

# COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

July 16, 2007

## SANTA MONICA BAY RESEARCH AND MONITORING GAP ANALYSIS

File No. 07-050-01

Project Managers: Rebecca Pollock and Rachel Couch

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Consideration and possible Conservancy authorization to disburse up to \$210,000 of tideland oil revenues authorized by the California Ocean Protection Council to the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Foundation for the Santa Monica Bay Research and Monitoring Gap Analysis.

**LOCATION:** Santa Monica Bay, Southern California

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Integrated Coastal and Marine Resources Protection

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### **EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit 1: [Report on the Santa Monica Bay Marine Habitats and Living Resources Inventory: “Assessment of the Information Need for Protection of the Bay’s Living Resources and Habitats” \(2005\)](#)
  - Exhibit 2: [Public Summary of the Comprehensive Monitoring Program for Santa Monica Bay \(2007\)](#)
  - Exhibit 3: [Letters of Support](#)
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### **RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31111 and 31220 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to \$210,000 for ocean protection purposes to the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Foundation for completion of the **Santa Monica Bay Research and Monitoring Gap Analysis**, to catalog gaps in scientific research, mapping, and monitoring of the marine resources of the Santa Monica Bay and the Southern California Bight. Prior to the disbursement of these funds, the Executive Officer of the Conservancy shall review and approve in writing a work program, budget and schedule for the project.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

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“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 set forth in Chapter 3 (Section 31111) and Chapter 5.5 (Section 31220) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the protection and restoration of coastal, ocean and marine resources, and authorizing funding of plans and feasibility studies for these purposes.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The Santa Monica Bay Restoration Foundation (SMBRF) is a non-profit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”

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### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of \$210,000 to the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Foundation (SMBRF) for the Santa Monica Bay Research and Monitoring Gap Analysis (Gap Analysis). Cataloging gaps in research, mapping, and monitoring of the marine resources in Santa Monica Bay will allow SMBRF, through the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission (SMBRC), and others in the Southern California Bight to prioritize future research projects to address scientific needs, and create a sound knowledge base for future management actions such as the designation of marine protected areas (MPAs). This pilot project will provide a replicable methodology and initial regional coordination within the Southern California Bight for prioritizing and conducting research and monitoring to eliminate identified gaps in research and monitoring data for this economically and ecologically important region.

### **Site Description and Background**

The Southern California Bight encompasses over 300 miles of coastline and thousands of square miles of coastal waters, used by millions of residents and tourists annually. The natural resources of the region provide ecological and economic value both locally and statewide. The Santa Monica Bay is a special biogeographic feature within the bight. The bay’s rich living resources, unique habitats, and proximity to one of the nation’s most densely populated metropolitan areas has prompted both the federal and State governments to declare it a nationally significant estuary. A long stretch of nearshore habitats along the northern coast of the bay has also been designated by the State as an Area of Special Biological Significance (ASBS), and it is by far the largest designated ASBS in California.

Southern California’s marine ecosystems in general and Santa Monica Bay in particular are stressed and continue to face many threats such as polluted runoff, marine debris, habitat destruction, and overfishing. The well-documented decline in fishery resources is especially alarming. Many targeted stocks in Southern California, such as California sheephead, lingcod, and bocaccio, have been declining for decades. Other important species such as abalone have been locally extirpated and their survival in the region is threatened.

There is a need for implementing further marine protection measures in the Santa Monica Bay. MPAs are valuable tools for ecosystem protection and have been proven to protect and enhance degraded ecosystems, including kelp forests and fish communities. Yet, the process of

establishing MPAs can be hindered by conflict among various uses and the lack of scientific data on social and ecological impacts.

The Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) was signed by the governor in 1999 (Chapter 10.5 of the California Fish and Game Code, Sections 2850 - 2863). The first region to successfully implement a network of reserves was the central coast region (Pigeon Point to Point Conception). Currently, the north central coast region (Point Arena to Pigeon Point) is beginning the stakeholder process.

The timeframe for the MLPA process to move to Southern California is presently unknown. Because the MLPA requires that the best science available be used when designating reserves, SMBRF intends to assess the data needs in the region in advance, with the goal of eliminating data gaps before the MLPA stakeholder process begins. This will ensure future decisions are made based on high quality, comprehensive, accessible data.

The proposed Gap Analysis will support numerous other management actions in the region, such as completing Marine Life Management Act (MLMA) stock assessment updates and establishing baselines for water quality prior to runoff reduction efforts.

### **Project Implementation**

As a first step toward providing comprehensive data about the region's marine resources, SMBRF will compile and review existing data, focusing on:

- the state of marine resources in the region
- the conservation needs in the region
- the economic and social values of the many uses of Bay resources

SMBRF will collect and disseminate existing knowledge and identify additional needed research, both ecological and socioeconomic. It will develop a general work plan with a timeline and cost estimates for monitoring and technical studies needed to fill identified data gaps.

