

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
August 2, 2012

COMMUNITY WETLAND RESTORATION GRANT PROGRAM

Project No. 12-026-01
Project Manager: Greg Gauthier

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$650,000 to Earth Island Institute to provide funding for the Community Wetland Restoration Grant Program, a program of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project, for community-based restoration projects in Southern California coastal wetlands and watersheds; 2012 projects are located in Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego Counties.

LOCATION: Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties coastal wetlands and watersheds.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Locations Map](#)
Exhibit 2: [Completed CWRGP Projects List](#)
Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
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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 the disbursement of up to six hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$650,000) to Earth Island Institute to implement a suite of community-based resource enhancement projects along the Southern California coast, subject to the condition that, prior to the disbursement of funds for each project, Earth Island Institute shall submit for review and approval by the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

- a. A work program, including a project plan, schedule and budget;
- b. All contractors to be employed for the project;
- c. Evidence that all necessary permits and approvals have been obtained.”

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 current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
 2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding enhancement of coastal resources.
 3. Earth Island Institute is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to \$650,000 to Earth Island Institute to implement community-based resource enhancement projects along the Southern California coast through the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project’s Community Based Wetland Restoration Program (CWRGP).

CWRGP is a program of the Wetlands Recovery Project (WRP) jointly managed by the State Coastal Conservancy and Earth Island Institute, providing funding for community-based restoration projects in coastal wetlands and watersheds in the Southern California region. The purpose of the CWRGP is to further the wetland recovery goals of the WRP Regional Strategy; build local capacity to plan and implement wetland restoration projects; promote community involvement in wetland restoration activities; and foster education about wetland ecosystems. Projects funded through the program must include educational and community involvement elements as strong components of the project.

Southern California has lost approximately 90 percent of its historic wetlands due to urban development, in-fill, flood control practices, and habitat type conversion. The WRP funds projects that seek to recover fully functioning wetland ecosystems including upland areas surrounding the wetlands. Typical projects funded through the CWRGP include removal of invasive species, planting of native plant species, trash abatement, trails and interpretive element construction, and other efforts to restore or enhance wetland habitats.

The CWRGP typically funds 10 to 12 projects per year with an annual budget of approximately \$300,000. Each January the CWRGP solicits proposals from nonprofit organizations, university departments, and local agencies eligible to apply to the program. Proposals are reviewed by a technical advisory committee that includes staff from the State Coastal Conservancy, Earth Island Institute, the Wildlife Conservation Board, National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Projects are selected by early summer and the work begins in late summer or early fall. Projects funded through this program are designed to be completed in one or two years. The total amount recommended for authorization is expected to fund at least 2 years of grant cycles, potentially lasting through 2015.

Project selection for 2012–2013 was completed in June, 2012. The 10 projects selected which would be funded this year under this authorization are as follows:

Santa Barbara County

UC Santa Barbara (UCSB) Campus Lagoon Salt Marsh Restoration: This project will integrate a restoration and access project along the northeast shoreline of the Campus Lagoon by restoring a 1000-foot (3/4 acre) strip of iceplant to saltmarsh and coastal sage scrub. The area is the last remaining non-native-dominated zone along the campus shoreline of the lagoon. Implementing this project further protects this narrow edge of the lagoon from future infringement and impacts, while providing native habitat and ongoing educational opportunities. UCSB will collaborate with the Research Experience and Education Facility, better known as The REEF, UCSB's interactive aquarium facility to provide improved access to educational view points and sample collection areas for a coastal resource education program that will incorporate restoration activities during the project time period. Approximately 600 junior high school students and 90 elementary school programs from the REEF and Kids in Nature environmental education programs are expected to directly participate in the project. In addition, this project is highly visible due to its location adjacent to the well-used Campus Point Beach and the REEF touch tanks that are open to the public on Saturdays. By removing iceplant and revegetating with more than 20 native species, this area can provide more diverse resources for insects and birds while also completing the restoration of the northern shore of the lagoon. A total of approximately 9,000 native plants will be planted in this project. Plants will be grown in the Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration greenhouse and nursery, and collected from local sources.

Total project cost: \$43,500

Amount requested from CWRGP: \$30,000

Devereux Slough Margin Enhancement: Santa Barbara Audubon Society and community volunteers will enhance the slough margin at the UC Natural Reserve System Coal Oil Point Reserve (COPR) by removal of invasive plant species, primarily iceplant and New Zealand spinach, from approximately 8 acres, and intensive re-vegetation of two of the iceplant removal sites approximately 0.6 acres in size. The project will utilize 600 hours of volunteer time from approximately 200 volunteers, and will remove the remaining two patches of iceplant on the east margin of the Devereux Slough through tarping and manual removal. The project also will aid the Western Snowy Plover by cutting back Eucalyptus Trees, which provide skunk habitat. Skunks are a major predator of Snowy Plover eggs. Re-vegetation will include 1,000 plants consisting of sagebrush, Mugwort, Coast Goldenbush, California Morning-Glory, California sunflower, Seacliff Buckwheat and Santa Barbara Honeysuckle. In addition, seeds of species found at COPR will be collected on the reserve for propagation at the Reserve Plant Nursery.

Total project cost: \$56,600

Amount requested from CWRGP: \$29,400

Refugio Creek Mouth Restoration Project: South Coast Habitat Restoration, a California 501 (c)(3), will improve wetland habitat by increasing ecological diversity for native species by removing invasive non-native flora and installing native flora along the banks at the mouth of Refugio Creek, located on the Refugio State Beach, a State Park, through the use of volunteers.

