

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

May 16, 2019

**COMMUNITY WETLAND RESTORATION GRANT PROGRAM**

Project No. 12-026-02

Project Manager: Evyan Sloane

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$184,700 to one public entity and six nonprofit organizations for seven community-based natural resource restoration and enhancement projects in Southern California coastal wetlands and watersheds in Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties.

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

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Coastal Education, Resource Enhancement

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Project Locations Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Sample Project Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

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**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 one hundred eighty-four thousand seven hundred dollars (\$184,700) to one local government and six nonprofit organizations for seven community-based natural resource restoration and enhancement projects in Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties, as more specifically described in the accompanying staff recommendation. These authorizations are subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds for each project, each project 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.

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- d. If the project site is not owned by the grantee, evidence that the grantee has entered into landowner agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement the project.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and the attached exhibit, 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. Ventura Land Trust, Will Geer’s Theatricum Botanicum, Bolsa Chica Conservancy, Earth Discovery Institute, Living Coast Discovery Institute, and San Diego Audubon Society all are nonprofit organizations 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.
4. Consistent with Public Resources Code Section 31117, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy supports the “Topanga Creek’s Theater of Plants” project located in the Santa Monica Mountains Zone.

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### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to \$184,700 to one local government and six nonprofit organizations to implement seven community-based resource restoration and enhancement projects along the Southern California coast (Exhibit 1) as part of the 2019 Community Wetland Restoration Grant Program (CWRGP).

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 CWRGP is to further the wetland recovery goals for Southern California as set forth in the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (WRP) *Regional Strategy* (2018); 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 typically funds approximately 10 CWRGP projects per year with an annual allocation to the CWRGP of approximately \$300,000. Each January, the Conservancy solicits CWRGP proposals from nonprofit organizations, universities, tribes, and agencies eligible to apply to the CWRGP. Proposals are reviewed by a technical advisory committee that includes staff from the Conservancy, Earth Island Institute, the Wildlife Conservation Board, and other agencies that participate in the WRP. Projects are selected by late spring with the work beginning in late summer or early fall. Projects funded through the CWRGP are designed to be

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completed in one to two years. The total amount recommended for this authorization is expected to fund one year of the grant cycle.

Project selection for the 2019 CWRGP was completed in February 2019. Of this year's projects, six were proposed by nonprofit organizations and one by a city government. The seven projects recommended for funding this year are as follows:

### Ventura County

#### **Ormond Beach Community Restoration at Perkins Road**

The project area contains unique upland and beach habitats of Ormond Beach. However, the site has several challenges that impact its habitat and recreation value such as proximity to a Superfund site, prior use of the site as a homeless encampment, and invasive plants (Exhibit 2). The project area is broken into 3 segments: the island, the triangle, and the beach. The proposed project will address the impacts to habitat by removing invasive plants in the area, removing at least 10 tons of trash and debris remaining from the homeless encampment sites that were removed in January 2019, and planting native plants. City Corps trainees will remove the trash and debris, cut and remove invasive plants, and prepare the planting sites. Native replanting will be done by the City of Oxnard's City Corps program and the City of Oxnard's After School Education and Safety Program, and residents.

**Site Description:** This project site is located at the south terminus of Perkins Road in southern Oxnard and is owned and managed by the City of Oxnard. The project area has a number of challenges that impact its habitat and recreational value. The site is adjacent to the Halaco Superfund site, and the site suffers from illegal encampments and invasive plants that threaten sensitive habitat for the nesting of two endangered bird species, the Western Snowy Plover (*Charadrius nivosus nivosus*) and the Belding's Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*). Existing plant communities at the site include coastal strand, coastal salt/freshwater marsh, and coastal sage scrub. These communities have been invaded by non-native plants including Wattles (*Acacia* sp.), Ngaio tree (*Myoporum laetum*), Saltcedar (*Tamarisk ramosissima*), Pampas Grass (*Cortaderia jubata*), Bottlebrush (*Callistemon citrinus*), *Carpobrotus* sp. and Iceplant (*Mesembrianthemum* sp.) and other species. The site is adjacent to the seasonal lagoon formed at the confluence of the Ormond Lagoon Waterway (formerly the J Street Drain), tšumaš Creek (Chumash Creek - formerly the Oxnard Industrial Drain), and Bubbling Springs, a stormwater channel that provides drainage from Bard Road.

