



# County of Santa Cruz

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## COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

701 OCEAN STREET, SUITE 520, SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060-4073

(831) 454-2100 FAX: (831) 454-3420 TDD: (831) 454-2123

SUSAN A. MAURIELLO, J.D., COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

## PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Sierra Ryan or John Ricker  
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### **COUNTY, SAN LORENZO VALLEY WATER DISTRICT RECEIVE FISH HABITAT ENHANCEMENT GRANT**

The State Wildlife Conservation Board on Thursday awarded a \$330,000 grant to the Water Resources Program of the County of Santa Cruz and San Lorenzo Valley Water District to develop a plan for more reliable water supplies and improve steelhead trout habitat in the San Lorenzo River Watershed.

The Proposition 1 (Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act) grant will support the development of a conjunctive water use plan to increase groundwater storage in the Santa Margarita Groundwater Basin and improve San Lorenzo River streamflows during dry summer months. The plan, called “*San Lorenzo Watershed Conjunctive Use and Baseflow Enhancement Plan*,” will be developed through a partnership between the County and the San Lorenzo Valley Water District, with support from the Scotts Valley Water District and City of Santa Cruz.

Local steelhead trout are federally listed as a threatened species, and the San Lorenzo River plays an essential role in their recovery on the Central Coast. Currently, summer river levels are considered poor for juvenile steelhead rearing.

The plan will determine the optimal way to implement routine exchanges of water that would increase water diversions during the winter (when the San Lorenzo watershed has excess water), while allowing the over-drafted Santa Margarita Basin the opportunity to replenish. Once the rainy season ends, the District would utilize the replenished groundwater basin while reducing surface water diversions and improving habitat.

“If we are smart about how we utilize our water infrastructure, we can increase water supply reliability and benefit local fisheries,” said John Ricker, Water Resources Division Director at the County of Santa Cruz. “This grant will help us move toward a more sustainable water future that meets community needs while protecting critical habitat.”

This project is a component of the San Lorenzo 2025 Program, a partnership between local agencies and non-profits to improve habitat throughout the San Lorenzo Watershed.