

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 28, 2017

**SANTA ANA RIVER TRAIL
GREEN RIVER GOLF COURSE SEGMENT
RIVERSIDE COUNTY**

File No. 11-023-03
Project Manager: Greg Gauthier

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorize disbursement of up to \$2,300,000 to the Riverside County Regional Parks and Open Space District for preparation of design and engineering and other documentation needed for environmental review for the 1.5 mile Santa Ana River Trail segment that is adjacent to the Green River Golf Course and connects to the Orange County Line in the County of Riverside.

LOCATION: Santa Ana River Parkway, along the Santa Ana River in Riverside County.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Trail Alignment Options Map](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Santa Ana River Images](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 *et. seq.* and Sections 31170 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed two million three hundred thousand dollars (\$2,300,000) to the Riverside County Regional Parks and Open Space District (District) for design, engineering and other studies, assessments, procedures and documentation needed for environmental review for the Santa Ana River Trail segment that is adjacent to the Green River Golf Course and connects to the Orange County Line.

This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to disbursement of funds to the District, the Conservancy's Executive Officer shall review and approve in writing a final work program, including a budget and schedule, and any contractors the District proposes to employ for the project.
2. To the extent appropriate, the District shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's 'Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development' and the requirements of all applicable federal and state laws governing barrier-free access for persons with disabilities into the Santa Ana Trail segment design.

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 authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program and funding for recreational opportunities and trails, and with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the establishment of a system of public accessways to and along the California coast.
 2. The proposed project will serve greater than local needs.
 3. The proposed authorization is consistent with the current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines."
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

The recommended authorization will provide funds to Riverside County Regional Parks and Open Space District (District) to complete the final design, engineering, and additional studies and assessments and other documentation needed for environmental review for the development of the Santa Ana River Trail segment that is adjacent to the Green River Golf Course and connects to the Orange County Line.

This trail segment will begin where the Orange County project ends and continue east adjacent to the Green River Golf Course to the Prado Dam. Near the Prado Dam, the trail will cross under Highway 71 and continue around the edge of the Prado Basin. Planning for this section will be coordinated with the Army Corps of Engineers, which is currently working on a project to increase flood storage in the Prado Basin by raising the face of the dam and constructing a series of supporting dikes. The trail will continue through the cities of Corona and Norco. Above the Prado Basin, the Santa Ana River is a wide braided channel that migrates across an active floodplain. Planning for the trail in this section is complicated because it must be balanced with natural resource protection and flood management. Exhibit 2 shows the recommended trail alignment options.

This project will be undertaken by the District, which was created by the electorate in November 1990 and formed on January 29, 1991. The District is an independent agency governed by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, which sits as the District's Board of Directors. The District manages more than 44,000 acres, including 40 parks, reserves, historic and archeological

sites, and 90 miles of regional trails.

Site Description:

The Santa Ana River watershed drains approximately 3,200 square miles, including portions of San Bernardino, Riverside and Orange counties. According to 2016 census data the population of Riverside County, San Bernardino County and Orange County combined is 7.7 million. Currently the state's total population is estimated to be 39.3 million; thus just less than 20 percent of all the people in the state live in these three counties.

The Santa Ana River watershed supports hundreds of species of birds, fish and amphibians, including more than a dozen protected rare or endangered species such as Least Bell's vireo, the Santa Ana Sucker, San Bernardino kangaroo rat, and the Santa Ana River woollystar.

The upper portion of the watershed is in the San Bernardino National Forest, the middle section crosses the Inland Empire, through the urbanized areas of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. Throughout this region, the Santa Ana River is a wide, braided channel with flood control levees protecting the urban development. In some places, the river is a mile wide.

Near the western boundary of San Bernardino and Riverside counties, the river flows into the Prado Basin. The Prado Basin is a flood control basin, habitat area and a water treatment wetland. The Orange County Water District owns 2,150 acres in the basin, which is in Riverside County. It operates a treatment wetland to reduce nitrogen levels in the river water prior to using that water for groundwater recharge downstream. Prado Dam was built at a narrow point along the river, where the river flows between the Chino Hills and the Santa Ana Mountains. Below Prado Dam, through the Santa Ana Canyon, there is a short section of relatively natural riparian corridor, with natural channel bottom and riparian vegetation. Below this section, through most of Orange County, the Santa Ana River is a concrete-encased flood control channel that leads to the coast. The mouth of the Santa Ana River is between Huntington Beach and Newport Beach and is part of the 1,000-acre Orange Coast River Park. Exhibit 3 shows images of the river along its course.

The Santa Ana River Trail is nearly complete in Orange County and almost half finished in Riverside County, with approximately 12 miles left to complete. There are approximately 8 miles of trail to finish in San Bernardino County.