**Total Project Cost:** \$30,000

**Grant Amount:** \$30,000

**Grantee:** City of Oxnard

**Enabling Legislation:** Chapters 3 and 6: Educational Programs and Resource Enhancement

**Strategic Plan:** The proposed project will further the following strategic objectives:

- Goal 4, objective 4A by supporting educational programs and interpretive events.
- Goal 6, objective 6B and 6D by enhancing coastal watersheds and wetlands.

**Conservancy Funding Source:** Proposition 84, Public Resources Code section 75001, et seq.

**CEQA:** The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations

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(CCR) Section 15304, which exempts minor alterations of the land, water and/or vegetation that do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees. It is also categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15333 (small habitat restoration projects) because it is a small-scale habitat restoration project that meets all exemption criteria.

### Lower Ventura River Habitat Restoration

The proposed project addresses critical invasive species dominance in the lower Ventura River, specifically at Willoughby Preserve and the Ventura River Estuary (see project photos in Exhibit 2). By activating their extensive volunteer network, Ventura Land Trust staff will 1) clear *Arundo* and other invasive species across the two parcels in order to mitigate the destructive impacts of invasive plants and allow space for native species to establish and 2) contract with a third-party service provider for treatment of the *Arundo* rhizome to ensure proper removal techniques for this persistent invasive. The project includes providing volunteers with trainings about invasive species impacts and removal strategies and providing for the project areas to be surveyed by biologists prior to removal days to ensure that bird nests are not impacted by the project activities.

**Site Description:** The Lower Ventura River Habitat Restoration Project site is broken into two parcels composed of both riparian and estuarine habitat and owned by the City of San Buenaventura and the Ventura Hillside Conservancy. The eastern portion of the project site, Willoughby Preserve, is a terraced riparian corridor dominated by willow trees, mule fat, and coyote brush. At times of significant rainfall, Willoughby Preserve can be completely covered in water, although this type of flooding only happens once or twice a year. Invasive species at Willoughby Preserve include *Arundo* (*Arundo donax*), tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*), common fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), and castor bean (*Ricinus communis*). The lower terrace at Willoughby is mostly exposed stream channels with sizeable river rocks and everchanging paths due to flood events. The upper terrace is more densely populated with native and invasive species. The southwestern portion of the project site, Ventura River Estuary, is a classic Southern California estuary with exceptionally valuable wetland habitat and ecological resource. The project site changes with the seasons, from an enclosed lagoon in dry season to a flowing river in wet seasons. Large swaths of *Arundo* have sprouted along the southern edge of the estuary, near the Ventura-Ojai bike path.

**Total Project Cost:** \$57,200

**Grant Amount:** \$19,600

**Grantee:** Ventura Land Trust

**Enabling Legislation:** Chapters 3 and 6: Educational Programs and Resource Enhancement

**Strategic Plan:** The proposed project will further the following strategic objectives:

- Goal 4, objective 4A by supporting educational programs and interpretive events that improve public understanding.
- Goal 6, objective 6B and 6D because the proposed project will enhance coastal wetlands/stream corridors and objective 6E because the project will enhance fish passage by removing invasive *Arundo donax* that chokes stream channels and creates debris that impedes fish travel.

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**Conservancy Funding Source:** Proposition 84, Public Resources Code section 75001, et seq.

**Matching Funds:** The grantee will provide thirty-seven thousand six hundred dollars (\$37,600) to the project.

**CEQA:** The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304, which exempts minor alterations to land that do not remove healthy, mature and scenic trees. Revegetation activities will improve habitat for wildlife, or native fish and reduce or eliminate erosion and sedimentation. It is also categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15333, which exempts small habitat restoration projects, because it is a small-scale habitat restoration project that meets all exemption criteria.