The goal of the project is to increase the ecological value of habitat at the mouth of Refugio Creek. The project area is roughly 2,100 square feet on either side of Refugio Creek. Non-natives at the site include Fan Palms, Guadalupe Palms, Myoporum, Arundo donax, Black Acacia, Pampas Grass, Fennel, Castor Bean, Brazilian Pepper trees, California Pepper trees, Eucalyptus, as well as annual grasses. Natives to be planted at the site include native riparian trees and coastal scrub species. The project also will allow for volunteers and visitors to the State Beach to learn about habitat restoration and the importance of the Refugio Creek Watershed. Two permanent interpretive signs will be installed to inform visitors about watershed resources and restoration activities.

Total Project Cost: \$62,210

Amount requested from CWRGP: \$28,022

Ventura County

Ormond Beach Native Plant Restoration: Channel Islands Marine Resource Institute will improve the quality of a coastal freshwater and brackish marsh, and bordering back dune area at Ormond Beach as an experiential education tool for local elementary school and college students. Depending upon the class level, students will be involved in different aspects of the restoration process including permitting, habitat surveys and evaluation, developing plant lists, mapping, obtaining seeds and cuttings, nursery cultivation and eradication of non-native invasive plant species such as Myoporum, ice plant, pampas grass and sweet clover. Restoration activities will include: Mapping of existing vegetation, removal of iceplant and Myororum, propagation and replanting with native plants, monitoring and maintenance, and Native Plant Nursery operation.

Total project cost: \$93,646

Amount requested from CWRGP: \$27,346

Los Angeles County

Lower Topanga Creek Restoration Project: TreePeople will lead volunteers in removing invasive species and planting native trees, plants, and shrubs in a buffer riparian zone along Topanga Creek in Topanga State Park. The project will increase native plant biodiversity and enhance habitat for native species. TreePeople estimates that at least 350 community volunteers will attend the 14 restoration events TreePeople will hold at the project site. Volunteers will learn how to remove invasive species, plant native species, and why restoring this coastal stream is important. Volunteers will consist of school groups, boy and girl scout groups, retirees, and local residents from the surrounding neighborhood. The project goals include: (1) Educate 350 volunteers about the Santa Monica Bay and the importance of restoring natural ecosystem functions in coastal stream areas; (2) Remove invasive plant species from the project site; and (3) Plant native species in the project area to connect the undisturbed coastal sage scrub with Topanga Creek. All of the invasive species at the site will be removed by the end of the grant period, and approximately 280 native plants will be planted. The invasive species that will be removed include Arundo donax, mustard, Bermuda grass, and euphorbia. The native species that will be planted include coast live oak, Chaparral yucca, Mugwort, Bush sunflower, scrub oak, California wild rose, and purple sage.

Total project cost: \$62,000

Amount requested from CWRGP: \$12,300

Orange County

Invasive Removal in Bell Creek at Audubon Starr Ranch: The Audubon Starr Ranch Sanctuary and community volunteers will remove periwinkle, smilo grass, and English ivy from a 1.5 acre work area in Bell Creek, a tributary of San Juan Creek. A crew of at-risk young adults from the Orange County Conservation Corps will remove olive and palm trees from the entire length of the 4.71 miles (125 acres) of Bell Creek on Starr Ranch. Starr Ranch interns will recruit 300-500 volunteers from elementary schools, high schools, universities, scout groups, church groups and corporations. Starr Ranch will focus on non-chemical control of invasive plant species and rare habitat restoration. The project funds recent college graduates to serve as riparian interns for 8 months to cover the 2012-2013 season and a four-person Orange County Conservation Corps crew and supervisor.

Total project Cost: \$52,072

Amount requested from CWRGP: \$26,000

Bolsa Chica Dune Habitat Enhancement Project: The Bolsa Chica Dune Habitat Enhancement project is a community-based restoration and education project designed to expand dune habitat at the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve. The project targets expansion of areas for dune plants including the rare Coastal Woolly Head. In addition, it will increase nesting and foraging areas for the endangered California Least Terns, threatened Western Snowy Plovers and other migratory and resident shorebirds and waterfowl. The project goals are to: (1) Remove non-native plants, trash, and debris from the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve to increase habitat for rare dune plants such as the coastal woolly heads, and to improve water quality of the wetlands and adjacent marine areas; (2) Expand habitat for the endangered California Least Tern, the threatened Western Snowy Plover, as well as other migrating and resident shorebirds and waterfowl at Bolsa Chica; and (3) Educate youth and the general public through public outreach and participation in on-the ground restoration work at the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve.

Total project cost: \$100,000

Amount requested from CWRGP: \$30,000

San Diego County

Ocean Connectors Wetland Restoration Project: Ocean Connectors, a project of The Ocean Foundation, will involve low-income youth in San Diego County in wetland restoration in the Otay River and San Dieguito watersheds. In partnership with local organizations, Ocean Connectors will increase environmental awareness and educate the community through hands-on habitat restoration activities and lessons. This project will involve members of the San Diego community in on-the-ground wetland restoration efforts. The target audience is low-income K-12 students. The project also will involve other members of the community including volunteers, teachers, parents, and experts from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the San Dieguito River Park. The Ocean Connectors project will expand on past and future restoration efforts through litter and debris removal, invasive plant species removal and planting of native plant species.

