



GREAT REDWOOD TRAIL AGENCY

MEETING DATE: March 19, 2026

AGENDA ITEM: 6. Memorandum of Understanding: Blue Lake Rancheria

FROM: Elaine Hogan

RE: Memorandum of Understanding: Blue Lake Rancheria

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This MOU memorializes the shared values, aligned goals, and collaborative intentions of GRTA and Blue Lake Rancheria (BLR) and establishes a framework for ongoing government-to-government partnership in connection with the development and stewardship of the Great Redwood Trail. The MOU reflects BLR's nationally recognized expertise in renewable energy and microgrid technology, sustainable forestry and portable sawmill operations, fish passage restoration, native plant propagation, traditional ecological knowledge, and tribal arts and cultural programming. These capabilities directly align with GRTA's trail development, restoration, and tribal involvement goals.

BACKGROUND:

The Great Redwood Trail Master Plan Tribal Recommendations, developed through community and tribal engagement conducted between Fall 2022 and Summer 2025, identify the importance of respectful early and ongoing communication with tribes, inviting tribal participation in ecological restoration, identifying culturally sensitive sites and species, developing culturally mindful vegetation management and land stewardship, and inviting tribes to collaborate in the management of trail segments crossing ancestral lands.

With Master Plan adoption expected during this Board meeting, the Agency is taking steps to implement the recommendations and guidance set forth in the plan. Additionally, with the adoption of Resolution 2025-09 Environmental and Tribal Commitments, staff were directed to proactively build long-term relationships with tribes and explore contracting opportunities to draw on local tribal cultural knowledge. This MOU builds from ongoing conversations staff and board members have been having with the Blue Lake Rancheria and lays a formal foundation for continuing those government-to-government conversations, structured around our shared goals and mutual interests.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommend the Board authorize the Executive Director to execute the MOU with Blue Lake Rancheria, as attached.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No direct fiscal impact. Any subsequent contracts that exceed the Executive Director's delegated authority will be brought back to the Board for consideration.

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. MOU BLUE LAKE RANCHERIA

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN
GREAT REDWOOD TRAIL AGENCY
AND
BLUE LAKE RANCHERIA

Effective Date: March 19, 2026

PREAMBLE

This Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") is entered into between the Great Redwood Trail Agency ("GRTA"), a California public agency created under California Government Code Section 93000 et seq., and Blue Lake Rancheria ("BLR"), a federally recognized Indian tribal government located in Humboldt County, California (collectively, the "Parties").

This MOU memorializes the shared values, aligned goals, and collaborative intentions of the Parties and establishes a framework for ongoing government-to-government partnership in connection with the development and stewardship of the Great Redwood Trail within and adjacent to Blue Lake Rancheria's ancestral territory and sphere of influence.

RECITALS

WHEREAS, GRTA, formerly the North Coast Railroad Authority ("NCRA"), is charged by California law with planning, developing, and stewarding the Great Redwood Trail, a multi-use trail corridor along the former Northwestern Pacific Railroad right-of-way through Mendocino, Trinity, and Humboldt counties; and,

WHEREAS, The Great Redwood Trail corridor passes through the ancestral territories of numerous California Native American tribes and tribal communities, and GRTA acknowledges the harmful legacy created by colonization and the historic railroad industry in this region, and is committed to supporting tribal communities in uplifting their connections and relationships to the land through meaningful, compensated collaboration; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria is a federally recognized tribal government located in Humboldt County, California, and has a demonstrated and nationally recognized record of environmental stewardship, ecological restoration, climate resilience, sustainable land management, and economic and workforce development for the benefit of its Tribal members and the surrounding regional community; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria has actively pursued land restoration and carbon sequestration programs — including recent acquisition of wetland and forestland within the Tribe's ancestral territory to enhance environmental sustainability and Tribal sovereignty — and shares GRTA's commitment to protecting, restoring, and stewarding the natural landscape of the North Coast region; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria has established a native plant nursery at Leavey Ranch with the goal of restoring local ecosystems and preserving indigenous plant species, maintaining a locally sourced seed bank of regionally significant native species critical for biodiversity, pollinator support, and climate resilience — plant materials that are ideally suited for habitat restoration activities along the Great Redwood Trail corridor; and,

