

# Sustainable Conservation's **ESSENTIAL GUIDE** for Accelerated Restoration Permitting

Agency/ Authority	Permit/ Approval	Project Size Limits	Activities Covered	Location	Benefits/ Details
California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)	Categorical Exemption <a href="#">15333* - Small Habitat Restoration Projects</a> , <a href="#">15304 – Minor Alterations to Land</a> , and others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>≤ 5 acres for Sec. 15333</li> <li>No acreage limit for Sec. 15304</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fish, plant, and wildlife habitat restoration</li> <li>Minor alterations to land, water, and/or vegetation</li> </ul>	Statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faster/lower cost alternative to preparing a CEQA document (e.g., Initial Study/Negative Declaration)</li> <li>CEQA lead agency (e.g., state or local government, Resource Conservation District, etc.) must file a Notice of Exemption</li> <li>The 5-acre limit includes all areas directly disturbed, such as work areas, access routes, staging areas (wetlands and uplands), and temporary as well as permanent disturbance. Do not include areas with potential indirect disturbance when calculating project size.</li> </ul>
	<a href="#">Statutory Exemption for Restoration Projects (SERP)</a> Administered by California Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW)  SERP has been extended through January 1, 2030.	No size limits	Projects that exclusively conserve, restore, protect, or enhance, and assist in the recovery of California native fish and wildlife, and habitat on which they depend. May have incidental benefits, e.g. public access, recreation.	Statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faster/lower cost alternative to preparing a CEQA document, for projects that don't qualify for a categorical exemption (see above)</li> <li>The CEQA Lead Agency must first determine independently that the SERP qualifying criteria apply and then seek concurrence from the CDFW Director</li> <li><a href="#">New quick guide from CDFW on CEQA for restoration projects</a></li> </ul>
	<a href="#">State Water Resources Control Board Program Environmental Impact Report for the Statewide Restoration General Order (SRGO PEIR)*</a>	For projects exceeding size limits for Categorical Exemption 15333 - Small Habitat Restoration Projects (see above)	Projects that result in a net increase in aquatic or riparian resource area functions and/or services. may include multiple benefits (e.g., recreation, groundwater recharge, flood protection)	Statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced effort for CEQA compliance. Projects outside the scope of the PEIR can do supplemental analysis to save time</li> <li>See <a href="#">Figure ES-2 CEQA Process Flow Chart</a> for a summary of how the PEIR can be used</li> <li>CEQA lead agency must file a Notice of Determination</li> <li>This PEIR could be utilized to satisfy the CEQA requirement of other CEQA lead agencies (in addition to the Water Board), as long as the project meets the definition of a restoration project and meets all other applicable assumptions in the SRGO PEIR</li> <li><a href="#">See our SRGO PEIR FAQ for answers</a> to common questions</li> </ul>

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(updated 4/21/2026)

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State Water Resources Control Board and Regional Water Quality Control Boards	<a href="#">Order for Small Habitat Restoration Projects (SHRP)</a>	≤ 5 acres and 500 cumulative linear feet of stream segment or coastline	Aquatic and riparian habitat restoration and related water quality improvement projects impacting Waters of the US. Projects must not be a compensatory mitigation project.	Statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faster/simpler process compared to standard individual 401 Water Quality Certification; coordinated with CDFW's HREA authorization (see below)</li> <li>Must be eligible for CEQA categorical exemption 15333 (see above) but other CEQA compliance pathways can be used</li> <li>A project must impact waters of the U.S. to be eligible for this Order. Projects impacting only waters of the state could consider using the SRGO</li> </ul>
	<a href="#">Statewide Restoration General Order (SRGO)*</a>	For projects exceeding the size limits, or otherwise unable to use the Small Habitat Restoration Projects 401 Water Quality Certification (see above)	Projects that result in a net increase in aquatic or riparian resource area functions and/or services; projects may include multiple benefits (e.g., recreation, groundwater recharge, flood protection)	Statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faster/more efficient process compared to standard individual 401 Water Quality Certification/WDRs</li> <li><a href="#">Protection measures</a> are coordinated with USFWS and NMFS Restoration Programmatic Biological Opinions, (see below)</li> <li>Copy <a href="mailto:jessica.nadolski@waterboards.ca.gov">jessica.nadolski@waterboards.ca.gov</a> and your USACE permitting contact when submitting your Notice of Intent (NOI) for noticing and informational purposes</li> <li>Can use SRGO PEIR or another CEQA pathway</li> <li>Includes Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) for those projects only impacting waters of the state</li> <li><a href="#">See our SRGO FAQ for answers to common questions</a></li> </ul>
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)	<a href="#">Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Act (HREA)*</a>	≤ 5 acres and 500 cumulative linear feet of stream segment or coastline	<p>Voluntary aquatic habitat restoration and related water quality improvement projects (projects cannot be required as mitigation).</p> <p>Projects must have the primary purpose of improving fish and wildlife habitat.</p>	Statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faster/simpler process with one single approval from CDFW for 1600 Lake and Streambed Alteration agreement (LSAA) and California Endangered Species Act (CESA): approval in up to 30 days with the SWRCB's Small Habitat Restoration Permit approval first, otherwise up to 60 days</li> <li>For Fully Protected Species coverage - consider applying for a Restoration Management Permit (RMP) – see below</li> <li><a href="#">New restoration permitting quick guide from CDFW</a></li> </ul>

