

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

September 6, 2018

COMMUNITY WETLAND RESTORATION GRANT PROGRAM

Project No. 12-026-02

Project Manager: Julie Gonzalez

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$29,800 to the MERITO Foundation to undertake the Kalorama Wetland Restoration and Community Education Project, a community-based natural resource restoration and enhancement project in Ventura County.

LOCATION: The Kalorama Wetland at San Buenaventura State Beach, Ventura County.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Coastal Education, Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [CWRGP Staff Recommendation](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31119, 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of up to twenty nine thousand eight hundred dollars (\$29,800) to the MERITO Foundation (the “grantee”) for a community-based natural resource restoration and enhancement project at the Kalorama Wetland in Ventura County, as more specifically described in the accompanying staff recommendation. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds the grantee shall submit for the review and approval of the Conservancy’s Executive Officer:
 - a. A work program, including project tasks, schedule and budget;
 - b. Names and qualifications of all contractors to be employed on the project; and
 - c. Evidence that all necessary permits and approvals for the project have been obtained.
- d. Evidence that the grantee has entered into a landowner agreement sufficient to enable the grantee to implement the project.”

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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 Chapters 3 and 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding undertaking educational projects for K-12 students relating to the coastal resources (Ch.3) and enhancement of coastal resources (Ch.6).
3. The MERITO Foundation is a nonprofit organization qualified under Section 501 (c) (3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code. The purposes of these nonprofit organizations are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to \$29,800 to the MERITO Foundation to implement the Kalorama Wetland Restoration and Community Education Project (“project”), a community-based resource restoration and enhancement project at the Kalorama Wetland at San Buenaventura State Beach as part of the 2018 Community Based Wetland Restoration Program (CWRGP). The funding source will be a 2016 grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to the Conservancy for the CWRGP. The WCB granted this money to the Conservancy because of the Conservancy’s history of supporting the CWRGP through technical expertise to grantees and administrative support.

The CWRGP is a Conservancy program to provide funding annually for community-based wetland and riparian enhancement and restoration projects in coastal wetlands and watersheds in the Southern California region. The purpose of the CWRGP is to further the wetland recovery goals for Southern California as set forth in the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (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.

The Conservancy authorized funding for eight 2018 CWRGP projects at its meeting on May 24, 2018 (see Exhibit 1). Staff had intended to include the proposed project in the May 2018 authorization as the 9th and final 2018 CWRGP project, but the previously selected grantee dissolved directly before the May meeting. The current grantee was recommended by the previous grantee and is capable of implementing the project. The project is described below.

Kalorama Wetland Restoration and Community Education Project

The Kalorama Wetland is at the mouth of a storm drain outlet in Ventura, California (Exhibit 2). Prior to urban development, the Ventura coastline had extensive sea cliffs interspersed with deep

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and narrow winding river gorges that let out at the beaches. The Kalorama Wetland was fed by its associated barranca and consisted of meandering streams along the beach linked to the outlet of the Sanjon Barranca. The wetland is in the back shore zone on the stretch of beach south of the Ventura pier and north of the Sanjon Barranca in the San Buenaventura State Beach day use area. The site has relatively few native plant species and many non-native plant species. These non-native species are spreading and outcompeting the native plants, further depleting their struggling populations. This proposed project will enable the MERITO Foundation to remove non-native invasive plants and restore native vegetation through community engagement. The MERITO Foundation will prepare for and lead removal events where volunteers will remove non-native invasive plant species. During events, removal work will be prefaced with a presentation to educate volunteers on various aspects of the project. The MERITO Foundation staff will present information on local wetland ecology and conservation, and the threats posed by non-native and invasive species. The MERITO Foundation staff will instruct volunteers on plant identification, methods of non-native plant removal, and methods of native plant propagation and revegetation.

In addition to the volunteer events open to the public, the MERITO Foundation will coordinate with local schools to involve student volunteers in these restoration efforts. The MERITO Foundation will also lead a workshop for teachers prior to the revegetation that will provide the teachers with curriculum, presentations and online resources focused on Ventura's wetlands a coastal habitats. This workshop will provide more value to the student volunteers involved in the restoration. The MERITO Foundation's biologist and GIS specialist will map the invasive plant coverage using ArcGIS prior to commencement of initial removal, and then monthly following volunteer events to provide an updated visual for tracking progress. They will also design and install a temporary project sign along the bike path describing the habitat, its functions, and the importance of this restoration work. This will be replaced with a permanent sign depicting similar information before the completion of the project.

Following the volunteer events, the MERITO Foundation staff will treat invasive plant regrowth in the areas that have had invasive plants physically removed. Application methods will include foliar spray application and cut and daub using a combination of aquatic-safe herbicides. The MERITO Foundation staff will hold revegetation events where staff and volunteers will broadcast native plant seed mixes, and install cuttings and container plants over bare areas where invasive plants have been removed. The revegetation will provide erosion control, increase habitat value, and provide aesthetic value for the project area once it becomes established.

