

# COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

March 22, 2018

## **Marshes on the Margins in Southern California**

Project No. 97-001-04

Project Manager: Evyan Sloane

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to a total \$46,949 to the Aquatic Science Center to augment the previously authorized grant for marsh migration studies that will further the goal of expanding, restoring and protecting wetlands in Southern California's coastal watersheds in Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties.

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

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Resource Enhancement

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### **EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [February 2, 2017 Staff Recommendation](#)

Exhibit 2: [November 30, 2017 Staff Recommendation](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 4: [Grant Application to NOAA](#)

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### **RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31111 and 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby approves the additional disbursement of up \$46,949 to augment the Conservancy's prior authorization of November 30, 2017 for the second year of marsh migration and estuary dynamics studies that will further the goal of expanding, restoring and protecting wetlands in Southern California's coastal watersheds in Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties. It is anticipated that the augmented funding will be disbursed as follows:

1. An amount of up to forty-six thousand nine hundred forty-nine dollars (\$46,949) to the Aquatic Science Center.

Prior to the disbursement of any augmented funds, the Aquatic Science Center shall submit for the review and written approval of the Conservancy's Executive Officer a work program,

including budget and schedule, and any contractors to be employed for these work program tasks.”

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 remains consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the funding of feasibility studies and plans, and with Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding resource enhancement.
2. The proposed project remains consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.”

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends augmentation of the Conservancy’s November 30, 2017 authorization to provide an additional \$46,949 to support the second year of studies of marsh migration in Southern California. The funds will be granted to a public entity, the Aquatic Science Center, a joint powers authority created by the State Water Resources Control Board and other public water agencies that seeks to increase scientific data regarding wetland restoration in Southern California to promote sustainable wetlands restoration. The study is consistent with the goals of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (WRP), a forum through which unaffiliated state and federal entities coordinate with each other regarding the protection, restoration and enhancement of wetlands in Southern California’s coastal watersheds.

This augmentation is to provide state matching funds to a project funded prior to this point entirely from NOAA’s Ecological Effects of Sea Level Rise grant program, as well as to fill a budget shortfall for the proposed study activities in year two. The Conservancy authorized the first year of NOAA’s project funding at its February 2, 2017 meeting (Exhibit 1) and authorized the second year of NOAA funding at its November 30, 2017 meeting (Exhibit 2). The proposed augmentation seeks to add additional funds provided by the Conservancy for the second-year activities.

The entities participating through the WRP are currently engaged in the development of an update to the *Regional Strategy* - a document that reflects a consensus on how to expand, restore and protect Southern California’s wetlands. The update will address how to achieve wetland restoration that is sustainable and adaptable to the effects of sea-level rise (SLR). The updated *Regional Strategy* will set forth quantifiable and spatially-explicit restoration objectives for wetlands recovery. These objectives will be developed through a science-based analysis of the current extent and state of tidal wetlands, the historical structure and functions of those wetlands, and the future vulnerabilities in the face of sea level rise. Over the past year the Science Advisory Panel, a group of scientists convened through the WRP, has identified some key uncertainties regarding how wetlands in Southern California will adapt to sea level rise. One key

gap in knowledge is the understanding of how and where to restore upland transition zones for wetland migration—an aspect of wetland restoration that will likely become the main opportunity for many estuarine systems to persist in the future. This proposed project consists of the studies necessary to answer these questions thereby generating information that will help the update the *Regional Strategy* and achieve the grantees’ goals of increasing scientific data regarding wetland restoration and promoting sustainable wetland restoration.

The work for the project under the proposed augmentation will be carried out by one of the same organizations that was identified for the marsh migration studies in the February 2, 2017 and November 30, 2017 staff recommendations, Aquatic Science Center (ASC). The role and activities of ASC for the second year of project work under the proposed augmentation remain the same as the roles and activities described for that entity in the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation (see Exhibit 1).

**Site Description:** The proposed project area consists of the coastal wetlands and watersheds within the counties of San Diego, Orange, Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara, from Point Conception south to the U.S./Mexico border (see Exhibit 2).

**Project History:** See the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation for the full history of the project and for the history of the *Regional Strategy*.

The *Regional Strategy* needs to be updated to reflect new data and information and contemporary approaches to ecological restoration. Incorporating an understanding of how climate change will impact approaches to restoration is a primary impetus for updating the *Regional Strategy*.

In September 2016, the Conservancy was awarded a grant from NOAA to further the scientific analyses supporting the regional restoration strategy for Southern California’s wetlands and, specifically, to provide for studies regarding wetland restoration in the face of sea-level rise. This NOAA grant was the source of the first year of studies authorized by the Conservancy on February 2, 2017 and was also the source of funding for the second year of studies authorized by the Conservancy on November 30, 2017.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<i>Grantee Name</i>	<i>Proposed Augmentation (Conservancy Funds)</i>	<i>November 30, 2017 Authorization (NOAA Funds)</i>	<i>February 2, 2017 Authorization (NOAA funds)</i>	<i>Totals</i>
UC Davis		\$76,991	\$39, 272	116,263
USGS		\$63,319	\$62,187	125,506
SCCWRP		\$28,280	\$1,431	29,711
Point Blue		\$22,487	\$4,657	6,905
ASC	\$46,949	\$38,585	\$97,945	183,479
SWIA		\$12,401	\$11,467	23,868
USC Sea Grant		\$22,931	\$22,510	45,441

<b>Project Totals</b>	<b>Proposed Year 2 Augmentation</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>\$46,949</b>	<b>\$264,994</b>	<b>\$239,470</b>	<b>\$531,173</b>

The expected source of Conservancy funds for the proposed augmentation is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84, Public Resources Code section 75001, et seq.). Proposition 84 allows for the use of funds for expenditures for the protection of beaches, bays and coastal waters and watersheds, including projects to protect and restore the natural habitat values of coastal waters and lands, pursuant to the Conservancy’s enabling legislation. The proposed project will further planning for wetland habitat restoration along the coast of southern California and will result in enhanced, protected, and resilient wetlands and will be undertaken pursuant to the Conservancy’s enabling legislation as specified below and detailed in the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation (see Exhibit 1).

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

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, as detailed in the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation (see Exhibit 1).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2018 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

On November 30, 2017, the Conservancy adopted a Strategic Plan for 2018-2022. The project remains consistent the Conservancy’s 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, as follows:

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective A**, the proposed project will inform the update of the *Regional Strategy*. The *Regional Strategy* is the planning document used by the entities coordinating through the WRP to prioritize and select various restoration, conservation, and preservation efforts throughout southern California’s wetland habitats. The proposed project and the updated *Regional Strategy* will help local project proponents plan more successful projects by providing SLR decision-making tools and specific restoration guidance and management strategies for SLR resiliency.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The project remains consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines as detailed in the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation (see Exhibit 1).

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The project remains consistent with Local Coastal Program policies, as detailed in the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation (see Exhibit 1).

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed project remains categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the reasons described in the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation (see Exhibit 1).