

Exhibit 2: August 14, 2003 Staff Recommendation

LOWER ROSE CREEK WATERSHED ASSESSMENT

Agenda Item 10.

August 14, 2003

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
August 14, 2003

LOWER ROSE CREEK WATERSHED ASSESSMENT

File No. 03-039
Project Manager: Christopher Kroll

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$200,000 to San Diego EarthWorks for preparation of an assessment of existing conditions and opportunities and constraints for habitat protection, habitat restoration, and public access improvements in lower Rose Creek watershed.

LOCATION: Rose Creek watershed, including Rose Canyon and San Clemente Canyon (between Interstate 805 and Mission Bay), City of San Diego, San Diego County (Exhibits 1 and 2)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

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 authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) to San Diego EarthWorks (also known as San Diego Earth Day) for preparation of the Lower Rose Creek Watershed Assessment, subject to the condition that, prior to the disbursement of any funds, San Diego EarthWorks shall submit for the review and written approval of the Conservancy’s Executive Officer a work program, including scope of work, budget and schedule, and the names of any contractors it intends to use to prepare the plan.”

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. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and criteria of Chapter 6 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-31270) regarding the enhancement of coastal resources.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.

3. San Diego Earth Day (also known as San Diego EarthWorks) is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U. S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

The proposed project would provide a grant of \$200,000 to San Diego EarthWorks (also known as San Diego Earth Day) to prepare an assessment of the natural resources of the Rose Creek watershed between the Marine Corps Air Station at Miramar (MCAS Miramar) and Mission Bay. The Rose Creek watershed is a coastal watershed which drains to Mission Bay and includes Rose Creek, San Clemente Creek, and their associated canyons. Preparation of a plan for Rose Creek is a Tier 2 project on the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (WRP) Work Plan. The proposed assessment would be the first phase in preparing an enhancement plan for the watershed. The proposed assessment would focus on the lower watershed below MCAS Miramar as the Marine Corps has a separate planning effort underway for protecting natural resources within the air station.

The Rose Creek watershed is one of the largest watersheds draining into Mission Bay and serves as a wildlife corridor between the foothills south of Poway and Mission Bay. The watershed is a major contributor of pollutants, including bacteria, to the bay. Mission Bay has a history of “contaminated water” postings as a result of high bacteria levels that exceed state water quality standards. This problem is attributed to sanitary sewer overflows, poor tidal flushing in East Mission Bay, and urban runoff. The water quality problems have continued in spite of the City of San Diego’s attempts to improve water quality in Mission Bay. Heal the Bay, a Santa Monica-based environmental organization, gave the Campland beach at the mouth of Rose Creek an “F” grade in its 2002-2003 Beach Report Card based on poor water quality. The watershed itself suffers from a number of problems other than poor water quality including habitat fragmentation, invasive plant species, homeless encampments, creek channelization, and development encroachments into the canyon.

Rose Creek and San Clemente Creek, the two largest streams in the watershed, both flow through large coastal canyons. There are approximately 40 canyons in the City of San Diego. These canyons have all been impacted by development as the City has grown around them but they still provide important habitat for many native plants and animals and maintain fragments of native plant communities in areas where this habitat has otherwise been lost to development. The City recognizes the importance of the canyons both as habitat and open space. Community concern about the canyons is also growing and several neighborhood groups have formed in the last ten years to protect the canyons.

The Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA) of the City of San Diego’s Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Subarea Plan specifically includes “urban habitat lands,” which largely consist of canyons with native habitat. The intent of the MSCP is preservation of a network of habitat and open space, and protection of biodiversity in southwestern San Diego County. The City has identified biological resource areas for conservation. Mission Bay Park, Rose Canyon Open Space Park, and Marian Bear Memorial Park (the City’s open space parks in the Rose Creek watershed) are specifically included in the

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MHPA. Several sections of Rose Creek are not, however, included within these designated open space areas. Mission Bay Park and Marian Bear Memorial Park both have Natural Resource Management Plans (NRMP) to govern management of the areas consistent with the goals of the MHPA and Subarea Plan. Rose Canyon Open Space Park does not. The proposed watershed assessment would help the City prepare the NRMP for Rose Canyon Open Space Park and may provide additional resource information for the City's Mission Bay Park and Marian Bear Memorial Park NRMPs.

The major elements of the proposed watershed assessment would be:

- 1) Compilation of existing information about the watershed (below MCAS Miramar) and identification of gaps in information;
- 2) Identification of current management practices in the watershed;
- 3) Analysis of the general hydrology of the watershed;
- 4) Mapping of exotic plant species;
- 5) Identification of habitat restoration opportunities; and
- 6) Identification of public access/trail opportunities.

