

Exhibit 2: June 25, 2001 Staff Recommendation

PARADISE CREEK ENHANCEMENT PLAN

Agenda Item XXVIII.

June 25, 2001

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Project Summary
June 25, 2001

PARADISE CREEK ENHANCEMENT PLAN

File No. 98-035
Project Manager: Deborah Ruddock

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Approval of the Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan, authorization to disburse up to \$700,000 to the City of National City for implementation of the resource enhancement elements of the Plan, and adoption of the mitigation monitoring program for the project.

LOCATION: National City, San Diego County (Exhibits 1 and 2)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

ESTIMATED COST: Coastal Conservancy

Resource enhancement elements	\$ 700,000
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Source: FY 98/99 specific appropriation for
Paradise Creek Enhancement (General Fund).

City of National City

Recreational park elements	300,000
City land transfer to park use	200,000
Volunteer program coordinator time	12,000
City staff time	<u>5,000</u>

TOTAL	\$ 1,217,000
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PROJECT SUMMARY: Paradise Creek is a major drainage into south San Diego Bay, with a watershed extending through the most densely populated area of San Diego County east to the surrounding mountains. The site of the proposed project is the lower reach of the creek, a remnant of the substantial tidal marsh (Paradise Marsh) that existed prior to urbanization. The project would provide a variety of measures to restore the biological productivity of a one-half mile length of the creek located approximately one mile from the San Diego Bay shoreline. The subject area was previously channelized and is currently substantially degraded, sub-

ject to uncontrolled urban runoff and soil erosion, invaded by exotic plant species, and lacking in either recreational or visual amenities.

The City of National City has recently completed the Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan (Exhibit 3), supported in part by a grant from the Conservancy. The Enhancement Plan has as its centerpiece the restoration of a portion of Paradise Creek located adjacent to Kimball Elementary School and a community park. The proposed Paradise Creek Educational Park includes enhanced and expanded coastal salt marsh habitat in this stretch of the creek, integrated with a nature education facility and a pedestrian corridor. The proposed project is a culmination of six years of community enthusiasm and volunteer effort, supported by \$50,000 in prior Coastal Conservancy funding and grants from a variety of public agencies and nonprofits.

While the project site is located outside the Coastal Zone, the Paradise Creek project is intended to enhance coastal resources by restoration of degraded southern coastal salt marsh and creation of new wetland communities that can treat runoff on the way to the coastal zone less than a mile downstream. The impaired water quality and degraded channel conditions in Paradise Creek have been identified as factors contributing to declining biological productivity of the remaining Paradise Marsh.

The estimated implementation cost for all elements of the Enhancement Plan is \$1,217,000. Staff recommends that the Conservancy contribute \$700,000 for carrying out resource enhancement measures, from a specific appropriation to the Conservancy for Paradise Creek. The City and volunteer assistance would contribute the balance of the project costs.

The Paradise Creek project enjoys support from a broad spectrum of interests. Former Assemblymember Denise Ducheny was instrumental in obtaining the FY 1998/99 appropriation from the General Fund for Paradise Creek enhancement. The City Council of the City of National City unanimously approved the Enhancement Plan in December 2000. Letters of support (Exhibit 5) have been received from District 79 Assemblyman Juan Vargas and the San Diego Bay Council, a consortium of area environmental groups including the San Diego Chapter of Sierra Club, San Diego Chapter Audubon Society, San Diego BayKeeper, Environmental Health Coalition, San Diego Surfrider Foundation, and Surfers Tired of Pollution.