### Los Angeles County

#### **Topanga Creek's Theater of Plants**

This project will enhance 1.16 acres along 700 linear feet of Topanga Creek riparian wetland habitat by utilizing a community volunteer network to 1) remove non-native invasive plants such as *Arundo* (*Arundo donax*), English ivy (*Hedera helix*), Smilo grass (*Stipa milieacea*), and Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) and 2) plant native trees and understory in its place. The project will incorporate information on good stewardship practices, the threat of non-native invasive plants and the importance of native riparian wetland vegetation, into its existing education programs and develop new interpretive panels. This information will reach the ~30,000 annual visitors to the Theatricum.

**Site Description:** The Topanga watershed is a coastal watershed of the Santa Monica Mountains. Topanga Creek flows north to south through the village of Topanga. The project area is 1.16 acre of Topanga Creek riparian wetland habitat located on the Will Geer's Theatricum Botanicum ("Theatricum") property. The project area contains remnant populations of its pre-disturbance condition – heritage coast live oaks and sycamores tower over an understory dominated by *Arundo* (*Arundo donax*), *Vinca* sp. and other non-native plants. Streambanks are littered with concrete rubble. The upper floodplain terraces are utilized for human uses, including a major road on one side, on the other open space areas serving the needs of the theatrical performance and education center.

**Total Project Cost:** \$46,475

**Grant Amount:** \$28,800

**Grantee:** Will Geer's Theatricum Botanicum

**Enabling Legislation:** Chapters 3 and 6: Educational Programs and Resource Enhancement

**Strategic Plan:** The proposed project will further the following strategic objectives:

- Goal 4, objective 4A by supporting educational programs and interpretive events and 4B through the installation of interpretive panels.
- Goal 6, objective 6A and 6D by enhancing coastal wetland/stream corridors and coastal watersheds.

**Funding Source:** State Coastal Conservancy (Proposition 84, Public Resources Code section 75001, et seq.)

**Matching Funds:** A private partner, the Environmental Restoration Group, will provide three

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thousand five hundred dollars (\$3,500) in matching funds and the grantee will provide fourteen thousand one hundred seventy-five dollars (\$14,175) in in-kind support to the project.

**CEQA:** The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304, which exempts minor alterations to land that do not remove healthy, mature and scenic trees. It is also categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15333, which exempts small habitat restoration projects, because it is as small-scale habitat restoration project that meets all exemption criteria.

### Orange County

#### **Rabbit Island Restoration and Education Initiative**

The proposed project will protect and restore a coastal wetland ecosystem by enhancing a diverse salt marsh and dune habitat conducive to supporting an array of native plants and wildlife. This will be achieved through the removal of non-native and invasive plants, especially highway Iceplant (*Carpobrotus edulis*), and the installation of California cordgrass (*Spartina foliosa*) by community-based volunteers, school groups, and at-risk youth organizations. Volunteers will also assist with the creation of five nesting rafts for Ridgway's rails (*Rallus obsoletus*). At the volunteer service events, the Bolsa Chica Conservancy will present information on the history, ecology and overall importance of the land and restoration.

**Site Description:** The proposed project site is a ~2-acre infested dune area on a 55-acre island in the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve known as Rabbit Island. The land is primarily composed of salt marsh habitat (39-acres) that includes mudflats with lesser amounts of coastal strand habitat (16-acres). Having once been isolated from tidal influence, the island is now exposed to a full tidal regime, flooding with salt water twice a day, providing healthy foraging and hunting area for shore and wetland birds, such as California Ridgeway's rail (*Rallus obsoletus obsoletus*), and the state endangered Belding's savannah sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis beldingi*). Historically, 40% of the island's coastal strand habitat was covered with invasive plant species, much of which was highway iceplant (*Carpobrotus edulis*). Rabbit Island serves as habitat for coast woolly heads (*Nemacaulis denudata var denudata*) and estuary seablite (*Suaeda esteroa*), species of plant that the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) lists under the California Rare Plant Ranking (CRPR) 1B.2, denoting a rare/endangered status in California. The Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve is owned by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

**Total Project Cost:** \$144,500

**Grant Amount:** \$25,000

**Grantee:** Bolsa Chica Conservancy

**Enabling Legislation:** Chapters 3 and 6: Educational Programs and Resource Enhancement

**Strategic Plan:** The proposed project will further the following strategic objectives:

- Goal 4, objective 4A by supporting educational programs and interpretive events that improve public understanding and promote stewardship of coastal resources.
- Goal 6, objective 6A and 6D by enhancing coastal wetland areas and watersheds.

