Geographic Review Panel 4 – San Joaquin River

Proposal number: 2001-C209 **Short Proposal Title:** Toulumne River Mining Reach Restoration Project #3, Warner-Deardorff Segment

1. Applicability to CALFED ERP Goals and Implementation Plan and CVPIA priorities, and relevance to ERP and CVPIA priorities for your region. This panel feels this full-scale implementation project is clearly applicable to both CALFED ERP Goals (1,2,3, and 4) and CVPIA-AFRP priorities. The project is intended to re-establish geomorphic processes via large-scale floodplain and channel manipulations to provide and maintain habitats important to populations of fall-run chinook salmon and floodplain riparian communities. The manipulations will reconnect the channel with a reconstructed and widened floodplain, thereby contributing to the CALFED process (Goal 2) and habitat (Goal 4) goals and is aligned with the CVPIA-AFRP priority to focus on natural channel and riparian habitat values in support of increasing natural production of salmon. Addressing these goals and priorities should support further increase and maintenance of naturally reproducing salmonid populations on the Tuolumne River. Also, other riverine and riparian-dependent species should benefit from the action given the nature of re-establishing floodplain and riverine processes that will support the riparian and floodplain communities.

This project is the third of a four-segment channel restoration project covering 7-miles of river which constitutes the most dysfunctional portion of the gravel-bedded reach of the Lower Tuolumne River. The Tuolumne River is consistently the largest producer of fall-run chinook salmon of the San Joaquin River tributaries and reconstruction of this segment of the river is key to achieving and sustaining further increases in salmon production. Without a "restored" Gravel Mining Reach, other river-wide objectives such as increasing the maximum flow release possible from New Don Pedro Reservoir for river function and catastrophic flood protection cannot be achieved. This proposed action is also consistent with the vision of the Tuolumne River Technical Advisory Committees Habitat Restoration Plan for the Lower Tuolumne River.

2. Linkages/coordination with previously funded projects or other restoration activities in your region. As mentioned above, this is the third of a four phased, 7-mile Gravel Mining Reach restoration project. This effort is well coordinated with previously funded actions on the Tuolumne River and is consistent with the overall restoration vision for the Lower Tuolumne River corridor and is consistent with ongoing and proposed expanded outreach and stewardship activities proposed in H202 (Tuolumne River Watershed Outreach and Stewardship).

3. Feasibility, especially the project's ability to move forward in a timely and successful manner. Key to this project moving forward is the successful implementation of the previously funded segments of the Gravel Mining Reach Project. The first segment is scheduled to go to construction in the late fall of 2000 and be completed in the early summer of 2001. The second segment is scheduled for construction in 2001 and

will carry over into 2002, given that the projects proceed as currently planned. These projects involve multiple landowners, the aggregate industry, and complex easement and royalty negotiations; as well as extensive environmental compliance and easements, all of which are often subject to delay.

4. Qualifications of the applicants and others involved in implementing the proposed project. The project team consisting of Irrigation District personnel and consultants is well qualified, and they have demonstrated an ability to work their way through the complexities of planning a project of this magnitude in preparation for implementation. However, a project of this magnitude and complexity should be exposed to, and benefit from, outside expertise. This panel recommends that this large-scale project and experiment be subjected to some form of outside review. This could be in the form of the Adaptive Management Forum for Large-Scale Channel Restoration Projects that is currently under development by the AFRP in cooperation with UC Davis' Information Center for the Environment, or some other formalized review body. Projects of this nature will benefit from other multi-disciplinarians providing input throughout the planning, implementation, and monitoring components, and from other practitioners implementing similar projects on other systems.

5. Local involvement (including environmental compliance). This project has benefited from good outreach by project proponents to the locally involved community via meetings between the project manager and a local landowner and mining industry interest group. Also, the Tuolumne River Technical Advisory Committee have held a series of meetings with local, State and Federal agencies on the overall restoration planning process for the Tuolumne River. However, there is always room to further increase awareness along the river about this, and similar other, projects.

6. Cost. Total cost of this project is $6,877,001. This compares similarly to the Robinson project on the Merced River, another large-scale channel restoration project in an adjacent drainage. However, because the final design is not completed, costs for construction should be considered very preliminary.

7. Cost sharing. Minor. The applicant suggests a proposed funding split between the AFRP and CALFED, however, this should not be read as secured funding to count as cost-share contribution.

8. Additional comments. This Panel believes that the most important components of this project ready for funding are those associated with project design and right of way engineering, and pre-project monitoring. Panel recommends funding only pre-construction activities at this time. Easement and mineral rights purchase; and construction, revegetation, and post-project monitoring can likely be funded in a subsequent year's proposal solicitation. Also, this panel believes this type of project would greatly benefit by being exposed to a more regional review venue. A venue such as the Adaptive Management Forum for Large Scale Channel Restoration Projects that is under development by the AFRP is one such option. The intent this Forum is to use a multi-disciplinary panel of experts to review multiple large-scale projects, such as the

Robinson Project and Tuolumne Mining Reach projects, as they are designed, implemented and monitored. This higher level of review could expand the information value of such projects and provide monitoring and implementation insights important to adaptive management and implementation of future project phases.

Regional Ranking

Panel Ranking: Medium high

Provide a brief explanation of your ranking: This Panel believes this project justifies a medium high ranking, however the Panel recommends phased funding (see comments above). The TARP ranked the project as Excellent to Very Good. This project is of high regional importance and should provide extensive benefits to chinook salmon and other species that rely on a functional river and floodplain. However, because of the large expenditure and somewhat experimental nature of attempting to re-establish river processes to increase production of riverine species of concern, the project proponent should pursue additional outside multi-disciplinary input and review.