To complete the Gap Analysis work plan, SMBRF will:

- Identify gaps in existing studies of habitats and species in the region by conducting a literature review to update the Santa Monica Bay Marine Habitats and Living Resources Inventory (Inventory). The Inventory is a bibliographic database that was completed in 2005 to provide a comprehensive picture of the research conducted within Santa Monica Bay and to connect this picture with threats and vulnerabilities facing the Bay's living resources (report attached as Exhibit 1). Upon updating the Inventory, SMBRF will compile and generate data summary reports from the Inventory by site location, habitat type, and taxa;
- Develop a spatial database compatible with existing Department of Fish and Game (DFG) databases (namely the geographic information system (GIS) for the central coast MPAs), and populate it with existing information by locating and acquiring data;
- In collaboration with the Southern California Coastal Ocean Observing System (SCCOOS), collect and compile oceanographic information for trend analysis;
- Evaluate data collected under existing monitoring protocols used throughout the bay (e.g., Cooperative Research and Assessment of Nearshore Ecosystems (CRANE), Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans (PISCO), Reef Check) to

determine their applicability in the MLPA process. The recently completed “Comprehensive Monitoring Program for Santa Monica Bay”, a catalog of monitoring designs for five major habitat types within the bay, will be a valuable resource for this task (summary attached as Exhibit 2). The catalog incorporates key ongoing monitoring efforts and provides a regional, long-term picture of the status of the various ecosystems in Santa Monica Bay;

- Review available gap analyses of federal and state resource protection regulations and conduct an analysis of local resource protection regulations to identify gaps (e.g. spatial extent, species, type of limits, etc.);
- Collaborate with Southern California Bight partners to identify key types of marine habitats and develop a master list of species of concern for Santa Monica Bay and the Southern California Bight that will be revised as needed based on new information;
- Compare existing data with the lists of key habitats and species of concern and identify information gaps and study needs; and
- Coordinate the review of the data summary reports, spatial database, and the work plan by the SMBRC MPA Technical Advisory Committee (MTAC) and stakeholders, and incorporate feedback received.

While completing these tasks to generate the final comprehensive work plan, SMBRF will coordinate with other key groups working in the Southern California Bight to ensure the Gap Analysis’ work products will be replicable and acceptable for the rest of the bight.

### **Products and Outcomes**

Completion of the Gap Analysis will advance our understanding of the ecology of critical marine habitats, as well as the status and trends of marine populations and communities along California’s coast. The Gap Analysis will also promote the development of new research tools and technology, and the development and application of standard data collection and management protocols in cases where none currently exist. Monitoring programs and studies will be designed in cooperation with researchers in the Southern California Bight and be transferable to studies throughout the region. SMBRF will take advantage of existing knowledge, programs, and funding to coordinate comprehensive ongoing monitoring (see Exhibit 2).

The major products from this project will be:

- (1) an updated resources inventory of Santa Monica Bay;
- (2) a populated GIS database;
- (3) a work plan for further monitoring and studies; and
- (4) a framework for expanding this effort to the entire Southern California Bight based on initial bight-wide stakeholder meetings.

The work plan will include monitoring and studies needed to fill data gaps, along with budgets, timelines, and deliverables. The research identified will be prioritized using clearly-defined criteria and with input from DFG, other resource management agencies, and the public. In addition, the Inventory will be updated with any new information acquired during the Gap Analysis. Both of these products will be delivered to the OPC and DFG, as well as distributed to the SMBRC MPA mailing list of interested parties and made available via the Internet. Data from the GIS database will be reported to the MPA Monitoring Enterprise at the California

Ocean Science Trust, and will be made available to agencies, distributed to interested parties, and announced on the SMBRC Web site.

**Proposed Grantee**

The proposed grantee is the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Foundation, a non-profit organization that acts as fiscal agent for SMBRC. SMBRC will carry out the project. SMBRC is a non-regulatory state entity that provides stewardship of water quality and habitats within the Santa Monica Bay and its watersheds. The SMBRC governing board is comprised of a broad spectrum of federal, state, and local representatives. Voting members include the Secretary of the Resources Agency, Secretary for Environmental Protection, an appointee of the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles County, cities within Los Angeles County watersheds, and Los Angeles City and County Public Works. In addition, the SBMRC has a 28 member technical advisory committee comprised of Southern California marine experts from a variety of disciplines that provide recommendations to its governing board on technical issues.

SMBRC has a history of working effectively with diverse stakeholders in the assessment, protection, and restoration of Southern California’s marine resources and has participated in many regional assessments and monitoring efforts in the Southern California Bight. This makes SMRBC uniquely qualified to compile existing scientific research and then apply this knowledge toward MPA development in Southern California and the Santa Monica Bay. In addition, the technical advisory committee has a history of initiating and overseeing marine research and providing various management agencies with scientific advice.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy (Ocean Protection Council tidelands oil revenues)	\$210,000
SMBRC Match	<u>\$180,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$390,000</b>

Staff recommends that the Conservancy approve the use of up to \$210,000 of the Ocean Protection Council’s tidelands oil revenues, appropriated to the Secretary of Resources in the FY 04/05 for projects authorized pursuant to the Ocean Protection Act. The Resources Agency has entered into an interagency agreement with the Conservancy to administer these funds on behalf of the Council and recommend projects for funding.

