



CALIFORNIA FISH PASSAGE FORUM

Policy & Permitting Committee Meetings

Present: Grace Adams, Anna Halligan, Stephanie Falzone, Garrett Altmann

Absent: John Sayers, Erika Lovejoy

Meeting attendance:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NApL93PWEhVy2thUfWbRoe0ILJVullm5_YTjQfazKil/edit?usp=drive_link

8/6/25 Agenda

- Welcome Garrett Altmann, EPIC
- News or Updates
- Case Studies Updates
- 2026 Work Plan Brainstorming

8/6/25 Meeting Minutes:

Welcome Garrett Altmann, EPIC

Anna shared that the P&P Committee responsibilities and role have been in flux since it's restart in 2020. The Forum cannot engage in advocacy due to the inclusion of governmental agencies, so the P&P Committee has been primarily focused on keeping Steering Committee members up to date on policy and legislation that may be of interest (state and federal). The Committee has also started developing permitting pathway case studies to identify common themes and share best practices. Sustainable Conservation, as an organization, does a lot of permit guidance and accelerated permitting, so it has been helpful to have them on the Committee.

Garrett noted that he is a big believer in leveraging case studies to highlight what worked and what could be done differently.

Policy & Permitting News or Updates

Federal

Anna shared a link to an article that provided a comprehensive recap of where federal funding discussions stand. The good news is that the senate is pushing back against the federal administration's proposed cuts to natural resource programs.

Link to article: <https://worksfornature.org/article/good-news-for-noaa-nrcs-as-congress-rejects-trumps-radical-spending-cuts>

It is good to see that NFHP is not on the cutting block, but we need to confirm which program NFHP falls under. The Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund (NOAA, funds are awarded to states or tribes) is slated

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to receive an allocation in line with the previous FY amount (better than nothing). This program funds the Fisheries and Restoration Grants Program (FGRS) administered by CDWF.

State

CA state Proposition 4 was passed in the last election, which will fund restoration projects.

Legislature returns on August 18, so there will be more updates once the session gets started.

Sustainable Conservation

Central Coast NMFS Programmatic Biological Opinion (PBO) website updated with new application form and contact information: <https://acceleratingrestoration.org/permits/central-coast-nmfs-pbo/>.

New blog and project page for Arroyo Grande Creek Stream Gauge Modification Project. The blog/project page go hand-in-hand and are intended for different audiences.

Blog link: <https://suscon.org/blog/2025/08/rru-arroyo-grande/>

Project page: <https://acceleratingrestoration.org/projects/arroyo-grande-creek-stream-gauge-modification-project/>

Stephanie is working on a statewide restoration permitting roadmap and hopes to have it done by the end of the year. She will share it with the Steering Committee once complete. The roadmap is essentially expanding on the Sacramento River Basin roadmap: <https://acceleratingrestoration.org/find-permits/sacramento-river-basin-roadmap/>.

EPIC

EPIC submitted comments for the reissuance of nationwide permit (NWP) 14 and 27, specifically to include language for considerations of aquatic and terrestrial organism passage. In general, there was less language on passage because US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is working on a new NWP for fish passage. EPIC has been actively engaged with USACE, mostly regarding NWP 27 and the desire to remove the requirement for pre jurisdictional limitations. Garrett noted that the new language is fairly comprehensive, possibly preparing for/providing a buffer for legal challenges. There was also a robust amount of language included referring to the inclusion of traditional ecological knowledge, indigenous knowledge, and nature-based solutions.

Sustainable Conservation also submitted comments on NWP 14 and 27.

Trout Unlimited partnered on two letters of support for NWP 27 and the proposed NWP for fish passage. They noted that the proposed NWP would compliment NWP 14 and 27.

Guidance for the reissued NWPs is expected in early 2026, but this has not been confirmed.

Notably, those that have an existing NWP 27, it is now only good for 2 years due to the reissuance.

EPIC has been looking at FEMA's no rise rule, with a goal to create exemptions for habitat restoration and fish passage projects. Last year FEMA was working on providing a national exemption for nature-based solutions, however with administration change, this is now at a standstill. Garrett is on a board as a State, Local, Tribal & Territorial Government (SLTT) representative that meets with FEMA leadership

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on a quarterly basis to discuss issues and strategize solutions. Garrett noted that the board is looking to share issues with the no rise rule with FEMA leadership.

Stephanie met someone at SRF this year who has been having issues with the no rise rule and will circle back to connect them with Garrett.

The no rise rule's intention is to protect infrastructure and public safety. However, it is also tied to the National Flood Insurance Program, which is administered by FEMA, and FEMA does not want to be liable for increases in flood risk. The no rise rule can pose challenges for floodplain restoration projects and projects that add large woody debris to a system (issue in PNW).

Per a new judicial ruling, all of FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) projects are to resume and not have their funds re-obligated.

Case Studies Updates

Quiota Creek – The write up is complete, but there are some follow up questions for Tim Robinson that need to be addressed before finalizing the case study. Grace will be following up with Tim in the next two weeks and then Holly will finalize the case study when she returns.

Upper Noyo, Strawberry Creek, No-Name Gulch – Grace interviewed Anna and some of her colleagues about these three projects. They all used the HREA, SHRP, and CalEx15333 pathways, and all have slightly different features. Grace is going to clean up her notes and then hand off the write up to Holly on her return.

2026 Work Plan Brainstorming

Grace shared a link to a 2025 workplan with only P&P Committee tasks for the Committee to review. She then asked members to consider which tasks are of interest to complete again in 2026 and if there are any new ideas for tasks in 2026. Paraphrased notes from the discussion are below.

Link to P&P 2025 workplan:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Fv9IzkW_eVs8k3CxnGXtEhfsodTFQj4dEnypLM0Thw/edit?tab=t.0

It would be interesting to learn more about the possibility of leveraging emergency/expedited permitting pathways to advance restoration. There are teams in the Dept of the Interior that complete the NEPA process at the burn scar scale following a wildfire, so it would be interesting to see if/how this could be applied in California. Emergency categorical exemptions are used in wildfire burn areas to promote stabilization/erosion mitigation and/or other process-based restoration techniques.

Completing 2 additional case studies is of interest, potentially focused on leveraging emergency powers.

Example: South coast habitat restoration project applied for permitting following an atmospheric river.

The project is discussed in this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UL1jtViwK0>

Future Agenda Items

- Case study updates
- 2026 Work Plan Brainstorming

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- Policy Updates to send to Steering Committee