**Funding Source:** State Coastal Conservancy (Proposition 84, Public Resources Code section 75001, et seq.)

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**Matching Funds:** The grantee will provide ninety-four thousand five hundred dollars (\$94,500) and the Orange County Community Foundation will provide twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) in matching funds to the project.

**CEQA:** The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304, which exempts minor alterations to land that do not remove healthy, mature and scenic trees. It is also categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15333, which exempts small habitat restoration projects, because it is as small-scale habitat restoration project that meets all exemption criteria.

### **San Diego County**

#### **Sweetwater Stewards: Community River Restoration**

The proposed project consists of river habitat restoration along the Sweetwater River on the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge by Earth Discovery Institute (EDI) in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Native habitat in the project area has been altered by removal of native oaks from the uplands and riparian areas and by agriculture immediately adjacent to the river. Restoration will be achieved through removal of invasive plants and planting of acorns and native understory plants. The planting will be carried out by students from Title I schools, with support from community volunteers and restoration contractors. The project includes providing pre-restoration training and education to the students and volunteers. Contractors will remove invasive species prior to revegetation and irrigate newly planted native species.

**Site Description:** The San Diego National Wildlife Refuge (SDNWR) encompasses 12,000+ acres in inland southern San Diego County, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The project will take place at the Sweetwater River unit of the SDNWR, along the Sweetwater River in Rancho San Diego/Spring Valley. The project area includes approximately 3 acres of oak-willow-sycamore riparian corridor along the southeast bank of the river. With EDI and others, FWS has partnered to begin restoration invasive plant removal, native planting, and trail and signage improvements. The area is used by hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, dog-walkers, wildlife-watchers, and photographers.

**Total Project Cost:** \$41,900

**Grant Amount:** \$30,000

**Grantee:** Earth Discovery Institute

**Enabling Legislation:** Chapters 3 and 6: Educational Programs and Resource Enhancement

**Strategic Plan:** The proposed project will further the following strategic objectives:

- Goal 4, objective 4A by supporting educational programs and interpretive events that improve public understanding and promote stewardship of coastal resources.
- Goal 6, objective 6A and 6D by enhancing riparian stream corridors and coastal watersheds.

**Funding Source:** State Coastal Conservancy (Proposition 84, Public Resources Code section 75001, et seq.)

**Matching Funds:** The grantee will provide eleven thousand three hundred dollars (\$11,300) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will provide three thousand dollars (\$3,000) in matching funds to the project.

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**CEQA:** The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304, which exempts minor alterations of the land, water and/or vegetation that do not remove mature, healthy, scenic trees. It is also categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15333, which exempts small habitat restoration projects, because it is as small-scale habitat restoration project that meets all exemption criteria.

### Sweetwater Marsh Community Restoration Project

Partnering with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Living Coast Discovery Center (LCDC) Sustainability Team will restore native habitat to a critical location along the Sweetwater River basin. The project includes 1) an area assessment by the grantee and partners, and 2) weeding of non-native ice plant species and re-planting of native coastal wetland species through a series of community-volunteer based restoration events (photos of project area in Exhibit 2). The project includes education of the volunteers on threats to healthy watersheds, including use of the curriculum used in LCDC's existing climate science education (Living Labs program) which provides interactive, age-appropriate climate science lessons for K-12 students.

**Site Description:** The proposed restoration would occur near the southeast corner of the D Street Fill, located on the outskirts of the 316-acre San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Sweetwater Marsh Unit. The D Street Fill is to the west of Interstate 5 and south of the Sweetwater River flood control channel in Chula Vista, CA. The site is in close proximity to important nesting grounds for endangered California least terns (*Sterna antillarum browni*).