WHEREAS, GRTA's enabling legislation (Government Code Section 93022(a)) directs GRTA to use the services of conservation organizations for projects related to trails, fishing access, fish passage barrier restoration, and other environmental enhancement, restoration, and improvement projects; and,

WHEREAS, GRTA's adopted "Resolution No. 2025-09 Environmental and Tribal Commitments" directs Agency staff to pursue protecting, preserving, and restoring sensitive natural and cultural resources along the trail corridor; removing environmentally damaging railroad infrastructure; restoring fish passage and ecologically important features; and developing long-term relationships with tribes consistent with the goal of aligning preservation of tribal and cultural resources with implementation of the Great Redwood Trail; and,

WHEREAS, The Great Redwood Trail Master Plan Tribal Recommendations, developed through tribal engagement conducted between Fall 2022 and Summer 2025, identify priority recommendations including early tribal participation in ecological restoration activities, inviting tribes to collaborate on management of trail segments crossing ancestral lands, creating paid stewardship opportunities for holders of tribal knowledge, and exploring contract opportunities to draw on local tribal cultural knowledge relevant to trail planning and implementation; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria's Environmental Programs Department has direct experience leading successful fish passage restoration projects — including removal of a failed bridge structure on Powers Creek, a tributary to the Mad River, in coordination with NOAA Fisheries and other partners — experience that closely aligns with GRTA's commitment to remove fish passage barriers on tributaries crossing GRTA-controlled right-of-way and to implement stream restoration as a part of trail development; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria operates sustainable forestry programs and is actively developing portable sawmill, kiln drying, and associated woodworking operations to advance forest-based workforce development and sustainable timber practices within the region, representing a potential source of locally produced, sustainably harvested timber and wood materials for trail amenities, interpretive structures, and other infrastructure elements of the Great Redwood Trail; and BLR's portable sawmill capabilities are further aligned with GRTA's commitment to salvage, reuse, and repurpose former railroad infrastructure — including timber rail ties, bridge timbers, and other dimensional lumber removed during trail development — by milling such materials on-site or nearby for incorporation into trail design features, furnishings, and structures, thereby reducing waste, honoring the history of the corridor, and advancing circular materials practices; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria supports Indigenous arts, cultural revitalization, and traditional ecological knowledge programs, and tribal members and artisans represent a potential local source for tribally-made interpretive signage, trail art installations, and culturally significant amenities consistent with the Master Plan recommendation to install interpretive signage and tribal artwork developed by local tribal people along the trail; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria shares GRTA's goals of creating meaningful local employment and economic opportunity, and the Tribe has a proven track record of creating jobs across environmental, sustainability, forestry, cultural, and administrative fields — employment opportunities that may be expanded through collaboration on trail stewardship, construction monitoring, guided excursions, maintenance, restoration, and other activities along the Great Redwood Trail corridor; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria's Tribal Education Agency is developing career and technical education pathways for Native youth in agriculture, natural resources, and indigenous land management — programs that, in partnership with GRTA's trail development work, could expand paid internship and apprenticeship opportunities for Tribal youth in trail stewardship, ecological restoration, and sustainable forestry; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria has long demonstrated commitment to building resilient regional partnerships, having partnered with federal, state, and local agencies including the U.S. EPA, NOAA Fisheries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and numerous non-governmental organizations, reflecting the Tribe's capacity and disposition toward effective inter-governmental and public-private collaboration; and,