No comprehensive analysis of the natural resources of the watershed has been done and this information is necessary to plan for habitat protection and restoration. The City of San Diego has shown a high level of commitment to the protection and enhancement of its urban canyons and creeks. However, because of budget constraints, the development of management plans and the implementation of enhancement plans have been only incremental. The proposed watershed assessment would be the first phase of a larger planning process for protection and restoration of the watershed. Planning efforts could be coordinated with MCAS Miramar's planning for the upper watershed as well with the Mission Bay and Marian Bear Memorial Park management plans.

San Diego EarthWorks (SDEW), a nonprofit organization, would undertake the project in partnership with the City of San Diego. As the Rose Creek watershed crosses several city departmental jurisdictions, no one city department was able to oversee the watershed assessment effort. Accordingly, the City has requested that SDEW take the lead role on this planning effort, and both parties have agreed to the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that defines the roles and participation of both entities in the project. The City will be represented by at least three departments: Park and Recreation, Storm Water Pollution Prevention Program, and Real Estate Assets. A technical advisory committee would be set up to monitor and provide input to the project.

SDEW's mission is to increase public awareness of environmental issues and undertake projects to protect and restore the natural environment. SDEW's work is focused on the San Diego area, especially the City of San Diego. Since 1995, SDEW has organized several restoration projects (removal of non-native vegetation and debris, planting of native vegetation) in areas such as Mission Trails Regional Park, Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge, San Dieguito River Park, Rose Canyon, Torrey Pines State Reserve, Sherman Heights, and Florida Canyon in Balboa Park.

Site Description: The 26,126-acre Rose Creek watershed lies entirely within the City of San Diego and extends 27 miles from Poway to Mission Bay. The watershed is part of

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the Miramar Hydrologic Unit. The watershed includes all or parts of the following communities: Scripps Ranch, University Town Center, Kearney Mesa, La Jolla, University City, Clairemont, Pacific Beach, and Mission Bay. The upper watershed is located within MCAS Miramar and would not be included in the proposed assessment as the Marine Corps has its own Natural Resource Management Plan for the area within the air station. The lower watershed (below MCAS Miramar), which is the subject of the proposed project, contains three City of San Diego parks: Rose Canyon Open Space Park, Marian Bear Memorial Park, and Mission Bay Park.

The watershed has several plant communities, most of which are limited to the canyons, and include: Diegan coastal sage, southern mixed chaparral, southern sycamore/alder riparian woodland, southern willow scrub, arroyo willow riparian forest, and coastal oak woodland.

Project History: The Nature School, a local nonprofit organization, completed the Rose Creek Canyon Enhancement Plan for a portion of the proposed study area (between the Interstate-5 bridge and Grand Avenue) in 2000. The Nature School has received funding from the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board to begin implementing some of the recommendations of the plan.

In 2001, at his first State of the City address, Mayor Dick Murphy outlined ten goals to make the City of San Diego a “City Worthy of Our Affection.” Goal number four, “Clean up Our Beaches and Bays”, called for the reduction of beach postings and closures by fifty percent by 2004. Mission Bay became the focal point for meeting this goal as over half of the postings had occurred in Mission Bay. In early 2002, the Mission Bay Water Quality Management Plan was created and is being implemented by the City’s Storm Water Pollution Prevention Program. At this time, seven projects are included in the Plan. One project, the Rose and Tecolote Creeks Water Quality Improvement Project, proposes various treatment controls to protect the water quality in the two creeks. The draft Rose and Tecolote Creeks Water Quality Improvements Project Plan was completed in 2002.

In 2000, The Nature School submitted a proposal to the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (WRP) for funding for an enhancement plan for an area of Rose Creek between Interstate 5 and Grand Avenue. The WRP Board of Governors added Rose Creek to the work plan in June 2000.

San Diego EarthWorks, working with the Sierra Club, has recently begun a campaign for protection of San Diego’s canyons. A new advocacy group, Friends of Rose Canyon, was recently established. With The Nature School focused on the lower portion of the creek and the City’s efforts in the watershed focused on water quality improvement, SDEW sees the need for a broader resource protection planning effort looking at a larger area of the watershed.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$200,000
City of San Diego	<u>82,300</u>
Total Project Cost:	\$282,300

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The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Fund (Proposition 40). Preparation of the proposed assessment is consistent with this funding source. Proposition 40 allows funds to be used for restoring land and water resources in accordance with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy's enabling legislation. In addition, consistent with Proposition 40, Conservancy funding would be matched by monies from other sources.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251 *et seq.*) provides for the Coastal Conservancy's participation in a program of coastal resource enhancement. The proposed authorization will assist the Conservancy in meeting the purposes and objectives of Chapter 6 by facilitating the watershed assessment, which is a necessary first step towards enhancement of the wetland resources of the lower Rose Creek watershed, a significant coastal watershed in the City of San Diego. Consistent with §31251, the proposed assessment will facilitate the enhancement of coastal watershed resources, which have been degraded and lost due to the filling of historic wetlands and to other impacts of development..

