

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
April 18, 2013

SAN ELIJO LAGOON RESTORATION PROJECT: FINAL DESIGN

File No. 08-118-02
Project Manager: Megan Cooper

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Augment the Conservancy's December 4, 2008 authorization to disburse an additional amount of up to \$2,202,355 to the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy for final engineering, construction contract documents, permitting applications, and developing a monitoring program for the San Elijo Lagoon Restoration Project, San Diego County.

LOCATION: San Elijo Lagoon, Cities of Encinitas and Solana Beach, County of San Diego

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [December 4, 2008 Conservancy authorization](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

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 augments its December 4, 2008 authorization to disburse an additional amount of up to two million, two hundred two thousand, three hundred fifty five dollars (\$2,202,355) to the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy for final engineering, construction contract documents, permitting applications, and monitoring for the San Elijo Lagoon Restoration Project, San Diego County. This authorization remains subject to the conditions of its December 4, 2008 authorization."

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following finding:

"Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that the proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's findings under its December 4, 2008 authorization and with respect to the revised Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines and 2013 Strategic Plan."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy augment its December 4, 2008 authorization to disburse an additional amount of up to \$2,202,355 of San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) funds to the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy (SELC) for final engineering, construction contract documents, permitting applications, and monitoring for the San Elijo Lagoon Restoration Project (SELRP).

The goal of the SELRP is to enhance and restore the biological functions and values of the San Elijo Lagoon Reserve with a balance of habitat types, taking into account regional historic losses (See Exhibit 2 for additional information). San Elijo Lagoon is owned by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the County of San Diego and SELC. It is designated as a State Ecological Reserve and is located at the southern boundary of the City of Encinitas adjacent to Solana Beach (Exhibit 1).

Since the Conservancy's initial approval of the restoration planning project on December 4, 2008, and subsequent SANDAG funding, the SELC has accomplished all tasks on schedule, as identified in the Work Program. The work accomplished to date has included seven technical studies (sediment characterization, sea level rise, water quality, hydrology and hydraulics, inlet stability, shoaling, and tidal muting), development of conceptual designs for three restoration alternatives, four biological surveys (protocol surveys for Pacific pocket mouse, rare plant surveys, a California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM) survey, and a wetland delineation), and an ecological alternatives assessment to evaluate functional change for each draft alternative. The final deliverable from this first phase of Conservancy and SANDAG funding will be the Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (DEIR/EIS). These accomplishments were done in partnership with the SELRP stakeholder group, which meets every other month and consists of resource and regulatory agencies, the cities of Encinitas and Solana Beach, SANDAG, Caltrans, and the North County Transit District. This first phase of work allowed the SELC and the stakeholder group to develop restoration alternatives driven by the biological and physical needs of the Lagoon. This is important because a significant portion of the construction funding is likely to come from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) mitigation fees for environmental impacts caused by widening Interstate 5(I-5). Conservancy staff actively participates in the SELRP stakeholder group and provides technical assistance on the issues identified in our Strategic Plan and Project Guidelines.

The SELRP is now moving into the final design and engineering phase. Tasks for this proposed augmentation include additional technical studies required to complete the EIR/EIS, completion of the Final EIR/EIS, additional technical studies required for restoration design, preparation of the final engineering submittals, preparing permit applications, and establishing a scientific monitoring program. The purpose of the monitoring program is to establish baseline conditions in order to document achievement of project goals and objectives, including habitat improvements for plants and wildlife. The final engineering will include two incremental plan sets (30% and 60% design) construction cost estimates and schedule, construction bid package and technical support during contractor selection.

Although the preferred project alternative is yet to be identified, the final engineering phase of work must be initiated now to keep pace with the I-5 corridor transportation projects if the SELRP is going to take advantage of CalTrans mitigation funding for construction of the

SELRP. Much of the initial design work and pre-construction monitoring can be done in parallel with the environmental review process.

Project History

On December 4, 2008 the Conservancy authorized disbursement of up to \$680,000 in Conservancy funds for this project. Subsequent to that approval, the Conservancy has authorized the disbursement of an additional \$1,198,244 from SANDAG, and has augmented the Conservancy’s contribution by up to \$77,000 (See Project Financing section below). The SANDAG funding is part of a program to identify potential mitigation projects for transportation corridor improvements in north San Diego County (See Exhibit 2).

Additional project history is described in detail in the attached December 4, 2008 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy (December 4, 2008)	\$680,000
Coastal Conservancy (SANDAG) (February 26, 2009)	\$922,854
Coastal Conservancy (SANDAG) (EO approval)	\$275,390
Coastal Conservancy (December 6, 2012)	\$77,000
<u>Coastal Conservancy (SANDAG) (April 2013)</u>	<u>\$2,202,355</u>

Total Project Cost **\$4,157,599**

The source of funds for this proposed augmentation is a grant to the Conservancy from SANDAG via the CalTrans (See Exhibit 3). SANDAG and CalTrans are currently proposing a major expansion of I-5, one of the three major transportation corridors that bisect the lagoon. SANDAG has agreed to fund the next phase of the proposed project because of its interest in developing potential environmental mitigation projects for the I-5 widening project. The funding for the I-5 widening will come from a half-cent sales tax for local transportation projects called TransNet, which includes \$850,000,000 for an environmental mitigation program. This environmental mitigation program will fund the acquisition, restoration, and maintenance of many open spaces and wetlands throughout San Diego County. Over the course of this project, SANDAG has provided the Conservancy with approximately \$150,000 in staff support.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy’s December 4, 2008 authorization with respect to the Conservancy’s enabling legislation. (See Exhibit 2).

STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective A** of the Conservancy’s 2012 Strategic Plan, the proposed project would develop a plan for the enhancement of 1,066 acres of tidal wetland habitat by restoring tidal circulation and re-establishing native habitats.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's December 4, 2008 authorization regarding the 2008 project selection criteria. In addition, the project is also consistent with the current criteria, adopted on November 10, 2011 in the following respects:

Required Criteria

17. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The Project is located in an area that is vulnerable to future sea level rise. The Project will address sea level rise vulnerability by modeling predicted flood risk, habitat distribution, and hydrology using values for future sea level recommended by the Conservancy for the years 2015 and 2065. The Project design and adaptive management program is intended to reduce expected risks and increase resiliency by incorporating design features to protect infrastructure and allow for marsh migration.

Additional Criteria

18. **Minimization of Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** The Project design and construction methods will incorporate measures to avoid or minimize greenhouse gas emissions to the extent feasible and consistent with the project objectives.
19. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** The Project will include an analysis of increased storm surge and will address coastal erosion by nourishing the beach offshore of the lagoon with clean dredged material. In addition, by restoring the wetland habitat, the Project is creating a more resilient system which may buffer the ecosystem from climate change impacts.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's December 4, 2008 authorization with respect to the Local Coastal Program Policies. (See Exhibit 2).

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations, Section 15262, in that it would involve only planning studies and feasibility analyses for possible future actions. The project is also categorically exempt under Section 15306, which exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities. Environmental factors will be considered in the studies undertaken pursuant to this authorization.

Upon Conservancy approval of the project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for this project.