

## COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
September 6, 2018

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

Project No. 97-001-04  
Project Manager: Evyan Sloane

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$200,678 to the University of California Davis; U.S. Geological Survey; Southern California Coastal Water Research Project; Point Blue Conservation Science; Aquatic Science Center; Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association; and the University of Southern California Sea Grant to augment the previously authorized grant for marsh migration and estuary dynamics studies as recommended by the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project.

**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: [Project Location Map](#)  
Exhibit 3: [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 disbursement of up to \$200,678 of funds received from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to augment the Conservancy’s February 2, 2017 authorization for marsh migration and estuary dynamics studies that will further the goals of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project in Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties. It is anticipated that the augmented funding will be disbursed as follows:

- 1) Up to seventy-eight thousand six hundred ninety-three dollars (\$78,693) to the University of California Davis;
- 2) Up to eight thousand one hundred twenty-seven dollars (\$8,127) to the U.S. Geological Survey;

- 3) Up to sixteen thousand one hundred twenty-two dollars (\$16,122) to the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project;
- 4) Up to thirty-one thousand four hundred three dollars (\$31,403) to Point Blue Conservation Science;
- 5) Up to five thousand nine hundred thirty-six dollars (\$5,936) to the Aquatic Science Center;
- 6) Up to thirty-seven thousand thirty-nine dollars (\$37,039) to the Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association; and
- 7) Up to twenty-three thousand three hundred fifty-eight dollars (\$23,358) to the University of Southern California Sea Grant.

Prior to the disbursement of any funds to a grantee, the grantee 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 the 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 is consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding resource enhancement.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The USC Sea Grant, Point Blue Conservation Science and the Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association are nonprofit organizations existing under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code."

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends augmentation of the Conservancy's February 2, 2017 grant authorization to provide an additional \$200,678 of federal funds awarded to the Conservancy by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to support studies of marsh migration and estuary dynamics. The funds will be granted to various public entities and 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations that seek to increase scientific data regarding wetland restoration in Southern California to promote sustainable wetlands restoration. The studies will provide information that will help further the goals of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (WRP), which consists of staff of several state and federal entities coordinating with each other regarding the protection, restoration and enhancement of wetlands in Southern California's coastal watersheds. The proposed project will provide information that will help achieve the WRP goal that wetlands restoration projects be designed to be sustainable.

The WRP is 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 by 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 how the dynamic estuaries of Southern California, most of which are intermittently-open estuaries (IOEs), will be affected by sea-level rise. Another deficiency 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 will fund the studies necessary to answer these questions and will inform the update to the *Regional Strategy*.

The proposed project will be carried out by the same seven organizations that were identified in the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation: University of California Davis (UC Davis); U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS); Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP); Point Reyes Bird Observatory, dba Point Blue Conservation Science (Point Blue); Aquatic Science Center (ASC); Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association (SWIA); and University of Southern California Sea Grant (USC Sea Grant). The role and activities of each for the third year of project work under the proposed augmentation remain the same as the roles and activities described for each organization 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 history, nature, and role of the WRP and for the history of the WRP *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 and second year of studies authorized by the Conservancy on February 2, 2017 and November 30, 2017, and is also the source of funding for the third year of studies under the proposed augmentation.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

**Conservancy Funding (NOAA grant)**

<i>Grantee Name</i>	<i>Proposed Augmentation</i>	<i>Nov 30, 2017 Authorization</i>	<i>Feb 2, 2017 Authorization</i>	<i>Totals to Date</i>
UC Davis	\$78,693	\$76,991	\$39, 272	116,263
USGS	\$8,127	\$63,319	\$62,187	125,506
SCCWRP	\$16,122	\$28,280	\$1,431	29,711
Point Blue	\$31,403	\$22,487	\$4,657	6,905
ASC	\$5,936	\$38,585	\$97,945	136,530
SWIA	\$37,039	\$12,401	\$11,467	23,868
USC Sea Grant	\$23,358	\$22,931	\$22,510	45,441
<b>Project Totals</b>	<b>Year 3 \$200,678</b>	<b>Year 2 \$264,994</b>	<b>Year 1 \$239,470</b>	<b>Total \$504,464</b>

The expected fund source for this project is a grant from the NOAA’s National Ocean Service’s Center for Coastal Ocean Science through the Ecological Effects of Sea-level Rise Grant Program. (See Exhibit 3.) These funds were awarded to the Conservancy specifically for the purpose of carrying out studies of sustainable wetland restoration in the face of sea-level rise to increase scientific knowledge and inform the update to the WRP *Regional Strategy*. Although the total grant award to the Conservancy is \$850,330.63, NOAA will award its grant funds on an annual basis over the four year-long project, called Marshes on the Margins. The proposed augmentation is for the third year of funding for the project. Staff intends to return to the Conservancy each year to authorize disbursement of the annual portion of the total NOAA grant award.

**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 2018-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective A** of the Conservancy’s 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will generate information necessary to develop plans for the restoration and enhancement of coastal wetlands. The information generated by the proposed project will be included in the updated *Regional Strategy* to 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).