WHEREAS, As a federally recognized tribal government, Blue Lake Rancheria constitutes a public agency for purposes of intergovernmental cooperation under California Government Code Section 6500 et seq. (the Joint Exercise of Powers Act), and GRTA is authorized to enter into cooperative agreements with other public agencies to jointly exercise common powers and to contract for inter-agency services; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria possesses unique and specialized capabilities — including traditional ecological knowledge related to land stewardship of ancestral lands, proprietary access to locally gathered native seed stocks, holders of traditional ecological knowledge not available from any comparable commercial source, and tribally specific cultural expertise required for interpretive and ceremonial programming; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria is a nationally recognized leader in renewable energy, microgrid technology, and community climate resilience, having been designated a White House Climate Action Champion and having developed and operated a community-scale low-carbon microgrid since 2017 — a system combining 420 kilowatts of solar photovoltaic generation with over 2,000 kilowatt-hours of battery storage and advanced microgrid management systems that allows the Rancheria campus to operate fully islanded from the main utility grid during outages, wildfires, and other emergencies; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria's microgrid has demonstrated the real-world power of solar-plus-storage technology in remote, disaster-prone Northern California — detaching from the regional grid more than 35 times between 2017 and 2022 during wildfires, floods, and utility-initiated outages, providing power for days at a time, maintaining critical communications and IT infrastructure, running an American Red Cross-certified emergency shelter open to all area residents, and helping to save lives by keeping essential medical equipment operational; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria has developed replicable, scalable approaches to off-grid and islanded power — including a second facility-scale microgrid at its fuel station and convenience store designed as a replicable resilience package for small and remote commercial facilities, and its leadership role in the Tribal Energy Resilience and Sovereignty (TERAS) Project, a multi-tribe initiative to build a network of community-owned microgrids across Northern California's rural and mountainous terrain — demonstrating BLR's capacity to design, plan, and help procure off-grid solar-plus-storage power solutions for remote locations beyond its own campus; and,

WHEREAS, The Great Redwood Trail Master Plan community engagement process identified backcountry safety, emergency response, and off-grid communications as key concerns among trail users, law enforcement, and first responders, and GRTA has an emerging need for technically sound, cost-effective solutions to power emergency response devices, communications infrastructure, trail safety stations, and construction and restoration activities in remote, backcountry segments of the trail corridor that are far from the utility grid and subject to the same wildfire-related power outages that have repeatedly affected the North Coast region; and,

WHEREAS, Blue Lake Rancheria's deep operational experience with solar photovoltaic generation, battery energy storage, microgrid controls, load management, and off-grid islanding — combined with its established partnerships with the Schatz Energy Research Center at Cal Poly Humboldt, the Redwood Coast Energy Authority, and leading clean energy technology partners — uniquely positions the Tribe to advise GRTA on off-grid power options for backcountry trail infrastructure, assist in the planning and

procurement of deployable solar-plus-storage systems for remote trail segments, and serve as a long-term technical partner for GRTA's clean energy and climate resilience goals; and,

WHEREAS, A formal partnership between GRTA and Blue Lake Rancheria will advance GRTA's legislative mandate, fulfill the commitments of Resolution No. 2025-09, operationalize the Tribal Recommendations of the Great Redwood Trail Master Plan, and serve the shared goal of creating an ecologically restored, culturally rich, and economically beneficial trail corridor for the benefit of Tribal communities, North Coast residents, and the people of California; and,

NOW THEREFORE, the Parties agree as follows:

Section 1: Purpose and Intent

This MOU establishes the framework for a government-to-government partnership between GRTA and Blue Lake Rancheria, and establishes the intent and nature of the expected cooperation between the two entities in a non-binding document. It is intended to:

- Formalize the shared values and aligned goals of the Parties with respect to the development and stewardship of the Great Redwood Trail in and adjacent to Blue Lake Rancheria's ancestral territory;
- Provide a mutually agreed framework supporting direct, tribally-led service contracts and goods procurement agreements between GRTA and BLR, consistent with applicable law;
- Guide the Parties' ongoing collaboration on trail development, ecological restoration, cultural resource protection, fish passage restoration, sustainable forestry, workforce development, and other matters of shared interest; and
- Affirm GRTA's commitment to honoring Blue Lake Rancheria's cultural sovereignty, ancestral connections, and stewardship expertise in furtherance of the Great Redwood Trail's development.

Section 2: Shared Values and Guiding Principles

The Parties affirm the following shared values as the foundation of this partnership:

- Respect for Tribal sovereignty and Blue Lake Rancheria's ancestral connection to, and stewardship expertise in, the landscapes of the North Coast;
- Commitment to protecting, preserving, and restoring sensitive natural and cultural resources along the Great Redwood Trail corridor;
- Recognition that the creation of the Great Redwood Trail presents an opportunity for significant environmental restoration, including the removal of dilapidated railroad infrastructure, fish passage barrier removal, native plant restoration, and ecosystem rehabilitation;
- Belief that meaningful economic opportunity and compensated employment for BLR tribal members — including youth — is a core goal of this partnership; and
- Commitment to maintaining the highest degree of confidentiality with respect to sensitive tribal cultural and natural resource information shared between the Parties, within the bounds of applicable law.