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California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) cont.	Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Act (HREA)* cont.				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">HREA Guidance Document**</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Training Videos for Applicants**</a></li> <li>• Contact your <a href="#">CDFW Regional staff</a> to discuss before applying</li> </ul>
	<a href="#">Restoration Management Permit (RMP)*</a>  ( <a href="#">CDFW RMP web page</a> )	No size limit	A project with the primary purpose of restoration that also results in a substantial net benefit to native fish, wildlife, plants, and/or their habitat. Project may also have secondary or incidental benefits, such as flood risk reduction, recreation, or groundwater recharge.	Statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No financial assurance or full mitigation requirements</li> <li>• As of 1/1/2025, consolidates take authorization for CESA-listed species, candidate species, Species of Special Concern/common species, Fully Protected species, and rare plants; as well as Lake and Streambed Alteration into a single permit with no application fee</li> <li>• Environmental Permit Information Management System (EPIMS) not used for this CDFW permitting process</li> <li>• Contact <a href="mailto:restorationpermitting@wildlife.ca.gov">restorationpermitting@wildlife.ca.gov</a> to discuss</li> <li>• For <a href="#">FAQs see CDFW website</a> and <a href="#">restoration permitting guide from CDFW</a></li> <li>• For application tips see this <a href="#">Word</a> or <a href="#">PDF</a> document</li> </ul>
	<a href="#">Restoration Consistency Determination (CD)</a>	No size limit	Habitat restoration projects (does not have to be in aquatic habitat)	Statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faster/simpler CESA coverage without financial assurances or full mitigation requirements</li> <li>• Can work in conjunction with the USFWS and NMFS Restoration Programmatic Biological Opinions (see below) and individual biological opinions</li> <li>• Exemption from CESA fees for voluntary habitat restoration projects for species listed under both CESA and federal ESA</li> <li>• <a href="#">New restoration permitting guide from CDFW</a></li> <li>• Contact <a href="mailto:restorationpermitting@wildlife.ca.gov">restorationpermitting@wildlife.ca.gov</a> to discuss</li> </ul>

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<b>US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)</b>	<a href="#">USFWS Statewide Restoration Programmatic Biological Opinion*</a>	No size limit, but includes annual incidental take limits for certain commonly encountered species and critical habitats.  As of 2/7/25, it includes formal consultation for 47 animals, 21 plants, 36 critical habitats.	Aquatic and riparian habitat restoration and related water quality improvement projects	Statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simplified process: uses an ESA Section 7(a)(2) Review Form, rather than preparation of an individual Biological Assessment/Biological Opinion (BA/BO). Simplified <a href="#">post construction requirements</a></li> <li>Work with a federal Action Agency and/or your local USFWS Field Office, Coastal, Partners, Refuge, or Fisheries and Aquatic Conservation Program to apply using <a href="#">the ESA Section 7(a)(2) Review Form</a></li> <li>Allows for late-arriving federal action agencies (any federal agency can apply to use the consultation)</li> <li>If you need coverage for multiple species, and only some of those species have been included in the PBO, a separate consultation just for those species not included in the PBO, can be done. This approach will save time as compared to doing a new consultation for all species needing coverage.</li> </ul>
<b>National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)</b>	NMFS Programmatic Biological Opinions (PBOs) for the <a href="#">North Coast</a> <a href="#">Central Coast*</a> <a href="#">Central Valley*</a> <a href="#">South Coast*</a>	<i>Dewatering Limits</i> <a href="#">North Coast</a> – 1000 contiguous ft of stream reach at a time <a href="#">Central Coast</a> – 1000 linear ft at any one project site <a href="#">Central Valley</a> – 1000 contiguous ft of stream <a href="#">South Coast</a> – Dewater or disturb more than 500 contiguous ft of stream	Salmonid habitat and related upland restoration. See PBOs for detailed lists of project types, sideboards, and exclusions.	Areas of anadromy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faster/lower cost process: individual Biological Assessment/Opinion not needed</li> <li>Requires a federal nexus (e.g., USACE Permit, NOAA Restoration Center (RC) funding, or in the Central Valley, USFWS funding)</li> <li>Allows for late-arriving action federal agencies</li> <li>Contact NOAA Restoration Center staff to discuss your project. See contact information PBO web pages</li> <li>NC, CC, CV PBOs and the USFWS PBO above may be used with a CDFW <a href="#">Restoration Consistency Determination (CD)</a> for applicable dually listed species (not fully protected species)</li> <li>Protection measures from these PBOs and the USFWS PBO above may be incorporated by reference into a CDFW Restoration Management Permit (see above)</li> </ul>