Pursuant to §31251.2, under certain circumstances, the Conservancy may participate in projects to enhance a watershed resource that is partly outside of the coastal zone where such action protects or enhances coastal resources within the coastal zone. The proposed project encompasses a watershed area that is partly within and partly outside of the coastal zone. The proposed project will address poor water quality related to storm water and urban runoff, which is a problem of the Rose Creek watershed as a whole and adversely impacts coastal resources within the coastal zone. Loss of habitat is also an issue throughout the larger watershed as a result of channelization of the creek and its tributaries, invasive exotic plant species, poor water quality, and urbanization. As required by §31251.2, the City of San Diego, which has jurisdiction over the project area, has requested Conservancy assistance to aid in the planning for the Rose Creek watershed.

Section 31252 requires that the areas proposed for enhancement be identified by the local coastal program as needing public action to resolve existing or potential resource protection problems. The City of San Diego's Local Coastal Program has been divided into 12 segments, two of which, the Mission Bay Local Coastal Program (LCP) and the Pacific Beach Land Use Plan (LUP), have recommendations and policies related to Rose Creek watershed. The Pacific Beach LUP calls for the development of standards for the creek to balance conflicting goals of flood management and protection of riparian habitat. The Mission Bay LCP recommends the development of an 80-acre wetland area at the mouth of Rose Creek. The LCP also recommends that measures to reduce the flow of pollutants from Rose Creek into Mission Bay should be developed.

Consistent with §31253, the amount of proposed Conservancy funding for this project was determined by the total amount of funding available for coastal resource enhancement projects, the fiscal resources of project partners and the urgency of the project relative to other eligible coastal resource enhancement projects. The City is already actively involved in studying water quality problems in the watershed. SDEW has secured funding from the City of San Diego.

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The proposed authorization is also consistent with §31111, which states that the Conservancy may fund plans and feasibility studies and may award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to prepare those plans and studies.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES:

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective E** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project may lead to the improvement/development of trails and a river parkway along Rose Creek connecting inland areas to Mission Bay and the coast.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objectives A, B and C**, the proposed project would assess the nature and extent of native plant communities in the study area and would assess opportunities for restoration and enhancement of those communities. Therefore, the proposed project may lead to the restoration of coastal wetland, coastal sage scrub, oak woodland, and other key regional habitat types in lower Rose Creek watershed. The proposed project may lead to the preservation and restoration of habitat corridors from Mission Bay to inland habitat areas. Rose Creek has a serious problem with non-native invasive vegetation. The proposed project would result in a detailed mapping of areas of non-native vegetation in the watershed. This information would be used to direct future eradication efforts.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective A**, future restoration and management efforts in lower Rose Creek watershed will rely on the baseline information about the natural resources of the watershed gathered as part of the proposed project.

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

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The proposed project has strong community support. Support letters are attached as Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The Rose Creek watershed is a coastal watershed, which is located partly inside and partly outside the coastal zone.
5. **Need:** The financial support and participation of the Conservancy are critical for the success of this project because SDEW and the City lack the financial resources to proceed with this planning effort without outside funding.

6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Rose Creek watershed is one of the major coastal watersheds of southern San Diego County and provides a corridor for wildlife between inland areas and Mission Bay. San Diego's urban canyons, like Rose Creek Canyon, are a focus of the regional MSCP planning efforts to protect biodiversity in southwestern San Diego County.

Additional Criteria

15. **Cooperation:** See the "Support of the public" and "Project Financing" sections above for description of the participation of project partners.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

As discussed above, the proposed project is consistent with the City of San Diego's certified Local Coastal Program (LCP), which acknowledges the ecological importance of the Rose Creek watershed and specifically addresses habitat protection and improving water quality in Rose Creek. The proposed project would evaluate and recommend feasible opportunities to restore the historic riparian and tidal ecosystems. These objectives are consistent with the goals of the LCP.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from the provisions of CEQA under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262 in that it involves planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions, which the Conservancy has not approved, adopted, or funded. By definition and necessity, the studies proposed will thoroughly account for and consider environmental factors. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the proposed authorization.

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EXHIBIT 3

Letters of Support

Letters will be mailed separately and/or hand-carried to the Meeting.