Section 3: Areas of Collaboration

Subject to the availability of funding and the negotiation of separate written agreements or contracts for each activity, the Parties intend to collaborate in the following areas:

3.1 Native Plant Materials and Seed Stock

GRTA intends to procure native plant materials — including locally gathered and propagated seed stock, container plants, and plant material from Blue Lake Rancheria's native plant nursery at Leavey Ranch — for use in revegetation, habitat restoration, and erosion control along the Great Redwood Trail corridor. The Parties will negotiate direct procurement agreements for such materials, recognizing that BLR's locally sourced, ancestrally appropriate seed stock is not available from any comparable commercial source.

3.2 Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) Services

GRTA will engage Blue Lake Rancheria's tribal knowledge holders for traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) services in support of trail planning and environmental restoration activities, including:

- Consultation and field assessment;
- Cultural plant surveys and identification of species significant to tribal practices;
- Ecological restoration guidance for trail corridor segments within BLR's ancestral sphere; and
- Culturally mindful land stewardship recommendations and implementation support.

3.3 Fish Passage Restoration and Stream Assessment

Drawing on Blue Lake Rancheria's Environmental Programs Department's demonstrated experience in fish passage restoration — including the removal of a failed bridge structure on Powers Creek in coordination with NOAA Fisheries — GRTA will pursue direct contracts with BLR for fish passage and stream restoration services along GRTA-controlled right-of-way, including:

- Field reconnaissance and site assessment for fish barrier removal locations on tributaries crossing GRTA property;
- Project monitoring and construction oversight for barrier removal and stream restoration activities; and
- Coordination with state and federal partners including NOAA Fisheries and California Department of Fish and Wildlife on fish passage restoration projects in the Eel River watershed.

3.4 Sustainable Forestry Products and Milled Wood Materials

GRTA will explore the procurement of sustainably harvested timber and milled wood materials produced through Blue Lake Rancheria's forestry and sawmill operations for use in trail amenities, signage structures, bridges, and other trail infrastructure elements. Such materials represent locally sourced, tribally produced goods consistent with GRTA's commitment to environmentally responsible trail development.

Additionally, BLR's portable sawmill operations are uniquely suited to support GRTA's goal of salvaging, reusing, and repurposing former railroad infrastructure removed during trail development. Timber rail ties, bridge timbers, trestle members, and other dimensional lumber displaced in the course of trail construction represent a significant material resource that, where structurally appropriate and consistent with good design practice, GRTA intends to reintegrate into the trail corridor as benches, interpretive features, retaining elements, signage posts, and other trail furnishings and structures. BLR's portable sawmill can be deployed to corridor locations to mill salvaged railroad materials on-site or nearby, reducing hauling costs, minimizing waste, creating a distinctive and historically connected material palette for the trail, and generating paid work for tribal members skilled in milling and woodworking.

3.5 Interpretive Signage, Tribal Artwork, and Cultural Installations

The Parties will collaborate to develop tribally designed and produced interpretive signage, artwork, cultural installations, and wayfinding elements for placement along the Great Redwood Trail, consistent with the Master Plan Tribal Recommendation to install interpretive signage and tribal artwork developed

by local tribal people. Blue Lake Rancheria tribal artists and cultural practitioners will be engaged through direct paid contracts for such work.

3.6 Trail Stewardship, Patrol, Monitoring, and Maintenance

GRTA will pursue direct stewardship contracts with Blue Lake Rancheria for trail stewardship, patrol, monitoring, and maintenance services performed by tribal members and tribal staff on segments of the Great Redwood Trail within or adjacent to BLR's ancestral territory. Blue Lake Rancheria intends these contracts to create meaningful, ongoing employment and economic opportunity for Blue Lake Rancheria tribal members.

3.7 Cultural Resource Monitoring

GRTA will engage Blue Lake Rancheria for cultural resource monitoring services during trail construction and ground-disturbing activities on segments of the trail corridor within or adjacent to Blue Lake Rancheria's ancestral territory. The Parties will negotiate a separate Cultural Resource Monitoring Agreement (CRMA) to govern the scope, terms, and compensation for such services.