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<b>California Coastal Commission (CCC)</b>	NOAA Restoration Center Federal Consistency Determination (CD) for the <a href="#">North and Central Coast*</a>	Linked to NMFS Biological Opinions (see above)	Salmonid habitat and related upland restoration  Estuarine and coastal restoration that benefits NOAA trust species	California Coastal Zone from the OR border through SLO County (excludes San Francisco Bay)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faster/lower cost alternative to obtaining a Coastal Development Permit (CDP) or individual project CD from the Coastal Commission</li> <li>• Use with NMFS Programmatic Biological Opinions for Restoration on the North Coast and Central Coast (see above)</li> </ul>
<b>US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)</b>	<a href="#">NWP 27</a> – Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration, Enhancement, and Establishment Activities  <a href="#">NWP 53</a> – Removal of Low-Head Dams  <a href="#">NWP 54</a> – Living Shorelines  <a href="#">NWP 60</a> – Activities to Improve Passage of Fish and Other Aquatic Organisms	No size limit for NWP 27  NWP 54 – No more than 500 linear feet  NWP 60 – Must not cause the loss of greater than 1 acre of waters of the U.S.	<a href="#">NWP 27</a> – Aquatic restoration. No longer for small dam removal  <a href="#">NWP 53</a> – Removal of Low-Head Dams  <a href="#">NWP 54</a> – Living Shorelines  <a href="#">NWP 60</a> – Nature-like fishways, fish screens, modification of existing instream structures, including dams, and more. Not for small dam removal	Statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A more efficient way to acquire Section 10 Rivers and Harbors Act and Section 404 Clean Water Act permits than to apply for a <a href="#">Standard Permit</a></li> <li>• Since NWP 27 is no longer able to authorize removal of small dams, consider using NWP 53. NWP 53 does not authorize restoration of the stream in the vicinity of the low-head dam. NWP 27 or other USACE permits may be used for such activities</li> <li>• For NWP 27, reporting is required for all activities. Pre-construction notification (PCN) may be required by General Conditions or a Regional Condition of California</li> <li>• For NWP 27, if a PCN is required, a general description and map of aquatic and terrestrial habitat types on the site substitutes for wetland delineation</li> </ul>
	Regional General Permits (RGPs)	No Size Limits	<a href="#">RGP 16</a> – Aquatic Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Activities  <a href="#">RGP 41</a> – Invasive Plant Removal	Sacramento District (RGP 16) and  Los Angeles District (RGP 41)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A more efficient way to acquire Section 10 Rivers and Harbors Act and Section 404 Clean Water Act permits than to apply for a <a href="#">Standard Permit</a></li> <li>• The current version of RGP 16 cannot be used with the current version of the Order for Small Habitat Restoration Projects (SHRP). It can be used with the SRGO (see above)</li> </ul>

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<b>US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) cont'd</b>	<p><a href="#">Regional Categorical Permission (RCP) for Environmental Restoration</a> for Section 408 (March 2025)</p> <p>Multiple types of categorical permissions can be used together (erosion control, bridges, etc.)</p>	500 acres for non-channel restoration activities or 5,000 linear feet for channel restoration activities	Stream and wetland restoration activities	Statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streamlined programmatic permit as compared to the individual 408 letter of permission process</li> <li>No public noticing requirements, NEPA has already been completed programmatically</li> <li>Section 7 still required, but can be done through the USFWS and NOAA programmatic for qualifying projects</li> <li>Section 106 compliance still required</li> <li>Any plantings on or near a levee must meet the standards outlined in <a href="#">Engineer Technical Letter 1110-2- 583, Guidelines for Landscape Planting and Vegetation Management at Levees, Floodwalls, Embankment Dams, and Appurtenant Structures.</a></li> </ul>
<b>Programs that May Cover Permitting for More than One Agency/Authority</b>					
<b>CDFW Fisheries Restoration Grant Program (FRGP)</b>	CEQA Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND), CWA 401 Certification from SWRCB, CWA Section 404 USACE permit (RGP- <a href="#">12 SF District</a> , <a href="#">16 Sacramento District</a> , or <a href="#">78 LA District</a> )	No Size Limits	Restoration, enhancement, or protection of salmonid habitat in anadromous watersheds	FRGP Focus Watersheds. See maps on FRGP web page.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faster/simpler permitting processes for FRGP-funded projects. CDFW helps to acquire permits from other agencies</li> <li>FRGP opens its Proposal Solicitation Notice (PSN) in January</li> <li>Eligible applicants include state and local government agencies, public entities, Native American Tribes, and nonprofit organizations</li> </ul>
<b>Resource Conservation District (RCD) Partners in Restoration (PIR) Programs</b>	A variety of permits available (e.g., CEQA, SWRCB, USFWS, NMFS PBOs)*	Size Limits Vary Based on Project Type	Fish, plant and wildlife habitat restoration and water quality improvement projects	<a href="#">Marin</a> , <a href="#">Santa Cruz</a> , and <a href="#">Alameda County</a> RCDs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consolidated permitting programs managed by RCDs</li> <li>RCDs without PIR programs may still be able to provide some assistance with the permitting process</li> <li>Find your local RCD at <a href="http://carcd.org/rcds/find/">carcd.org/rcds/find/</a></li> </ul>

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