged frog, northern red-legged frog, and coastal tailed frog.
- UNIQUE FOREST COMMUNITIES: The LCCE includes the establishment of a 269-acre LSR managed to protect and enhance old growth forest characteristics in a mixture of coastal redwood, Douglas fir, and Sitka spruce.
- A LSR would help provide adequate distribution, quantity, and quality of old growth forest habitat critical to maintain biological diversity over a wide array of functional landscape patterns which serve as habitat for old growth related species such as the NSO.
- CONNECTIVITY: The LCCE will protect priority salmonid migration corridors in the Mad River watershed, connect over 5,000 acres of sustainably managed forestlands, conserve old growth forest characteristics needed by NSO and marbled murrelets, preserve wetlands and promote high species biodiversity.
- The proposed LCCE will connect with the recently funded MCF, which is adjacent to the west, and the existing Van-Eck CE, which is adjacent to the north and held by the Pacific Forest Trust since 2002. In totality, the project will help establish a 5,700-acre corridor of protected lands.
- The property is owned and managed by GDRC which manages the land subject to an Aquatic Habitat Conservation Plan (AHCP) as well as maintains Forest Stewardship Council certification, both of which operate under requirements in excess of California Forest Practice Rules.
- CULTURAL: Seven sites of historical significance were identified on the property during recent THP consultation with the NWIC-Sonoma State Database in 2018. Additionally, the Wiyot Tribe's traditional homelands include the lower Mad River, and the presence of artifacts in the project area is likely.
- COMMUNITY SUPPORT: In the late 1990s, residents formed the LC Watershed Group with a desire to protect the resource values provided in the watershed and especially to improve fisheries habitat and water quality, highlighting the communities desire to protect the undeveloped nature of the property.
- ECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM TIMBER: GDRC's California Timberlands (CAT) main office is located in Korbel, CA, less than 5 miles from the LCCE. CAT employs roughly 185 individuals and 500 contractors in the region through which the economic benefits are realized in the surrounding community.



Critical salmonid habitat provided by Lindsay Creek near Fieldbrook. (Photo by Tim Broadman, Redwood Comm Actn Agency)

- **COMMUNITY BENEFIT:** The project would benefit nearby disadvantaged communities, such as Arcata and Eureka, by preventing parcelization and development of 30 legal parcels to land use that would tax water supplies in a tributary watershed of the Mad River, a municipal water source.
- The strategic location of the property will result in reduced consumption of natural resources and energy as its establishment will act as a "greenbelt" preventing unchecked sprawling development of lands adjacent near McKinleyville (2 miles west) and Fieldbrook (directly adjacent to the east).
- **BENEFITS FROM RECREATION:** The property shares nearly 4 miles of boundary with the recently funded 553-acre MCF which, upon completion, will provide extensive recreational opportunities for a variety of users. The LCCE will help protect scenic views and provide a wildlife habitat buffer to the MCF.
- **PUBLIC ACCESS:** Terms of the CE require no less than two public access events per year, ensuring that the public benefits through the completion of the LCCE. Examples of potential public events include botanical walks, mountain biking, or equestrian endurance rides.

Threatened

- **LACK OF PROTECTION:** Encompassing all of or portions of 14 Assessor Parcels, the property currently has no encumbrances or protections from subdivision and development and could be subdivided into over 30 legal parcels if not protected by CE terms.
- Although the majority of parcels within the LCCE property are zoned for timber production, individual lots can be sold separately without further permission according to the Humboldt County General Plan (2017), making them highly vulnerable to future residential development.
- **ABILITY TO DEVELOP:** The property is located just 2 miles east of the census-designated place of McKinleyville (pop. 17,208), immediately adjacent to the township of Fieldbrook (pop. 859), and 10 miles from Arcata (pop. 18,178). Arcata-Eureka Airport lies 2 miles NW of the property.
- The LCCE is comprised of broad flat ridges and gentle slopes that lend themselves well to housing development. Housing units built on ridges within the property would offer ocean views making this a highly desirable location for future development.
- From 2010 to 2019, the McKinleyville population grew by 13.4% representing significantly higher growth rates than seen throughout the state of California (6.1%) or nationally (6.3%) over the same period of time.
- In July 2021, the median listing home price in McKinleyville was \$412,500, trending up 13.8% year-over-year. The current boom in housing price has caused a shortage in available housing and further increased the likelihood of subdivision if the property were to sell.
- **ADJACENT LAND USE:** Humboldt County, referred to as the "Emerald Triangle", is seen as a hotspot for marijuana cultivation, both legally and illegally. As of 2019, 3,590 marijuana cultivation licenses were issued statewide of which Humboldt County accounted for 788, or roughly 22% of the state total.
- Humboldt State University, located in nearby Arcata, recently unveiled a draft "prospectus" on its transformation into a polytechnic university and aims to increase enrollment, currently at 6,344, by 50 percent in the next three years and double in the next seven.
- The LC watershed has been significantly altered over the past 150+ years by land use activities that include removal of all original old growth redwood forests; on-going timber harvest activities; construction of railroads and roads; residential development; and agricultural activities.
- **LANDOWNER CIRCUMSTANCES:** In 1996, GDRC, formerly Simpson, submitted an application to rezone the LCCE property though the request was ultimately withdrawn. If the LCCE is not established, GDRC could pursue alternative options and sell the property as individual legal parcels.