Total project cost: \$20,000 Amount requested from CWRGP: \$8,000

Watershed Avengers at Swan Canyon: Watershed Avengers is a program of the Ocean Discovery Institute that works to improve habitat quality, transforming degraded canyons into healthy places while protecting local downstream wetlands habitats. This project, to restore 4.87 acres in Swan Canyon, will be completed with a combination of contracted restoration labor and volunteer work from the local community. Work will target 4.87 acres within the 26-acre canyon. Areas of active restoration include 2.1 acres of disturbed riparian habitat impacted by *Arundo donax* and 2.77 acres of disturbed coastal sage scrub and chaparral habitat. Re-vegetation will take place in areas where non-native plants are removed and outside of brush management zones. Over the course of the project approximately 500 native plants will be planted. The project will engage 750 community members, primarily youth, from the low-income community of City Heights.

Total project cost: \$148,620 Amount requested from CWRGP: \$30,000

Citizens Restoring Coastal Habitat at San Elijo Lagoon: Over the last 10 years, the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy (SELCO) has managed the invasive species control program for the entire Carlsbad Hydrological Unit in which San Elijo Lagoon's watershed, Escondido Creek, is located. SELCO will engage the community in this wetland habitat enhancement project by holding 18 monthly events aimed at restoring 10 acres of critical habitat for listed species, training and educating community members on the benefits of controlling invasive plants without the use of herbicides and restoration of the native plant community. Restored habitat will include 4 acres of Diegan Coastal Sage Scrub, 3 acres of Southern Coastal Salt Marsh, 2 acres of Southern Riparian Scrub and 1 acre of Coastal Strand. This project is expected to draw more than 1,000 community members over the 18-month period of the project. Eight long-term site leaders will be trained in maintaining restoration sites to lessen costs to the organization, while building capacity within the community. In addition, 4,500 native plants will be planted and 2,500 educational brochures will be created.

Total cost of Project: \$182,772 Amount requested from CWRGP: \$19,080

TOTAL PROJECT FUNDS REQUESTED FROM CWRGP: \$240,148

The proposal evaluation and project selection committee, described earlier in this report, will review and select projects from the 2013 project proposals consistent with this authorization for funding in the 2013 – 2014 program year. In addition to direct project costs, funding will help support project management and technical support. Earth Island Institute staff costs are covered by them as a part of matching funds. As stated earlier, this authorization will provide at least two years of CWRGP funding, depending on the number of projects selected for each year's program.

Earth Island Institute (EII) is uniquely qualified to manage the CWRGP and works in close collaboration with Conservancy staff. EII was founded in 1982 and acts as fiscal sponsor for many start-up organizations lacking the administrative expertise to carry out a suite of environmental initiatives. This experience ideally suits them to work with the many small

nonprofits and agencies through the CWRGP that have the passion but may need technical and administrative support to carry out stewardship and capacity building community-based resource enhancement projects. EII, in collaboration with the Conservancy, has managed the CWRGP for the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project since 2009.

Site Description:

The Community Wetlands Restoration Program (CWRGP) encompasses the Southern California coastal region from Point Conception in Santa Barbara County to the United States border with Mexico (Exhibit 1). This region includes Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties. Coastal watersheds that drain to the Pacific Ocean are included in the geographic scope of the program. Project locations include coastal wetlands, tidal marshes, rivers, streams, vernal pools as well as buffer zones including dunes, river banks and coastal sage scrub habitats.

Many of the project locations were historical flood plains and extensive wetland ecosystems that have been degraded and fragmented over the past 100 years. Others are discreet pocket wetlands that, while small and sometimes isolated from other habitat, cumulatively comprise a critical natural resource for native flora and fauna in a highly urbanized environment.

UC Santa Barbara Campus Lagoon Salt Marsh Restoration: The proposed project is located on the northeast shore of the UCSB Campus Lagoon in one of the few zones along the shore of the lagoon that hasn't been restored. The 31 acre estuarine lagoon supports a diversity of wildlife. Visitors each day include school groups, UCSB students, staff, faculty and recreational visitors. A new access stairway, funded by the Coastal Fund and the Coastal Conservancy, is under construction now and the restoration associated with it marks the southern edge of the project. The 1,000 foot-long project area is the last remaining non-native shore area adjacent to the campus and is currently dominated by iceplant. The project area borders the REEF (Research Experience and Education Facility), the University's aquarium and outreach center which educates several thousand students a year. In addition the area is adjacent to Campus Point Beach which receives hundreds of daily visitors during the summer. The campus lagoon supports a diversity of birds whose activities reflect a thriving food web. The evidence for this is reflected in the foraging activities of pelicans, cormorants and herons as well as mating behavior of red tail hawks, kestrels, cooper's hawks and recent visitation by loggerhead shrikes, Wilson's snipes and numerous shorebirds, sparrows and warblers. Over 200 different species of birds have been documented in monthly campus lagoon bird surveys with an average diversity of 50 species per survey.

Devereux Slough Margin Enhancement: Devereux Slough is a coastal estuary on the University of California Santa Barbara West Campus managed by the UC Natural Reserve System Coal Oil Point Reserve (COPR). The 157-acre reserve encompasses the estuary, dune habitat, seasonal wetlands and surrounding uplands. COPR has the primary missions of conservation, education, research and public outreach. The proposed project area is approximately 8 acres of the slough margin on both the eastern and western portions of the slough. Most of the slough margin has been the subject of intensive restoration by the COPR

and by Audubon on the western margin near the mouth. This project focuses on areas not yet restored.