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

June 25, 2001

PARADISE CREEK ENHANCEMENT PLAN

File No. 98-035

Project Manager: Deborah Ruddock

STAFF

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following Resolution pursuant to Sections 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby approves the Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan, authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed seven hundred thousand dollars (\$700,000) to the City of National City (the City) for implementation of the resource enhancement elements of the Plan (as shown on Exhibit 4 of the accompanying staff recommendation), and further adopts the mitigation monitoring program attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 9, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any funds, the City shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
 - a. A detailed final work program, schedule and budget for the project covering construction, monitoring and maintenance;
 - b. Documentation that it has obtained all necessary permits and approvals; and
 - c. The names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed for plan implementation;
2. The City shall manage and operate the property for the lifetime of the improvements, but in no case less than a period of 20 years; and
3. The City shall ensure that the mitigation measures identified in the City’s Negative Declaration are fully incorporated into the project, as identified in the Mitigation Monitoring Program, attached as Exhibit 9.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. Approval of the Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan and implementation of its resource enhancement elements are consistent with the purposes and criteria set forth in Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-31270) regarding the enhancement of coastal resources;
2. Implementation of the resource enhancement elements of the Plan is consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001;
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed the Negative Declaration prepared by and adopted on December 12, 2000, by the City of National City, attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 6, and finds that there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382;
4. The Conservancy has on the basis of substantial evidence rebutted the presumption of adverse effect contained in California Code of Regulations Section 753.5(d) regarding the potential for adverse effect on wildlife resources as defined under California Fish and Game Code Section 711.2; and
5. There is no substantial evidence before the Conservancy that the project will have a potentially adverse effect either individually or cumulatively, on wildlife resources as defined under California Code of Regulations Section 753.5(d) regarding the potential for adverse effect on wildlife resources as defined under California Fish and Game Code Section 711.2.”

STAFF DISCUSSION:

Project Description: The authorization being recommended by staff has three components: (1) approval of the Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan; (2) implementation of the resource enhancement elements of the Plan (Exhibit 4); and (3) adoption of the mitigation and monitoring program (Exhibit 9).

Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan

The goal of the Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan (Exhibit 3) is to provide a vision and planning framework that will help guide the long-term planning and design efforts for Paradise Creek Educational Park. The four-acre site proposed for the park is situated along 1,500 feet of Paradise Creek in the heart of an industrial area and includes a portion of City public works yard, the creek bed and upland areas. It is located approximately one mile west of the creek's terminus in San Diego Bay. The City of National City owns the entire property, all of which is proposed to be open and accessible to the public.

Enhancement Plan objectives, developed with broad community input, include:

- (1) restoring degraded southern coastal salt marsh habitat to viable functioning;
- (2) protecting sensitive plants and wildlife; and
- (3) expanding nature/science education opportunities for students of the neighboring elementary school and the surrounding community.

To achieve these objectives, the Plan calls for creation of the Paradise Creek Educational Park. Resource enhancement elements include:

- (1) restoration and construction of wetland and upland communities in this part of Paradise Creek;
- (2) construction of an Outdoor Learning Lab located adjacent to the Kimball Elementary School; and
- (3) construction of an interpretive trail system.

The plan also includes a "recreational park" with turf play area, picnic tables and playground equipment.

Implementation of resource enhancement elements of the plan

Staff is recommending that the Conservancy fund implementation of the resource enhancement measures in the Plan (Exhibit 4). The City will be responsible for funding and managing all "recreational park" improvements and any improvements/management measures involving portions of the project site currently dedicated to public works yard activities and storage.

The resource enhancement measures include the following:

- *Restoration* of approximately 0.07 acres of southern coastal salt marsh habitat and creation of another 0.06 acres. These measures will enhance wetland hydrology, improve downstream water quality, and provide a higher quality habitat for migratory and resident birds and sensitive wetland plants. Structural Best Management Practices will be employed to filter storm water. The created wetland will require excavation and dredging to an elevation appropriate to root and support wetland plant species. Grading will be employed to create a gradual slope supportive of middle and upper marsh habitats. Native vegetation and soils disturbed during excavation will be salvaged under consultation with the Fish and Game Department. Invasive and exotic plant species in the marsh and upland areas will be removed and replaced.
- *The Learning Lab*, located adjacent to the created wetland area, will accommodate students, residents, and visitors for the purpose of science and nature study. The Lab will feature a partially covered amphitheater, raised boardwalk, and observation decks.
- The *trail system* will replace existing informal paths and provide connections to educational and observation areas while minimizing impacts to natural resources. It will include ADA-compliant elevated and at-grade boardwalks with low-impact security lighting, decomposed granite paths, and informal seating areas. Interpretive signage will be installed throughout the park, providing information about the park, the creek and watershed, salt marsh ecology, and plant and wildlife. Signage will be in English, Spanish, Tagalog, and Braille. Creek undergrounding and roadway crossings to the west of the project site prevent creation of continuous trail access to the ocean.
- *A qualified biologist will perform monitoring of the enhanced and created wetlands* for five years, or until success criteria are met, and the Army Corps of Engineers and the Fish and Game Department grant approvals. Maintenance activities will include weed control, replacement of dead or damaged plants, trash removal, and adjustments to hydrology and topography as needed to improve wetland function.