Revegetation north of the bike path, at the source of the storm drainage, will include native *Carex* and *Juncus* species to aid in phytoremediation of the run-off pollutants. The MERITO Foundation will take water samples of the run-off to analyze water quality. They will provide brief qualitative progress monitoring reports following volunteer events to document and evaluate the success of the removal and revegetation for the duration of the project.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT SITE:

The Kalorama Wetlands has high pedestrian foot traffic from beach-goers, bicyclists, runners and others seeking coastal recreation due to its proximity to the Ventura pier, Ventura Freeway,

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and the state beach parking lots. The site contains two freshwater wetland components. The drainage itself, a storm run-off outlet, supports approximately 1 acre of riparian willow woodland. Southeast of the drainage the wetland extends into approximately 0.75 acres of seasonal wet meadow where vegetation has been colonizing the beach. Adjacent to the wetland are two transitional zones: the approximately 0.25-acres of coastal strand at the southern edge of the wetland where patches of vegetation and incipient dunes receive moisture from seeps off the drainage and water table; and approximately 1.5-acres of coastal sage scrub northeast of the drainage. The site is divided from its drainage source by a bike path and unnamed road leading to the San Buenaventura State Beach parking lot. The drainage follows a cement channelization approximately 45 feet long under the road and bike path before its outlet on the beach. This divides the woodland into two areas, the area closest to the run-off source north of the bike path (the source woodland) and the area south of the path, connected to the beach (the outlet woodland). All areas are being invaded by a variety of non-native plants including two species with a rating of highly invasive from the California Invasive Plant Council. The entire project will take place on land owned by the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) and they support this project (Exhibit 3).

CWRGP PROJECT HISTORY:

See “Project History” section of Exhibit 1.

PROJECT FINANCING

Conservancy (Wildlife Conservation Board grant)	\$29,800
Other funding sources (see below)	\$61,189
TOTAL	\$90,989

The anticipated source of funds is a grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) of \$450,000 to the Conservancy. In November 2016, the WCB approved a grant to the Conservancy from the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Fund of 2002 (established by Proposition 50, Water Code Section 79500, et seq.) to be administered over four years. Under Water Code Section 79572(a), these funds may be used for the acquisition, protection, and restoration of coastal wetlands, upland areas adjacent to coastal wetlands, and coastal watershed lands. The project fits this funding criteria because it entails restoration of coastal wetlands located in the coastal zone within Ventura County.

The MERITO Foundation will provide matching funds totaling \$61,189. These matching funds are composed of in kind funding from the MERITO Foundation, California Department of Parks and Recreation, and S&S Seeds.

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CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed authorization is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 of Division 21, Sections 31119 and 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code, respectively, regarding Educational Programs and Resource Enhancement Projects.

Chapter 3: Establishment and Functions

Section 31119 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants for educational projects for pupils in kindergarten to grade 12, inclusive, relating to the preservation, protection, enhancement and maintenance of coastal resources. Kalorama Wetland Restoration and Community Education Project includes an educational component on watershed science and restoration for students in K-12.

Chapter 6: Coastal Resource Enhancement Projects

Section 31251 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to 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." This proposed project will also enhance or restore natural resources that have been degraded by human activities.

Section 31252 requires that all areas proposed for resource enhancement by a state agency, local public agency, or nonprofit organization shall be identified in a certified local coastal plan or program as requiring public action to resolve existing or potential resource protection problems or shall be so identified in other local plans which the commission determines to be consistent with the policies and objectives of Division 20 (commencing with Section 30000).

The Kalorama Wetland Restoration and Community Education Project is located on land owned by State Parks that is within the Coastal Commission's retained jurisdiction and therefore is not identified in any local coastal plan. See Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies section, below. However, the project helps achieve the policies of Coastal Act section 30231, which requires that the biological productivity and quality of coastal waters and wetlands be maintained and, where feasible, restored. (Public Resources Code section 30231). Restoration of wetlands typically requires public action. Accordingly, funding the proposed project is consistent with Section 31252.

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 each 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. For the proposed project, the Conservancy's funding was deemed appropriate through a competitive grant process that included selection because the project benefits to coastal habitat is significant. The use of community volunteers in this proposed project provides added cost savings, and includes an important public education component.

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**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2018 - 2022
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S), AS REVISED NOVEMBER 30, 2017:**

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective B**, of the Conservancy's 2018 - 2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will enhance approximately 2 acres of coastal habitat and approximately 325 feet of stream corridor.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective D**, the proposed project will be implemented to preserve and enhance coastal watersheds and floodplains.