Refugio Creek Mouth Restoration: The Refugio Creek Watershed is located in coastal Santa Barbara County, 20 miles west of the City of Santa Barbara. It drains a watershed of approximately 8.2 square miles. The watershed begins in the Santa Ynez Mountains at an elevation of approximately 4,300 feet and drains steep hillsides and canyons before flowing through orchards and agricultural fields. The creek flows into the Pacific Ocean at Refugio State Beach. The proposed project is located at the mouth of the creek at Refugio State Beach, on State Parks property. The creek mouth provides important habitat for a variety of species including the federally endangered Southern Steelhead trout and Tidewater Goby. The mouth of Refugio Creek is lined with approximately 150 feet of rocks on both of its banks confining it from its natural meandering state. Few native plant species are present on the banks of the creek mouth or surrounding area. The majority of vegetation on the banks of the creek mouth is non-native species including Fan Palms, Guadalupe Palms, Myoporum, Arundo donax, Black Acacia, Pampas Grass, Fennel, Castro Bean, Brazilian Pepper trees, California Pepper trees, Eucalyptus, as well as annual grasses. California State Parks purchased the property along the mouth of Refugio Creek in the 1960's. The park has a number of campsites on both sides of the creek mouth. To the North of the creek mouth there is a vehicular bridge which connects the two areas of the State Park.

Ormond Beach Native Plant Restoration: The Ormond Beach dunes and wetland complex is located in Ventura County. The sand dunes stretching from Port Hueneme to Mugu Lagoon are what remain of a much larger system that extended from the Ventura River to Mugu Lagoon. Ormond Beach represents one of the few functioning dune-building systems remaining in Southern California. Dunes, back dune swales, and seasonal wetlands are home to federally and state listed endangered bird and plant species including the Least Tern, Western Snowy Plover, Belding's Savannah Sparrow, Salt Marsh Bird's Beak, and the Tidewater Goby. The proposed restoration site is approximately 11.2 acres on the northwest boundary of the Ormond Beach Generating Station. The site includes portions of back beach swales and seasonal freshwater / brackish water marsh areas. The back beach area of the site includes three dune swales and encompasses about 2.7 acres. The freshwater and brackish water marsh area consists of 8.5 acres. The invasive plant species Myoporum is found adjacent to and in the wetland area. There are approximately 60 of these trees in the area. Ice plant is found in areas closest to the generating station. Twelve Myoporum were previously removed from the sand dune ridge bordering the wetland to the south. Although its coverage has been greatly reduced, ice plant is still found adjacent to the generating station, back beach swales, and marsh. Sweet clover is found in this habitat as are several clumps of Pampas grass. Except for the plants noted above, the area is largely free of the more invasive species.

Lower Topanga Creek Restoration Project: Topanga Creek is a coastal stream located in the Santa Monica Mountains in Los Angeles County that flows into the Pacific Ocean. The project site is a 1.5 acre riparian buffer zone that borders 200 feet of Topanga Creek in Topanga State Park. The project site is a disturbed area between the creek and undisturbed coastal sage scrub habitat. The site is a south/south east facing slope, through which rainwater flows into the creek. There is an undisturbed area of coastal sage scrub habitat at the top of the slope, and the project

will connect the creek and the coastal sage scrub habitat. The project site is filled with invasive species, including *Arundo donax*, mustard, Bermuda grass, and euphorbia. Topanga Creek is one of only three creeks in the Santa Monica Bay Watershed that contains the endangered Southern Steelhead trout.

Invasive Removal in Bell Creek at Audubon Starr Ranch: Starr Ranch Sanctuary is a 4,000 acre preserve owned and operated by the National Audubon Society. It is located in the San Juan Creek watershed. The major riparian corridor within Starr Ranch, Bell Creek, is a tributary to San Juan Creek and formerly habitat for steelhead trout. Once the San Juan and Trabuco Creek steelhead barrier removal projects are completed downstream, Bell Creek will provide critical steelhead habitat and passage to upper reaches of the watershed. Starr Ranch is one of the few remaining large, protected open space areas in this region and the Bell Canyon riparian corridor is one of the few largely pristine, protected wildlife corridors in the area. Bordering the Santa Ana Mountains, the Cleveland National Forest, and two suburban developments, Starr Ranch preserves oak woodland, riparian forests, coastal sage scrub, chaparral, and needlegrass grassland. The Ranch is home to federally threatened California Gnatcatcher, as well as other native wildlife species including California tree frogs, Red-shouldered Hawks, and mountain lions. Since Audubon acquired Starr Ranch in 1973, it has operated as a nature preserve and an active ecological research station. Starr Ranch serves approximately 6,000 visitors each year through environmental education programs, citizen science projects, and volunteer programs.

Bolsa Chica Dune Enhancement Project: The Bolsa Chica wetlands are located in northern Orange County in the City of Huntington Beach and are one of the largest remaining coastal wetland systems in Southern California. The ecological reserve includes trails and boardwalks for visitor access. In August 2006 the first phase of restoration was completed, restoring nearly 600 acres of wetland habitat including a new inlet that provides tidal connection to the ocean on the southern end of the reserve. The wetlands provide habitat and feeding grounds for more than 200 species of birds as well as juvenile fish species. The 5-acre project area is characterized by coastal dune, upper salt marsh, coastal sage scrub, native grass and alkaline meadow habitats.