Project Financing: The Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan projects a construction budget of \$1,000,000 for the Educational Park (Exhibit 7). Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize expenditures

for the plan’s resource enhancement elements to a maximum of \$700,000, the amount of the FY 1998/99 state general fund allocation. The allocation for resource enhancement project elements would cover the costs for site preparation and grading of the wetland areas, Learning Lab and trail system; wetland planting; construction of the Learning Lab amphitheater and associated trail system; fabrication and installation of interpretive signage; and six of the 13 planned parking spaces.

The City will be responsible for funding implementation of the “recreational park,” including rehabilitation and enhancement of the existing community park and site preparation, construction, and management measures planned for the 1.5 acres of the project area currently used for public works functions. The City will also be responsible for funding emergency vehicle access, entry design amenities such as planting and irrigation, and seven of the 13 new parking spaces needed to accommodate recreational park visitors.

Project Financing: Coastal Conservancy

Resource enhancement elements	\$ 700,000
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Source: FY 98/99 specific appropriation for Paradise Creek Enhancement (General Fund).

City of National City

Recreational park elements	300,000
City land transfer to park use	200,000
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City staff time	<u>5,000</u>

TOTAL	\$ 1,217,000
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(The Conservancy previously provided \$50,000 for preparation of the Enhancement Plan, attached as Exhibit 3)

Site Description: Paradise Creek runs through the Rancho de La Nación, called National City since 1887, and terminates at San Diego Bay approximately one mile west of the project site and about ¼ mile north of the Sweetwater River (Exhibit 1). It serves as the drainage for a 1,190-acre watershed.

The project area comprises four acres adjacent to a 1,500-foot reach of Paradise Creek in the vicinity of Kimball Elementary School, outside of the Coastal Zone. The site includes an existing city park, the creek bed and shore areas and will incorporate approximately 1-1/2 acres of the City’s public works yard.

A mix of single-family residential, office, and industrial land uses characterizes the area.

The reach of the creek in the project area is a small remnant of the historic inland extent of Paradise Marsh. Southern coastal salt marsh forms a band of up to 20 feet along either side of the creek. Open water is found within the central channel of the creek. Adjacent land uses, point- and non-point source pollution, and invasive and exotic species have degraded the habitats in the area. Yet healthy stands of cordgrass, pickleweed, and other wetland plants grow in and along the water's edge, and the creek hosts a variety of birds including great blue heron, common egret, black phoebe, and willet. No listed animal species have been identified.

Project History: Beginning in the 1950s, undergrounding and channelizing reduced the hydrological and ecological functioning of Paradise Creek and associated wetlands. Increasing urban development and accompanying uncontrolled runoff, as well as the dumping of debris such as tires, mattresses, and trash have further degraded habitats.

As a result of the leadership of Kimball Elementary School teacher Margaret Godshalk and her husband Ted, a City Planning Commissioner, the future of Paradise Creek has begun looking brighter (Exhibit 8). In addition to conducting routine cleanups of the area, Mrs. and Mr. Godshalk, students, teachers, and neighborhood activists successfully opposed construction of a road across the creek and persuaded the City to fund a 1996 conceptual master plan for Paradise Creek Educational Park. The Rivers and Trails Assistance Program of the National Park Service assisted in master plan preparation. This plan evolved into the current Enhancement Plan, paid for with a 1998 Coastal Conservancy grant of \$50,000 and approved by the City Council in December 2000.