At its June 14, 2007 public meeting, the Ocean Protection Council found the project to be a high priority and authorized the grant of \$210,000 for completion of the project pursuant to provisions of the California Ocean Protection Act (COPA). The grant would be made pursuant to the Conservancy’s authority under Division 21 of the Public Resources Code to award grants for living marine resources protection and restoration projects and activities consistent with Division 26.5 (COPA).

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

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 5.5 (Section 31220) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which allows the Conservancy to carry out projects and award grants to protect and/or restore coastal watershed and marine habitat, water quality, sediment management, living marine resources and promote integrated coastal and marine resources

protection. Under Section 31220 of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy may undertake projects that meet any of the objectives specified in subsections (b) and (c) of that section. The Gap Analysis will meet the purposes of this division, specifically by cataloging gaps in research, mapping and monitoring of the marine resources in Santa Monica Bay which will lead to the prioritization of research projects to address scientific needs, and create a sound knowledge base for future management actions such as the designation of marine protected areas (MPAs). Consistent with 31220(b), subsection 10, the project will promote the California Ocean Protection Act's goal of advancing scientific understanding to improve efforts to protect, conserve, restore and manage coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.

The proposed project would also be undertaken pursuant to Section 31111 of the Public Resources Code. This section authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies for planning and feasibility studies.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

The Conservancy's Strategic Plan was last updated in 2003. Since that time the Legislature has expanded the Conservancy's role in the protection and restoration of ocean resources through the passage of the Ocean Protection Act (SB 1319) and amendments to the Conservancy's enabling legislation (SB 1110). These changes are not fully reflected in the Conservancy's goals contained in the Strategic Plan. Nonetheless, the project will help to further many of the Conservancy's existing goals related to habitat protection and water quality, particularly for coastal watersheds, and coastal and marine resources. The project will result in research that enhances ecosystem-based management and contributes to resource managers' understanding of actual and potential impacts to the state's ocean and coastal resources.

The Gap Analysis also supports the Ocean Protection Council's Five-year Strategic Plan by furthering Section B, Research and Monitoring, Objective 1: Improve scientific understanding of our ocean and coastal ecosystems. The outcome of this project will promote the improvement in scientific understanding of our ocean resources. Additionally, it supports Objective 2: Monitor and map the ocean environment to provide data about conditions and trends, by setting the stage for future monitoring and recommending standard protocols appropriate for the region. Ultimately, science-based implementation of MPAs and other management approaches will lead to improvement in the quality of ocean and coastal habitats and improve the health and viability of ocean and coastal wildlife populations and communities.

**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 the potential to become the first phase of a larger initiative to support needed research and monitoring in concert with agencies and organizations working in the Southern California Bight. Letters were received from Senator Sheila Kuehl (D-23<sup>rd</sup> Senate District) and Assemblymember Julia Brownley (D-41<sup>st</sup> Assembly District) in support of the project, including the larger initiative of research and monitoring to fill gaps. Letters were also received from stakeholders and organizations working in Santa Monica Bay and the Southern California Bight. All letters of support are attached as Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the waters of the state of California and within the coastal zone of Los Angeles County.
5. **Need:** The proposed project is appropriate for the expenditure of the requested funds, and there are no other funding sources currently available.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** This project will support ecosystem-based management efforts pertaining to the Southern California Bight and will prepare the region for the eventual designation of MPAs, consistent with efforts in other areas of the state.

#### **Additional Criteria**

7. **Urgency:** This project will identify and catalog gaps in research, mapping and monitoring of the marine resources in the project area in advance of the anticipated MPA designation process for Southern California.
8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** This project will gather existing data and identify gaps in scientific information, convene interested stakeholders in the region to provide a more complete picture of the state of the bight marine ecosystem, and develop priorities for pursuing additional study to better inform future management actions.
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
10. **Conflict resolution:** Given that conflicts can occur among marine users, this project will serve to provide objective data that can be used to inform the MPA process and potentially inform and mediate user conflicts that may arise.
11. **Innovation:** Assembling the technical information needed for the project area in advance of the MPA process will contribute to constructive and informed dialog among participants and result in improved process outcomes.
12. **Readiness:** SMBRF anticipates completion of project within twelve months of project approval and entering into a grant agreement with the Conservancy. The grantee is poised to begin work, and has conducted preparatory activities on various elements of the project.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The Conservancy, through the Ocean Protection Council, has funded prior MLPA projects including establishing the MPA Monitoring Enterprise within the California Ocean Science Trust (CalOST), statewide seafloor mapping, and baseline monitoring efforts.

14. **Cooperation:** SMBRC is a non-regulatory cooperative state agency comprised of a broad spectrum of federal, state, and local representatives, working in tandem with a technical advisory committee of experts of a variety of disciplines from all over Southern California. SMBRC will collaborate with other key groups in the bight including the Southern California Water Research Project, community-based organizations, marine user groups and other interested stakeholders to ensure the Gap Analysis' work products will be replicable and acceptable for the rest of the bight.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

Preparation of the project involves only data gathering, planning, and feasibility analyses for possible future actions and is thus statutorily exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval by the Conservancy.