Development threat from the township of McKinleyville, located just 2 mi away. (Photo by GDRC)

Strategic

- **MANAGEMENT PLANS:** The LCCE contains six river miles designated as critical habitat for coho and Chinook salmon and steelhead trout by NOAA Fisheries as well as NOAA Fisheries' 2014 Final Recovery Plan for the Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast Evolutionarily Significant Unit of Coho Salmon.
- High priority of the LC watershed for recovery of threatened salmonids is addressed in CDFW's 2004 Recovery Strategy for California Coho Salmon and has been demonstrated by the ongoing investment by the state. Since 2004, CDFW has awarded six Fisheries Restoration Grant Program grants, totaling millions of dollars, to salmonid-related projects in the LC watershed.
- The LC watershed is identified as a high priority landscape in the CALFIRE report California's Forests and Rangelands: 2010 Assessment for risk reduction (areas with important economic assets that face significant threat from wildfire and forest pests); and threats to forest carbon from wildfire, insects, and disease.
- The Humboldt County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (2019) listed the forested area east of McKinleyville (containing LCCE) as a priority area for landscape level fuels reduction and management treatments to increase forest resiliency and community protection against future wildfire events. Management of the LCCE by GDRC would ensure vegetation treatments could successfully achieve these goals.
- Other state plans include California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan, Natural Resources Agency's California Climate Adaptation Strategy (2009), CDFW's California Coho Recovery Strategy (2004), and State Water Resources Control Board's Water Quality Plan for the North Coast Region.
- **CONSERVATION INITIATIVE:** The State Department of Fish and Game has invested significant effort into riparian habitat restoration, barrier removal, habitat surveys, and fish monitoring in the LC watershed since the early 1950's. The DFGs Coho Recovery Strategy prioritizes watershed assessment and community education in the lower Mad River area, which includes LC.
- In 2018, GDRC signed a Humboldt Marten Safe Harbor Agreement with CDFW to help conserve habitat and assist in the recovery of the Humboldt marten, a protected species by the California Endangered Species Act. Included in the enrolled lands, the LCCE will ensure the property is continually managed to provide the marten with an improved chance at expanding its range.
- In 2015, GDRC and Trust for Public Lands embarked on a MCS and received unanimous support from the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors and the McKinleyville Municipal Advisory Committee. Complementing the MCF, the LCCE would act as the second and final strategic piece of this initiative to create a permanent green space between the cities of McKinleyville and Fieldbrook.
- The LCCE will provide the following strategic co-benefits: reduced fire risk, wood products produced, improved air/water quality, improved watershed health, protected water supplies, improved wildlife, fish and native plant habitat, protected cultural resources, improved scenic resources, climate adaptation, benefits to the local economy and good jobs supported.
- In 2001, citizen input in the Humboldt County General Plan Update process identified a strong desire to protect the natural resource values, salmonid habitat, working forests and ranches, and community character and values that are found within the LC watershed. The LCCE would act as a keystone property in achieving the goals set forth by the local community.



A coho smolt sampled in critical habitat provided by the Lindsay Creek property. (Photo by GDRC)

Readiness

Pre-Appraisal/Market Analysis	1
Easement or Fee Conditions	1
Non-Federal Cost Share Commitment	0
Signed Purchase Agreement	0
Title Search	1
Mineral Determination	0
Stewardship Plan (or equivalent)*	0
Readiness Total Tally Score	3

Supporting Parties

Senator Mike McGuire, California State Senate; U.S. Representative Jared Huffman, California 2nd congressional district; Assemblymember Jim Wood, California 2nd District; Supervisor Steve Madrone, 5th District Humboldt County Board; Senior Project Manager John Bernstein, The Trust For Public Land; and General Manager Patrick Kaspari, McKinleyville Community Services District.

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