**Total Project Cost:** \$34,700

**Grant Amount:** \$30,000

**Grantee:** Living Coast Discovery Center

**Enabling Legislation:** Chapters 3 and 6: Educational Programs and Resource Enhancement

**Strategic Plan:** The proposed project will further the following strategic objectives:

- Goal 4, objective 4A by supporting educational programs and interpretive events that improve public understanding and promote stewardship of coastal resources.
- Goal 6, objective 6A and 6D by enhancing coastal wetlands and watersheds.

**Funding Source:** State Coastal Conservancy (Proposition 84, Public Resources Code section 75001, et seq.)

**Matching Funds:** The grantee will provide four thousand seven hundred dollars (\$4,700) in matching funds to the project.

**CEQA:** The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304, which exempts minor alterations of the land, water and/or vegetation that do not remove, mature, healthy, scenic trees. It is also categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15333, which exempts small habitat restoration projects, because it is as small-scale habitat restoration project that meets all exemption criteria.

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### **Crown Point Bank Restoration at Kendall Frost Marsh Reserve**

Mission Bay has been massively altered over the last 200 years, especially in the 1940's and 50's when recreation became the focus of the park. As part of the effort to restore some of that lost habitat and its ecosystem services and community benefits, San Diego Audubon and the UC Natural Reserve System have partnered on projects for decades that seek to enhance and increase the wetland complex in the northeast corner of Mission Bay. The proposed project consists of 1) contracting with surveyors to undertake a site delineation to identify key invaded areas on the project site, and 2) using community and Urban Corps volunteers to both remove invasive species and revegetate the area with native species that have either been cultivated on-site or custom grown from a commercial grower. The project includes educating the volunteers not only the specific species of plants being planted or removed, but also about larger principles of ecology and the practice of conservation in San Diego County.

**Site Description:** This project will take place on a 0.3-acre portion of the western edge of the Kendall-Frost Mission Bay Marsh Reserve. The Reserve is the last remaining wetland habitat in the northeast portion of Mission Bay. Prior to development, Mission Bay supported an estuarine complex of approximately 4,000 acres, of which only about 1% remains as tidal wetland today. The Kendall-Frost Reserve is one of four reserves owned by the City of San Diego and managed by the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) Natural Reserve System (NRS) and occupies 16 acres of a total 40-acre contiguous wetland habitat. Two City of San Diego-owned parcels comprise the remainder of the contiguous wetland, the Frost parcel and the Northern Wildlife Preserve. Habitats include restored coastal sage scrub, south coastal salt marsh, tidal channels, salt flats, mudflats, sand spit, and eelgrass beds. The area to be restored within this project is the western transition zone, the interface between dry uplands and the tidal salt marsh, along the western edge of the Reserve. The area to be restored currently includes non-native and invasive plants including Brazilian pepper trees (*Schinus molle*) and iceplant (*Carpobrotus edulis*), and is the narrow transitional band, or ecotone, between the tidal marsh and development.

**Total Project Cost:** \$29,300

**Grant Amount:** \$21,300

**Grantee:** San Diego Audubon Society

**Enabling Legislation:** Chapters 3 and 6: Educational Programs and Resource Enhancement

**Strategic Plan:** The proposed project will further the following strategic objectives:

- Goal 4, objective 4A by supporting educational programs and interpretive events that improve public understanding and promote stewardship of coastal resources.
- Goal 6, objective 6A and 6D by enhancing coastal wetlands and watersheds.

**Funding Source:** State Coastal Conservancy (Proposition 84, Public Resources Code section 75001, et seq.)

**Matching Funds:** The grantee will provide eighteen thousand dollars (\$18,000) in matching funds to the project.

**CEQA:** The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304, which exempts minor alterations of the land, water and/or vegetation that

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do not remove mature, healthy, scenic trees. It is also categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15333, which exempts small habitat restoration projects, because it is a small-scale habitat restoration project that meets all exemption criteria.