The Santa Ana River Parkway will traverse the entire length of the Santa Ana River mainstem for one half mile on either side of the river. The Santa Ana River Parkway and Open Space Plan will be completed in late 2017. As part of the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program, the plan will address the resource and recreational goals of the Santa Ana River region including open space, trails, wildlife habitat, agricultural land protection, water quality protection, educational use, and public access.

Project History:

For more than 50 years, trail users and community leaders sought to complete the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway ("the Parkway") from the crest of the San Bernardino Mountains to the coast near Huntington Beach. Portions of the Parkway were designated a National Recreation

Trail in November 1976. When completed, it will be one of the longest urban recreation and river parkways in the United States. The trail will be a multi-use trail, serving pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians. It will connect a completed section of the California Coastal Trail to inland communities. The trail will go from the beach, through urban areas of Orange County and Riverside County up to San Bernardino National Forest wilderness areas. The completed trail will connect 3 counties and 17 cities.

The completed trail will be about 100 miles long and will include 18 miles of dirt multi-use trail in the National Forest and about 82 miles of paved trail along the lower reaches of the river.

The Parkway and river trail will connect more than 50 parks, historic sites, picnic areas, education facilities, forests, wilderness areas, hiking trails, campgrounds, nature preserves, and equestrian centers along the Santa Ana River. It is being designed to serve user groups with a wide range of interests and abilities ranging from casual pedestrian and family audiences to racing cyclists, commuters, equestrians, and hikers. The trail will be designed in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

In 1990, the Counties of San Bernardino, Riverside and Orange, along with 14 cities and various agencies came together to adopt the “Plan for the Santa Ana River Trail”, which provided a road map for completing the trail along its entirety. The over-arching goal of the plan was to provide a continuous, multi-use, trail system along the entire length of the Santa Ana River Corridor. Over the next decade, efforts to complete the trail continued at different rates within each of the respective jurisdictions. Some moved forward but progress stalled in many jurisdictions due to lack of funds.

Over time, local leaders in the watershed realized that a regional approach was necessary to complete the trail. A regional approach would allow the sharing of resources and ideas and development of a common vision for the entire trail.

In May of 2005, with the support of the Wildlands Conservancy, a nonprofit organization, local elected officials and state legislators from the watershed met to explore the possibility of state support for the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway. At this initial meeting Supervisor John Tavaglione of Riverside County suggested development of a Partnership Action Plan to coordinate planning efforts and leverage funding and resources by local entities throughout the watershed. In August of 2005, the group determined that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was the appropriate vehicle to formalize their commitment and in July of 2006, a final MOU was signed and adopted by The Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway Partnership including the Counties of Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority and The Wildlands Conservancy.

One of the primary hurdles to completing the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway had been a lack of consistent funding for trail projects. The Conservancy approved a \$1,850,000 planning grant to Riverside County in December, 2007. Since then the members of the Partnership have worked cooperatively and coordinated efforts to complete the conceptual development and trail alignments for the uncompleted segments of the Parkway. Proposition 84 included a \$45 million dollar allocation to the Coastal Conservancy for projects to “expand and improve” the Parkway.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	<u>\$2,300,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$2,300,000

Staff expects to use funds appropriated to the Conservancy in fiscal year 2016-17 from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). Chapter 5 of Proposition 84 provides for funding for the protection and restoration of rivers, their watersheds, and associated land, water and other natural resources. Public Resources Code section 75050. Chapter 5 specifically allocates funds to the Coastal Conservancy for projects that “expand and improve” the Santa Ana River Parkway and that have been developed “in consultation with local government agencies participating in the development of the Santa Ana River Parkway.” Public Resources Code section 75050(i) Proposition 84 further specified that at least \$10 million of the Parkway funds would be spent in each of the three counties. Funding for this project would come from the set aside for the region in which this project is located. Consistent with Proposition 84, the recommended action provides a planning grant to the District for a project, which will assist in providing access to and enjoyment of the coastal draining watershed of the Santa Ana River and, in conjunction with the larger Trail project, will eventually tie to an inland system of trails connecting with the Coastal Trail. The proposed project was developed in partnership with the local governments participating in the development of the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway. Finally, as discussed in the following section, the project is consistent with Chapters 4.6 and 9 of Division 21.

While there are no matching funds identified for these projects, significant matching funds have already been spent completing the Santa Ana River Trail. More than \$55,000,000 in private funding has matched a total of \$15,000,000 from the local governments and approximately \$8,000,000 in federal funds. It is expected that the entire Parkway will cost approximately \$118,000,000 to complete.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will help implement the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway, which will become a major inland trail connecting to the California Coastal Trail. The project is consistent with the provisions of Chapter 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31170 *et seq.* regarding the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program and funding for recreational opportunities and trails.

Section 31173 states that the Conservancy may undertake projects and award grants to public agencies to help achieve recreational opportunities and trails. It further states that Conservancy may undertake projects for “Public access to, enjoyment of, and enhancement of recreational and educational experience on, program lands in a manner consistent with the protection of land and natural resources and economic resources in the area.” This project will complete design of a portion of the Santa Ana River Trail for the purpose of public access and recreation.