Ocean Connectors Wetland Restoration Project: Native habitats to be restored by the project include coastal wetland, freshwater marsh, saltwater marsh, mudflats, and stream corridor along the San Dieguito River and the Otay River in San Diego County. The San Dieguito River Valley site is located in north San Diego County. The project site is adjacent to salt ponds at the north end of the San Dieguito River Park. The San Dieguito River leads to a large coastal lagoon.

The second project site is located at the southern tip of the South San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge. This is an urban area near the Mexico border region, in South San Diego County adjacent to the city of Imperial Beach. The wetland is adjacent to the Bayshore Bikeway and the Otay River. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service currently conducts wetland restoration at this site, and Ocean Connectors will add to the current restoration efforts.

Watershed Avengers at Swan Canyon: This project will take place in Swan Canyon in City Heights, a highly urbanized area of central San Diego. The degraded canyon is at the headwaters of Chollas Creek, a sub-area of the Pueblo Watershed. Swan Canyon and the other canyons of City Heights drain to the Pueblo watershed and into San Diego Bay. Decades of development

and anthropogenic impact have degraded the condition of the watershed for wildlife and people. Swan Canyon is a seasonally dry creek and is impacted by significant amounts of trash and large stands of the invasive plant species *Arundo donax*. The project area consists of 2.1 acres of disturbed riparian habitat and 2.77 acres of disturbed coastal sage scrub and chaparral habitat.

Citizens Restoring Coastal Habitat at San Elijo Lagoon: This project will take place at San Elijo Lagoon, one of the largest remaining coastal wetlands in San Diego County. The lagoon is part of the San Elijo Lagoon State Ecological Reserve. There are four distinct areas of the Reserve identified for this project. These include: the 45 acre Ford & SELC Wildlife Habitat Preserve on Escondido Creek; the 4 acre coastal strand area in the southwest corner of the Reserve between the Santa Fe Railroad and Pacific Coast Highway; upland buffer areas adjacent to the estuary; and coastal sage scrub areas of the Santa Carina and Stonebridge Mesas in the East Basin of the Reserve. The lagoon is the coastal terminus of the 54,000 acre Escondido Creek watershed and is habitat for more than 700 species of plants, birds and other fauna.

Project History:

The Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project is a partnership of 18 state and federal agencies, working in concert with local governments, environmental organizations and the business community to acquire, restore and enhance coastal wetlands and watersheds. At the WRP's October 2000 symposium, there was clear consensus that in order to be successful the WRP needed a strong education and community outreach component to its programs. The Small Grants Program, now named the Community Wetland Restoration Grant Program, was conceived as a way to further this objective while also building institutional capacity in the five counties for planning and implementing restoration projects.

In January 2001, at the same time that proposals were solicited to update the WRP Work Plan, applications for the formerly entitled Small Grant Program (now the CWRGP) were posted on the WRP's website and a program announcement was emailed to over 800 people. The WRP nonprofit partner, Environment Now, housed the program for the first 8 years.

Since its inception the CWRGP has completed 98 projects for a total of \$2,422,000 in funding. Several of the organizations initially funded through the CWRGP have gone on to develop and implement larger scale acquisition and restoration projects for inclusion on the WRP Work Plan. The list of such organizations includes the Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy, San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, the City of Santa Barbara, South Coast Habitat Restoration, Mountains Restoration Trust, the City of Costa Mesa, and Orange County Coastkeeper. These and other organizations underscore the CWRGP's ability to help develop the skills and capacity in groups, through small project design and implementation, to take on larger projects for the purpose of Southern California wetlands recovery.

A list and brief description of completed projects is included with this staff recommendation as Exhibit 2. Additional completed project information and photographs are available on the WRP web site at: http://www.scwrp.org/small_grants.htm

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$650,000
Earth Island Institute	\$900,000
Total Project Costs	\$1,550,000

Conservancy Funding Source

The anticipated source of the Conservancy's funds is the fiscal year 2009/2010 appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). This funding source may be used for the protection of bays and coastal waters, including projects to prevent contamination and degradation of coastal waters and watersheds, projects to protect and restore the natural habitat values of coastal waters and lands, and projects and expenditures to promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state pursuant to the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. See Public Resources Code section 75060. The proposed project protects coastal waters, restores natural habitat values and promotes access to and enjoyment of coastal resources through community-based restoration of coastal wetlands, rivers and associated habitats.

Another requirement of Proposition 84 is that for projects that restore natural resources, the Conservancy is directed to give priority to projects that meet one or more of the criteria specified in Section 75071. The proposed restoration project satisfies the following specified criteria: (b) Watershed Protection – the project will contribute to long-term protection of and improvement to the water and biological quality of coastal watersheds and the near shore area of the Pacific Ocean; and (e) Non-State Matching Funds. The 2012-2013 CWRGP projects have significant non-state matching funds. Project costs total \$821,420 with \$581,272 of that coming from non-state sources (\$179,035 federal sources and \$402,237 from private or corporate sources).

The remainder of this project funding is anticipated to come from a Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) grant of \$400,000 to the Conservancy. In May, 2012 the WCB approved the grant with funds from the Habitat Conservation Fund Section 2786 (e/f)(Prop 50) Section 79572(a) – Aquatic/Riparian So Cal projects to fund the CWRGP. The purposes of the CWRGP are consistent with the authorized uses of that funding source, which allows for the acquisition, restoration, or enhancement of riparian habitat and aquatic habitat for salmonids and trout in coastal wetlands, upland areas adjacent to coastal wetlands and coastal watershed lands in Southern California. The CWRGP restores riparian and aquatic habitat and adjacent upland areas.