### **Site Description:**

The Community Wetland Restoration Grant Program (CWRGP) encompasses the Southern California coastal region from Point Conception in Santa Barbara County to the United States border with Mexico (Exhibit 1). This region includes Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties. Coastal watersheds that drain to the Pacific Ocean are included in the geographic scope of the program as well as the Channel Islands. Project locations include coastal wetlands, tidal marshes, rivers, streams, as well as buffer zones including dunes, river banks and coastal sage scrub habitats.

Many of the project locations were historical flood plains and extensive wetland ecosystems that have been degraded and fragmented over the past 100 years. Others are discreet pocket wetlands that, while small and sometimes isolated from other habitat, cumulatively comprise a critical natural resource for native flora and fauna in a highly urbanized environment.

See above for the specific site descriptions for the seven projects selected for the 2019 CWRGP.

### **CWRGP PROJECT HISTORY:**

The Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (WRP) is a forum for 18 state and federal agencies to coordinate with each other regarding expansion, restoration and enhancement of coastal wetlands and watersheds in Southern California. Since 2001, the participating agencies have prepared, and continuously updated, a list of priority projects known as the WRP Work Plan.

At an October 2000 gathering of staff participating in the WRP, there was clear consensus that education and community outreach are critical to achieving the expansion, restoration and enhancement of coastal wetlands and watersheds. The Small Grants Program, now named the Community Wetland Restoration Grant Program (CWRGP), was conceived as a way to further these objectives, while also building institutional capacity in the five counties for planning and implementing restoration projects. Each year, WRP partner agencies evaluate and select projects that fulfill the goals of the CWRGP. The CWRGP projects are also included on the WRP Work Plan.

In January 2001, CWRGP projects were solicited for inclusion in the WRP Work Plan and a notice of the availability of CWRGP grant funding was sent to more than 800 people. For the first eight years of the CWRGP, the Conservancy granted funds to a nonprofit organization, Environment Now, to make subgrants to other entities for community wetland projects.

In 2002, Earth Island Institute (EII), another nonprofit organization, began to grant funds for CWRGP projects with funds it had obtained in settlement of litigation. EII also began providing

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technical assistance to CWRGP grantees to help them build their programs and technical knowledge. Since then, EII has continued to provide funds and technical assistance to Conservancy grantees and to other entities carrying out CWRGP projects listed on the WRP Work Plan.

Since 2001, 177 CWRGP projects have been completed with over \$3.8 million spent on project implementation. Several of the organizations initially funded through the CWRGP have gone on to develop and implement larger scale acquisition and restoration projects for inclusion on the WRP Work Plan. The list of such organizations includes Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy, San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, the City of Santa Barbara, South Coast Habitat Restoration, Mountains Restoration Trust, the City of Costa Mesa, Orange County Coastkeeper, University of California Santa Barbara, The Nature Conservancy and Friends of Colorado Lagoon. These and other organizations underscore CWRGP’s ability to help develop the skills and capacity in groups, through small project design and implementation, to take on larger projects for the purpose of Southern California wetlands recovery.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

Conservancy	\$184,700
Earth Island Institute	\$55,000
Other funding sources (see below)	\$198,100
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$434,800</b>

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of \$184,700 for the 2019 CWRGP. EII will provide each CWRGP grantee with technical assistance in getting the projects set-up and started. (See “Project History” section, above). This Conservancy authorization is the required match for a Wildlife Conservation Board grant of \$450,000 in 2016. All of WCB’s funds have been expended on previous CWRGP projects.

The anticipated source of funds is from the fiscal year 2009/2010 appropriation 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 funding may be used for the protection of bays and coastal waters, including projects to prevent contamination and degradation of coastal waters and watersheds, projects to protect and restore the natural habitat values of coastal waters and lands, and projects to promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state, pursuant to the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. (See Public Resources Code section 75060). Every project within the coastal zone (i.e. six of the proposed projects; not including Sweetwater Stewards: Community River Restoration) will protect coastal waters by enhancing watershed resources, restore natural habitat values by removing invasive plants and planting native plants, and promote access to and enjoyment of coastal resources by involving community members in the restoration of coastal wetlands, rivers and associated habitats. The Sweetwater Stewards: Community River Restoration project will protect a coastal watershed by enhancing the Sweetwater River, which flows to the ocean through the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Another requirement of Proposition 84 is that for projects that restore natural resources,