Section 31174(c) states that the Conservancy shall “Give priority to river-related projects that create expanded opportunities for recreation …” Completion of the Santa Ana River Trail will expand opportunities for recreation.

The project is also consistent with the provisions of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31400 *et seq.* Section 31409 states that the Conservancy “may award grants and provide assistance to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to establish and expand those inland trail systems that may be linked to the California Coastal Trail.” This project will expand the Santa Ana River inland trail system. Section 31400.1 states that the Conservancy may award grants to any public agency for public access purposes to the coast if the accessway serves more than local public need. This project will serve the recreational needs of three large counties encompassing almost 20 percent of the entire state’s population and will likely be used by visitors from other areas of the state and nation..

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2013 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S), AS REVISED JUNE 25, 2015:

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective 2E** of Conservancy’s 2013-2018 Strategic Plan the proposed project will design a 1.5-mile section of a new regional trail and river parkway that will connect inland populations to the coast.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated by the Conservancy on October 2, 2014 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. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** By funding the planning for development of a segment of the Santa Ana Trail, the proposed project will implement the following state plans:

California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report (Governor’s Office of Planning and Research, Draft 2013): Goal 2, “Build Sustainable Regions that Support Healthy, Livable Communities,” specific strategy to “support and invest in active transportation projects, such as walking and biking infrastructure.” This project will support completion of the Santa Ana River Trail, which will provide increased opportunities for active transportation and commuting by bicycle, as well as pedestrian and equestrian trail use. The trail will contribute substantially to providing sustainable and healthy lifestyle opportunities and alternative modes of transportation and recreation.

California Recreational Trails Plan (California State Parks, Phase I, June 2002): The Santa Ana River Trail is identified in the California Recreational Trails Plan as a state trail corridor and meets the Plan's three main criteria of providing: 1) a trail corridor that will be a long-distance route greater than 50 miles identified for non-motorized travel; 2) a trail corridor that links people to public and private lands that have outstanding scenic, historic, natural, educational, or recreational values; and 3) a trail corridor that connects with other trail corridors or shorter local trails, and stimulates the development of connecting trails by its location.

4. **Support of the public:** The Parkway project is widely supported by local organizations and elected officials, including California State Parks, the Counties of Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino, the Wildlands Conservancy, the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, the Flood Control Districts of Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties, the Orange County Water District. Project letters are provided in Exhibit 4.
5. **Location:** The proposed project is located along the Santa Ana River and will help to complete a 100-mile trail that will connect the Coastal Trail to the San Bernardino Mountains.
6. **Need:** As described above, there has been a vision of completing the Parkway for more than 50 years. During the last decade, significant political support and regional coordination was established with the goal of completing trail design and construction. Funding for trail construction is one of the key factors needed to complete the trail. With the funding allocated in Proposition 84, the Parkway planning and construction is progressing.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** Portions of the Parkway were designated a National Recreation Trail in November 1976 linking the San Bernardino Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. The National Park Service has indicated its interest in designating the entire trail, once completed, as a National Recreation Trail. When complete, it will be one of the longest urban recreation river parkways in the United States. Just under one-fifth of all the people in the state (approximately 7 million people) live in the three counties served by this trail.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project area is not vulnerable to sea level rise due to the project area's distance from the coast.

Additional Criteria

9. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The Parkway will provide recreational, transportation and health benefits to the residents of Orange County and the Inland Empire. The trail will provide urban populations with access to natural areas along the river, to the Coast and National Forests, and to many cultural and historical sites adjacent to the river. Trails development will be balanced with natural resource protection and flood management along the river.
10. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section, above.
13. **Readiness:** The conceptual planning and trail alignment alternatives are complete and the District is prepared to begin immediately with the final design, engineering and environmental review phase for the Green River Golf Course reach of the Santa Ana River Trail.

14. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** Completion of the Parkway will advance the Conservancy's long-held goal of increasing public access to the Coast. The proposed trail will provide bicycle, pedestrian and equestrian access to the Coast. The trail will potentially serve millions of residents within these counties. Completion of the entire trail will benefit previous Conservancy projects at the mouth of the Santa Ana River, including work at the Huntington Beach Wetlands, Orange Coast River Park, Fairview Park and Talbert Nature Preserve.
16. **Cooperation:** The Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway Partnership is a unique example of regional coordination and collaboration among the agencies and stakeholders created by a Memorandum of Understanding. The Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway Partnership was created to coordinate building and administering the trail as a regional resource and to manage and maintain the trail cooperatively across jurisdictional boundaries in perpetuity. The Partnership is comprised of elected officials from Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, cities within the watershed, and executive officers from the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority and The Wildlands Conservancy.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project involves planning design, engineering and environmental review and is therefore statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act under Title 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15262. Upon approval, staff will file a notice of exemption for the project.