The ten projects selected for funding in June, 2012 as noted above total \$821,420. Of that, \$240,148 will come from this authorization and the remaining \$581,272 will come from private and federal funding sources. Future CWRGP projects funded under this authorization will be brought to the Conservancy for approval.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 6 of Division 21, Sections 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code, regarding coastal resource enhancement projects. Consistent with Section 31251, "(t)he conservancy may award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for the purpose of enhancement of coastal resources that, because of indiscriminate dredging or filling, improper location of improvements, natural or human-induced events, or incompatible land uses, have suffered loss of natural and scenic values."

Consistent with Section 31251.2, the Conservancy may award grants to enhance a watershed resource partly outside of the coastal zone.

Consistent with Section 31253, the recommended amount of funding is determined by evaluating the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal resource enhancement projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant, the urgency of the project relative to other similar projects, and the application of other factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority. The Conservancy's funding is appropriate at this time because the project's benefits to coastal habitat are significant and the use of community volunteers provides added cost savings and an important public education component.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective B** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will enhance approximately 153 acres of coastal habitats including coastal wetlands and intertidal areas, stream corridors and dunes.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective D**, the proposed project will control or eradicate non-native invasive species that threaten important coastal habitats.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on November 10, 2011 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 is supported by elected officials, numerous community and nonprofit organizations, and local agencies (see Exhibit 3). Proposed projects for the CWRGP are vetted at local meetings to allow input from the local community and to ensure that projects represent local priorities.

4. **Location:** CWRGP projects are located within the coastal zone or coastal draining watersheds. CWRGP project locations span the five southernmost California coastal counties constituting the California Bight, from Point Conception in Santa Barbara County to the international border with Mexico.
5. **Need:** The CWRGP program is not sustainable without Conservancy funding.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The CWRGP is regional by design and serves greater than local interest through the cumulative benefits of its multiple small acreage projects. These projects help restore native wetland habitat critical for migratory birds and commercially and recreationally important fish species.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** Three of the project sites detailed in the Project Summary section of this report are located in areas vulnerable to sea level rise. The Refugio Creek mouth, UCSB Campus Lagoon and Bolsa Chica projects are located at or near sea level. Each of these projects sites has adequate surrounding buffer zones to allow for habitat migration and/or conversion considering a range of sea level rise scenarios for the years 2050 and 2100.

Additional Criteria

8. **Urgency:** Many of the CWRGP projects target invasive species for removal. Timely implementation of small invasive removal projects before these species can further spread helps prevent widespread dispersal and habitat destruction.
10. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
12. **Innovation:** CWRGP projects demonstrate innovation through the inclusion of a wide range and diversity of volunteers often targeting low-income and underserved communities and multi-generational community members.
13. **Readiness:** All CWRGP projects described in the “Project Summary” are ready to implement and to be completed within one to two years.
14. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.”
16. **Cooperation:** The CWRGP projects by design foster cooperation between the lead organization and the community in helping to enhance coastal resources. Multiple community organizations, nonprofits and local agencies are involved in project implementation.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

UC Santa Barbara Campus Lagoon Salt Marsh Restoration: The County of Santa Barbara Comprehensive Plan’s Conservation Element adopted in 1979 and amended August, 2010 identifies coastal salt marsh as one of the ecological communities of greatest interest that should be protected. The Plan’s Coastal Land Use Plan adopted in 1982 and republished in June, 2009 states that “the biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes appropriate to maintain optimum populations of marine organisms and for

the protection of human health shall be maintained and, where feasible, restored...”. Consistent with the County’s Coastal Land Use Plan, this project will restore salt marsh and buffer habitat around Campus Lagoon.

Devereux Slough Margin Enhancement: The County of Santa Barbara Local Coastal Program (LCP) identifies Devereux Slough as an environmentally sensitive habitat area that should be protected. The Margin Enhancement project will enhance wetland habitat at Devereux Slough and is consistent with the goals of the County LCP.

Refugio Creek Mouth Restoration Project: The County of Santa Barbara LCP identifies streams as environmentally sensitive habitat areas that should be protected. Refugio Creek is identified in the plan. The plan outlines several policies directed at development within stream corridors, including protection of riparian vegetation. The Refugio Creek Mouth Restoration Project is consistent with the Santa Barbara County LCP because it will enhance the habitat resources at Refugio Creek by removing exotic plant species and re-vegetating with native species. The LCP further recommends that the County encourage and support efforts to increase public understanding of significant habitat areas in part through informal education programs. This project is consistent with that goal of the LCP.

Ormond Beach Native Plant Restoration: The Ventura County General Plan’s Coastal Area Plan, last amended in September, 2008 states that “The County supports formal recognition of the value of the Ormond Beach saltmarshes and their enhancement or restoration.” The plan further states that “Recreation in the Central Coast saltmarshes will include resource compatible uses such as nature observation, scientific study, educational trips, and possibly fishing. Appropriate public agencies will provide the public with off-site, as well as on-site, interpretive opportunities within existing programs as feasible. As funds become available, new programs should be developed. Consistent with the Coastal Area Plan goals, this project will enhance Ormond Beach saltmarsh habitat and provide hands-on interpretive educational opportunities for community youth.