Consistent with **Goal 4, Objective A**, the proposed project will support programs or events that improve public understanding of coastal resources by involving communities and volunteers in coastal resource restoration.

Consistent with **Goal 4, Objective B** the proposed project will support the design and installation of interpretive or educational displays related to coastal and watershed resource education.

**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 October 2, 2014 in the following respects:

Required Criteria

Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes: See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.

Consistency with purposes of the funding source: See the "Project Financing" section above.

Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:

- a. This project is consistent with the *California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report* (2013 Draft) because it "increase[s] ecosystem services and biodiversity" and "increase[s] resilience of natural systems to recover from disruption.
- b. The proposed Project implements the *California Water Action Plan* (January 2014) by protecting and restoring the ecological health of a coastal estuary in order to increase ecosystem and native species distributions and abundance and to maintain and improve ecological conditions and ecosystem functions and processes.
- c. This project is consistent with the 2014 *Safeguarding California* update to the 2009 *California Climate Adaptation Strategy*, which seeks to "Create and maintain partnerships that support biodiversity conservation and promote public education and outreach."

Support of the public: The proposed project is supported by State Parks and Ventura Water. See Exhibit 3 for support letters.

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Location: The proposed project is located within the coastal zone. More specific information on each project location is provided in the “Site Description” section of the “Project Summary”, above.

Need: The CWRGP is not sustainable without Conservancy funding. Further, the proposed project would not happen without Conservancy funding.

Greater-than-local interest: The CWRGP is regional by design and serves greater-than- local interest through the cumulative benefits of multiple small acreage projects. The proposed project will help restore native wetland habitat critical for migratory birds and commercially and recreationally important fish species. The proposed project also provides educational opportunities for people throughout the region to participate in on-the-ground habitat restoration activities.

Sea level rise vulnerability: The Kalorama Wetland Restoration and Community Education project is a location above, at or near sea level in an area vulnerable to sea level rise. However, this project site has adequate surrounding buffer zone to allow for habitat migration and/or conversion considering a range of sea level rise scenarios for the years 2050 and 2100.

Additional Criteria

Urgency: This proposed project targets invasive species for removal. Timely implementation of small invasive removal projects before these invasive species can further spread helps prevent widespread dispersal and habitat destruction.

Leverage: See “Project Summary” section, above for specific details of leverage of funding for the proposed project.

Innovation: The proposed project demonstrates innovation through the inclusion of a wide range and diversity of volunteers often targeting low-income and underserved communities and multi-generational community members.

Readiness: The proposed project is ready to be completed within one to two years.

Realization of prior Conservancy goals: See “Project History” section, above.

Cooperation: The proposed project will, by design, foster cooperation between the lead organization and the community in helping to enhance coastal resources. Multiple community organizations, nonprofits and local agencies will be involved in implementation of the proposed project.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES/OR OTHER RELEVANT LOCAL, STATE AND/OR FEDERAL POLICIES:

The Kalorama Wetland Restoration and Community Education Project does not fall under the jurisdiction of a Local Coastal Plan or other planning document. The project area is within the San Buenaventura State Beach, which is within the Coastal Commission’s area of retained jurisdiction. Nathaniel Cox, Senior Environmental Scientists with State Parks supports the project. State Parks does not currently have a management plan that includes the project area

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and the State Parks General Plan for the San Buenaventura State Beach does not mention the project area. The project area is in the Coastal Zone but because it is within the Coastal Commission's retained jurisdiction, it is not addressed in the Ventura County Resource Management Agency Coastal Plan Area or the City of Ventura's Downtown Specific Plan.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304, which exempts minor alterations in the condition of land and vegetation that will not remove healthy, mature and scenic trees. The restoration component of the proposed project falls within this exemption because it consists of removing invasive plants and planting of native plants; no healthy, mature, scenic trees will be removed. The invasive plants will be removed using predominantly hand tools and herbicide. Use of herbicide is a standard practice for habitat restoration projects throughout the state of California because small amounts of herbicide is the Best Management Practice for control of the invasive species targeted in this proposed project. The proposed project is designed to apply the herbicide in a manner that does not impact surrounding vegetation and wildlife. The limited application of herbicides does not present an unusual circumstance requiring further environmental review. (See section 15300.2). The restoration component of the proposed project is also categorically exempt under Section 15333, small habitat restoration projects, because it involves revegetation of disturbed areas that do not exceed 5 acres in size; will have no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to Section 15065; will not disturb or remove any hazardous materials at or around the proposed project site; and will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects. In addition, the proposed project will host interns from Ventura High School's environmental club that will assist with monitoring of the project. The monitoring component of the project is categorically exempt under Section 15306, which exempts basic information collection, as students will be collecting basic data for educational purposes and the collection activities will not result in a major habitat disturbance. Finally, installation of the interpretive sign is exempt pursuant to Section 15303, which exempts new, small structures.

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