3.8 Tribal Advisory Committee

Consistent with the direction of GRTA's Resolution No. 2025-09, GRTA will engage Blue Lake Rancheria as a participant in the development of the proposed Tribal Advisory Committee. GRTA is committed to ensuring that the Committee's structure, compensation framework, and scope of work reflect meaningful, compensated tribal participation in trail governance and planning.

3.9 Workforce and Youth Employment Development

The Parties will explore the creation of paid internship, apprenticeship, and employment pathways, including for BLR tribal members and tribal youth, in connection with Great Redwood Trail development activities, such as ecological restoration, trail maintenance, cultural resource monitoring, and sustainable forestry, in alignment with Blue Lake Rancheria's Tribal Education Agency workforce development goals.

3.10 Renewable Energy, Off-Grid Power, and Climate Resilience Advisory Services

Blue Lake Rancheria is recognized nationally as a leader in community microgrid development, solar-plus-storage technology, and climate resilience, having operated a community-scale microgrid since 2017 and served as the pilot site and lead tribal partner for the Tribal Energy Resilience and Sovereignty (TERAS) initiative — a multi-tribe, multi-agency effort to deploy a network of community-owned microgrids across remote and rural Northern California. BLR's microgrid has demonstrated the ability to operate fully independently from the utility grid through wildfires, floods, and extended outages, maintaining power to critical infrastructure, emergency services, communications systems, and an American Red Cross-certified shelter.

The Great Redwood Trail Master Plan community engagement process identified safety, emergency response, and off-grid communications in remote backcountry trail segments as key concerns. The trail corridor includes long stretches of remote, roadless, and wildfire-prone terrain far from the utility grid where conventional power sources are unavailable for emergency response devices, trail safety infrastructure, communications equipment, and construction and restoration activities.

The Parties will collaborate on the following activities related to renewable energy and off-grid power solutions for the Great Redwood Trail corridor:

- Blue Lake Rancheria will provide advisory services to GRTA on technically sound, cost-effective options for powering off-grid trail infrastructure — including emergency call stations, communications repeaters, trail safety devices, ranger stations, and lighting — using solar

photovoltaic generation, battery energy storage, and deployable microgrid or islanded power systems appropriate for remote backcountry environments;

- BLR will assist GRTA in developing specifications and scopes of work for off-grid solar-plus-storage systems at identified backcountry locations, drawing on BLR's operational experience with microgrid management, load prioritization, and system sizing for emergency and critical-load applications;
- BLR will support GRTA in the planning and procurement of deployable solar-plus-storage power solutions to support construction, environmental restoration, and emergency response activities in remote segments of the trail corridor where grid power is unavailable;
- The Parties will explore joint grant applications and funding opportunities — including through the California Energy Commission, California Public Utilities Commission, U.S. Department of Energy, and other climate resilience and rural energy programs — to support the development of off-grid energy infrastructure along the Great Redwood Trail corridor; and
- The Parties will explore how BLR's established partnerships with the Schatz Energy Research Center at Cal Poly Humboldt, the Redwood Coast Energy Authority, and clean energy technology partners could be leveraged to support GRTA's backcountry energy and communications resilience goals.

GRTA recognizes that Blue Lake Rancheria's combination of demonstrated operational expertise, established technical partnerships, and commitment to replicable clean energy solutions makes BLR uniquely positioned to serve as GRTA's technical advisor and direct contractor for off-grid energy planning and procurement along the trail corridor.

Section 4: Communication and Coordination

The Parties shall designate primary points of contact responsible for day-to-day communication and coordination under this MOU. The Parties commit to regular communication to discuss the status of ongoing and anticipated collaborative activities, contract opportunities, and any issues that arise in the course of the partnership.

GRTA's primary point of contact:

Elaine Hogan, GRTA Executive Director | elaine@thegreatredwoodtrail.org | (707) 463-3280

BLR's primary point of contact:

[BLR Designee Name, Title, Email, Phone — to be completed by Blue Lake Rancheria upon execution]

SIGNATURES

The undersigned, being duly authorized representatives of their respective entities, hereby agree to the terms of this Memorandum of Understanding.

FOR GREAT REDWOOD TRAIL AGENCY:

Elaine Hogan, Executive Director

Date

FOR BLUE LAKE RANCHERIA:

[Authorized Signatory Name, Title]

Date