Lower Topanga Creek Restoration Project: Lower Topanga Canyon is identified as a Sensitive Environmental Resource Area in the Malibu Local Coastal Program, 1986, and also is identified as a Sensitive Environmental Resource Area in the draft Santa Monica Mountains Local Coastal Program. The Topanga State Park General Plan, Draft Environmental Impact Report states that “Topanga Creek Watershed is one of the few watersheds remaining in Southern California with large sections publicly owned and protected. There are numerous intermittent, ephemeral, and a few perennial drainages within the Park. Topanga Creek is the largest perennial drainage in the Park and currently one of only two creeks left in the Santa Monica Bay Watershed supporting a reproducing population of steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*).” This project is consistent with these habitat designations and will restore buffer zones important for native plant and endangered fish species.

Invasive Removal in Bell Creek at Audubon Starr Ranch: Starr Ranch is not located within the coastal zone. The Resources Element of the County of Orange General Plan, March, 2011 identifies Starr Ranch as a significant open space inland area and notes that “wildlife habitat is protected through the continued existence and operation of wildlife sanctuaries such as the

Audubon Society's Starr Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary.” It also points out the important buffer role the Ranch has in relation to the Cleveland National Forest. The plan states that “this area is valuable because of its scenic qualities, recreation opportunities, and for the preservation of important ecological habitats. The Caspers Wilderness Park area merits high-priority status through the combined efforts of County of Orange (Caspers Wilderness Park), U.S. Department of Agriculture (Cleveland National Forest), the National Audubon Society (Starr Ranch Audubon Sanctuary), and adjacent private landowners to create and operate a major conservation and recreation open space area for the benefit of County residents.” This project is consistent with that priority status in that it helps restore portions of Starr Ranch through the removal of non-native plant species and re-vegetation with native plants. The project also will enhance steelhead habitat in Bell Creek, a tributary to San Juan Creek with direct connection to the Pacific Ocean.

Bolsa Chica Dune Habitat Enhancement Project: The County of Orange LCP, as well as the LCPs of several cities within the County, identifies wetlands as environmentally sensitive habitat areas that should be protected. The County of Orange General Plan also identifies Bolsa Chica as an important ecological reserve. The Bolsa Chica Dune Enhancement Initiative will promote preservation and good stewardship of wetland resources in the area and will further the goals of the County’s and surrounding cities’ LCPs.

Ocean Connectors Wetland Restoration Project:

The project does not fall within the jurisdiction of a local coastal program (LCP). However, the San Dieguito project area has a detailed long term management plan and this project is consistent with that plan. Likewise, the South San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge has a detailed long term management plan. Because the project will occur on a National Wildlife Refuge and will be managed in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it will require a determination by the Coastal Commission that the project is consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the California Coastal Management Program. This determination is also known as “federal consistency review”.

Watershed Avengers at Swan Canyon:

Swan Canyon is not within the coastal zone and is not identified in any Local Coastal Plans. The City of San Diego’s Multi Species Conservation Program (MSCP), March, 1997 identifies Chollas Creek as “one of a variety of smaller canyon systems dispersed throughout the more urban areas of the City. These areas contain a mix of habitats including coastal sage scrub, grasslands, riparian/wetlands, chaparral, and oak woodland...The areas also contribute to the public’s experience of nature and the local native environment.” One of the Management Goals and Objectives of the MSCP is “to enhance and restore, where feasible, the full range of native plant associations in strategic locations and functional wildlife connections to adjoining habitat in order to provide viable wildlife and sensitive species habitat.” The Swan Canyon Watershed Avengers project is consistent with this goal. The project will remove non-native vegetation and enhance native plant biodiversity in Swan Canyon at the headwaters of Chollas Creek.

Citizens Restoring Coastal Habitat at San Elijo Lagoon: The City of Encinitas Local Coastal Program designates San Elijo Lagoon as an environmentally sensitive habitat and states that: “The City will encourage the preservation and the function of San Elijo Lagoon . . . as viable

wetlands, ecosystems and habitat for resident and migratory wildlife. . . .” The proposed exotics removal and re-vegetation project is consistent with this program because it will further efforts to restore and enhance the lagoon.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

Projects considered for funding under this authorization can be classified as Minor Projects and are categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3), Section 15304, Class 4, as minor alterations to the land, water and/or vegetation. They can further be classified as Small Habitat Restoration Projects and are categorically exempt under Section 15333, Class 33, as habitat restoration or enhancement projects not exceeding five acres in size. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval. A further discussion of each project is provided below.

UC Santa Barbara Campus Lagoon Salt Marsh Restoration: The project will remove invasive plant species from 0.75 acres of lagoon shoreline and re-vegetate the area with native plant species. The project can be classified as a Minor Project and is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3), Section 15304, Class 4, as minor alterations of the land, water and/or vegetation. The project is further categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines, Section 15333, Class 33, as a Small Habitat Restoration Project that does not exceed five acres in size and assures the enhancement of habitat for plants, or wildlife. Also consistent with Section 15333, Class 33, the project will have no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 1506; has no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed; and will have no significant impacts when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, current projects or probable future projects. Further, consistent with Section 15333, Class 33, the project involves wetland restoration with the primary purpose of improving conditions for species that rely on wetland habitats, and will be principally carried out with hand labor and not mechanized equipment.