City grant applications to the National Park Service, County of San Diego, and San Diego Unified Port District have resulted in funding for planning and outreach, creek cleanup, and science study. In addition, the community based nonprofit Paradise Creek Educational Park Inc. has been formed to provide environmental education programs for the students of the National School District and the people of National City and the region, as well as visitors. Interim enhancement and science education uses are underway, including cooperative efforts with San Diego BayKeeper.

Supporters have begun identifying and evaluating funding sources for local water quality initiatives that may further contribute to the health of the creek. A thornier long-term issue will be creating continuous public access along the one mile of creek from the project site to San Diego Bay. This will involve designing and constructing an access way under eight lanes of I-5 underpass to physically link the upstream and downstream sections of Paradise Creek.

PROJECT SUPPORT: Former Assemblymember Denise Ducheny was instrumental in obtaining the FY 98/99 appropriation from the General Fund for Paradise Creek enhancement. The City Council of the City of National City unanimously approved the enhancement plan in December 2000. Letters of support (Exhibit 5) have been received from District 79 Assemblyman Juan Vargas and the San Diego Bay Council, a consortium of area environmental groups including the San Diego Chapter of Sierra Club, San Diego Chapter Audubon Society, San Diego BayKeeper, Environmental Health Coalition, San Diego Surfrider Foundation, and Surfers Tired of Pollution.

**CONSISTENCY WITH
CONSERVANCY'S
ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code pertaining to coastal resource enhancement. The authorization will assist the Conservancy in meeting requirements under sections 31251-31270 by facilitating the enhancement of creek-associated wetland resources, as well as creation of new coastal wetland habitat, in a stretch of Paradise Creek in close proximity to coastal waters.

Public Resources Code Section 31251.2 authorizes Coastal Conservancy participation in projects to enhance a resource that is partly outside of the coastal zone, where such action protects or enhances coastal resources within the coastal zone. The project area is outside the Coastal Zone, but addresses enhancement of coastal salt marsh habitat both within the project area and in the Coastal Zone. Poor water quality related to storm water and urban runoff adversely impacts coast zone resources. Watershed urbanization and channelization reduce habitat values. Degraded habitat and loss of habitat intensify pressure on other habitat zones, creating a web of negative impacts that is complex, costly, and increasingly resistant to being unraveled. The project is intended to address all of these problems.

The proposed project is intended to accomplish the enhancement of coastal resources by the restoration of degraded southern coastal salt marsh along an urban stretch of Paradise Creek and creation of new wetland communities that can treat runoff on the way to the coastal zone. These activities will multiply the effectiveness of the San Diego Unified Port District's Paradise Marsh mitigations for its marina project, located a short distance downstream of the site. National City is currently building a new road along the marsh that includes a pedestrian and bike path with a connection to the San Diego Bayshore Bikepath. The nonprofit Paradise Creek Educational Park, Inc. will be working with the City, the District, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop viewpoints and interpretive signage overlooking the marsh. The goal is creation of continuity in the look and message in the signs from the Bay and Refuge up into the watershed of Paradise Creek.

Consistent with Section 31251, the proposed grant is to a local public agency. Consistent with Section 31251.2a, the City of National City has jurisdiction over the subject reach of Paradise Creek and has requested Conservancy assistance.

The City of National City's Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan for the project area, consistent with Section 31252, identifies the need for marsh enhancement and creation

Public Resources Code Section 31253 provides that the Conservancy "may provide up to the total cost of any coastal resource enhancement project. . . ." Staff is recommending that the Conservancy provide funding to cover the full capital costs of natural resource enhancement improvements.

CONSISTENCY WITH
CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION
CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

Promotion of the Conservancy's Statutory Programs and Purposes: The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code pertaining to coastal resource enhancement. The authorization will assist the Conservancy in meeting requirements under Sections 31251-31270 by facilitating the enhancement of creek-associated wetland resources, as well as creation of new coastal wetland habi-

tat, in a stretch of Paradise Creek in close proximity to coastal waters.

Consistency with Purposes of the Funding Source: Funding will be provided from the FY 1998/99 General Fund allocation for Paradise Creek.

Support: The history of this project is characterized by steadily increasing support from community interests, government and environmental organizations. The City Council of National City in December 2000 unanimously adopted the Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan and a mitigated negative declaration for the project. The National Park Service, County of San Diego, San Diego Unified Port District, and San Diego BayKeeper have lent financial and volunteer support. The non-profit Paradise Creek Educational Park, Inc. has been formed and has committed itself to a leadership role in implementation of the enhancement plan. Letters of support are included in Exhibit 5.

Location: The project site is located in National City approximately one mile from Paradise Creek's terminus in San Diego Bay (Exhibits 1 and 2). While the project would be situated outside of the coastal zone, it will address habitat and water quality issues which impact coastal resources and add to the effectiveness of existing and planned Port District enhancement projects downstream of the site.

Need: National City is the most densely populated area in San Diego County. Urban development pressures and activities have resulted in the channelization of Paradise Creek and increased point- and non-point source pollution of creek waters. The result has been degradation of natural plant communities that support wildlife and filter and absorb runoff and a concomitant reduction in downstream (Paradise Marsh, Pacific Ocean) water quality. The Paradise Creek Educational Park can begin to address these issues. The City does not have the funds necessary to carry the costs of implementing the plan's natural resource component.

Greater-than-local interest: Enhancement of Paradise Creek and development of the educational park will serve as a model for protection and integration of creek habitat into an urban area. In addition to serving the needs of neighboring Kimball Elementary School, the Learning Lab will be available for use by other schools and organizations in National City and from surrounding communities.

Additional Criteria:

Urgency: Funds for this project must be encumbered before the end of the current fiscal year as the source of the funds is a FY 1998/99 General Fund appropriation for Paradise Creek enhancement.

Readiness: The City Council of National City adopted a resolution in December 2000 approving the enhancement plan. Development of a construction timeline also is underway, indicating their eagerness to proceed.

Realization of prior Conservancy goals: The proposed project is the culmination of six years of community enthusiasm and volunteer effort (see "Project History"), supported by \$50,000 prior Coastal Conservancy funding for development of the Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan.

Cooperation: The City of National City will contribute \$512,000 in cash, staff time, and in-kind contributions to the project.

CONSISTENCY WITH
THE COASTAL ACT:

The Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan is consistent with the California Coastal Act (Public Resources Code Sections 30000 *et seq.*). In particular, the project is consistent with Section 30231 in that the wetlands restoration and creation is intended to enhance biological productivity and water quality in the vicinity of the project with downstream benefits for Paradise Marsh and San Diego Bay.

COMPLIANCE

WITH CEQA:

The City Council of National City adopted a mitigated negative declaration (Exhibit 6) for the Paradise Creek Educational Park in December 2000.

The City received only two responses during the public comment period and addressed all comments in the Negative Declaration. The City identified possible significant effects, including temporary construction impacts on the existing wetland area and grading impacts pursuant to creation of the new wetland area; demands on public services; and increased traffic. Mitigation is identified to reduce these effects to a level of insignificance.

The City did not, however, adopt a mitigation monitoring program for the mitigation of significant effects identified in the Negative Declaration. Staff has prepared a mitigation monitoring program for the project, attached as Exhibit 9 and recom-

mends that the Conservancy adopt this program to ensure that the mitigation measures are implemented.

Staff has independently reviewed the City's mitigated negative declaration and concurs that the project, as mitigated, will not have a significant adverse impact on the environment. Staff recommends, therefore, that the Conservancy find that the project, as mitigated, will not have a significant effect on the environment as defined in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382. Staff also recommends that the Conservancy find that the project does not have the potential for an adverse impact on fish and wildlife resources as defined under California Fish and Game Code Section 711.2.

Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination for the project.

EXHIBIT 3

Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan

Distributed to Board Members only

EXHIBIT 5
Letters of Support

EXHIBIT 6
Negative Declaration

EXHIBIT 7

Construction Budget

EXHIBIT 9

Mitigation and Monitoring Program

PARADISE CREEK ENHANCEMENT PLAN

Agenda Item XXVIII.

June 25, 2001

EXHIBIT 3

Paradise Creek Enhancement Plan