Devereux Slough Margin Enhancement: The project will remove invasive plant species from approximately 8 acres of lagoon shoreline and re-vegetate the area with native plant species. The project can be classified as a Minor Project and is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3), Section 15304, Class 4, as minor alterations of the land, water and/or vegetation on existing officially designated wildlife management areas which result in improvement of habitat for wildlife resources. The project area is located within the Coal Oil Point Reserve and is managed by the UC Natural Reserve System.

Refugio Creek Mouth Restoration: The project will remove invasive plant species along the Refugio Creek mouth and re-vegetate the area with native plant species. The project can be classified as a Minor Project and is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3), Section 15304, Class 4, as minor alterations of the land, water and/or vegetation. The project is further categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines,

Section 15333, Class 33, as a Small Habitat Restoration Project that does not exceed five acres in size and assures the enhancement of habitat for plants, or wildlife. Also consistent with Section 15333, Class 33, the project will have no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 1506; has no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed; and will have no significant impacts when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, current projects or probable future projects. Further, consistent with Section 15333, Class 33, the project involves wetland restoration with the primary purpose of improving conditions for species that rely on wetland habitats, and will be principally carried out with hand labor and not mechanized equipment.

Ormond Beach Native Plant Restoration: The project will remove invasive plant species from approximately 11 acres of dune and wetland habitat and re-vegetate the area with native plant species. The project can be classified as a Minor Project and is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3), Section 15304, Class 4, as minor alterations of the land, water and/or vegetation on existing officially designated wildlife management areas which result in improvement of habitat for wildlife resources.

Lower Topanga Creek Restoration Project: The project will remove invasive plant species from approximately one and a half acres of creek bank within Topanga State Park. The project can be classified as a Minor Project and is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3), Section 15304, Class 4, as minor alterations of the land, water and/or vegetation on existing officially designated wildlife management areas which result in improvement of habitat for wildlife resources. The project is further categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines, Section 15333, Class 33, as a Small Habitat Restoration Project that does not exceed five acres in size and assures the enhancement of habitat for plants, or wildlife. Also consistent with Section 15333, Class 33, the project will have no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 1506; has no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed; and will have no significant impacts when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, current projects or probable future projects. Further, consistent with Section 15333, Class 33, the project involves wetland restoration with the primary purpose of improving conditions for species that rely on wetland habitats, and will be principally carried out with hand labor and not mechanized equipment.

Invasive Removal in Bell Creek at Audubon Starr Ranch: The project will remove invasive plant species from one and a half acres adjacent to Bell Creek. The project also will remove invasive palm trees using nonchemical methods. Audubon Starr Ranch staff have consulted with the California Department of Fish and Game, the Regional Water Quality Control Board and the US Army Corps of Engineers on the tree removal portion of the project, as part of a previous effort to reduce excessive urban runoff into the project area, and determined that the project activities were minor alterations of the land on officially designated wildlife management areas that will result in improvement of habitat for wildlife resources. As such the project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3), Section 15304, Class 4.

Bolsa Chica Dune Habitat Enhancement: The project will remove invasive plant species from dune and wetland habitat in the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve. The project can be classified as a Minor Project and is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3), Section 15304, Class 4, as minor alterations of the land, water and/or vegetation on existing officially designated wildlife management areas which result in improvement of habitat for wildlife resources.

Ocean Connectors Wetland Restoration Project: The youth education project will include removal of invasive plant species and replanting with native vegetation at two sites totaling approximately three acres at the San Dieguito River Park and the South San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge. The project can be classified as a Minor Project and is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3), Section 15304, Class 4, as minor alterations of the land, water and/or vegetation on existing officially designated wildlife management areas which result in improvement of habitat for wildlife resources. The project is further categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines, Section 15333, Class 33, as a Small Habitat Restoration Project that does not exceed five acres in size and assures the enhancement of habitat for plants, or wildlife. Also consistent with Section 15333, Class 33, the project will have no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 1506; has no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed; and will have no significant impacts when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, current projects or probable future projects. Further, consistent with Section 15333, Class 33, the project involves wetland restoration with the primary purpose of improving conditions for species that rely on wetland habitats, and will be principally carried out with hand labor and not mechanized equipment.

Watershed Avengers at Swan Canyon: The project will remove trash and invasive non-native *Arundo donax* from less than five acres of habitat in the Swan Canyon, and re-vegetation with native plant species. The project can be classified as a Minor Project and is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3), Section 15304, Class 4, as minor alterations of the land, water and/or vegetation on existing officially designated wildlife management areas which result in improvement of habitat for wildlife resources. The project is further categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines, Section 15333, Class 33, as a Small Habitat Restoration Project that does not exceed five acres in size and assures the enhancement of habitat for plants, or wildlife. Also consistent with Section 15333, Class 33, the project will have no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 1506; has no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed; and will have no significant impacts when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, current projects or probable future projects. Further, consistent with Section 15333, Class 33, the project involves wetland restoration with the primary purpose of improving conditions for species that rely on wetland habitats, and will be principally carried out with hand labor and not mechanized equipment.

Citizens Restoring Coastal Habitat at San Elijo Lagoon: This project will remove non-native invasive plant species from approximately 10 acres of four habitat types including coastal sage scrub, coastal salt marsh, riparian scrub and coastal strand. The project is part of the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy's invasive species program and can be classified as a Minor Project and is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3), Section 15304, Class 4, as minor alterations of the land, water and/or vegetation on existing officially designated wildlife management areas which result in improvement of habitat for wildlife resources.