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the Conservancy is directed to give priority to projects that meet one or more of the criteria specified in Public Resources Code Section 75071. The CWRGP 2019 projects satisfy the following specified criteria: (b) Watershed Protection – each of the projects will contribute to long-term protection of and improvement to the water and biological quality of coastal watersheds and the near shore area of the Pacific Ocean; and (e) Non-State Matching Funds – all but one project (Ormond Beach Community Restoration at Perkins Road) will have non-state matching funds. (See “Project Summary” section above for project description). All of the projects are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, as described below.

The cost for the seven 2019-2020 CWRGP projects selected for funding totals \$434,800. All of these projects have significant matching funds (see Project Summaries, above). Earth Island Institute will expend \$55,000 to provide technical assistance to the grantees. The remaining \$198,100 will come from other funding sources (specifically: \$3,500 from federal sources, \$3,500 from private or corporate sources, and \$191,100 from other non-profit agencies). Furthermore, approximately \$14,175 will be donated as in-kind services (not included in the total project costs).

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

The proposed authorization is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 of Division 21, Sections 31119, 31117, 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. All seven projects include an educational component on watershed science and restoration for students in K-12.

Section 31117 requires the Conservancy to submit a project within the coastal zone portion of the Santa Monica Mountains Zone to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. Consistent with this section, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy supports the Conservancy’s funding for the “Topanga Creek’s Theater of Plants” project in the Santa Monica Mountains Zone (see Letters of Support, Exhibit 3).

#### **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.” Grants shall be used for, among other things, corrective measures that will enhance the natural and scenic character of the areas. All of the proposed projects will enhance or restore natural resources that have been degraded by human activities.

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Under Section 31251.2, the Conservancy may award grants to enhance a watershed resource partly outside of the coastal zone to enhance the natural or scenic character of coastal resources within the coastal zone. One of the proposed projects lies outside the coastal zone but, consistent with Section 31251.2, the proposed project will enhance the natural and scenic character of coastal resources within the coastal zone by enhancing a watershed resource that is located partly outside the coastal zone. The Sweetwater Stewards: Community River Restoration project is located in Rancho San Diego/Spring Valley along the Sweetwater River, an important riparian corridor within the Sweetwater River watershed. Sweetwater River is a watershed resource that lies partly outside of the coastal zone and flows into the San Diego Bay. Enhancing the Sweetwater River will help protect the natural character of the marshes in the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge by protecting water quality and providing native habitat.

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 wetland habitats of Ormond Beach, the lower Ventura River, Topanga Creek, Bolsa Chica, and Mission Bay all are identified in local coastal plans as requiring public action to resolve existing or potential resource protection problems. The Sweetwater Stewards: Community River Restoration is located outside the coastal zone and the Sweetwater Marsh Community Restoration Project is located on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service land and is not identified in any local coastal plan. However, both of these projects further policies of the Coastal Act, including Public Resources Code section 30231, which calls for the maintenance and restoration of the biological productivity and quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes. See Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies section, below.

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

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2018 - 2022 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective B**, of the Conservancy's 2018 - 2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed 2019 CWRGP projects collectively will enhance approximately 16 acres of coastal habitats such as coastal wetlands, and approximately 5,000 feet of stream corridor.

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

Consistent with **Goal 4, Objective A**, each of the proposed 2019 CWRGP projects 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 Topanga Creek's Theatre of Plants project will support the design and installation of an interpretive or educational display related to coastal and watershed resource education.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective E** the Lower Ventura River Habitat Restoration project will enhance fish passage by removing invasive *Arundo donax* that chokes stream channels and creates debris that impedes fish travel.

Consistent with **Goal 16, Objective A** the Lower Ventura River Habitat Restoration and Sweetwater Marsh Community Restoration Project areas are located within a disadvantaged community.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed 2019 CWRGP projects are 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.

**Promotion and Implementation of State Plans and Policies:** The CWRGP projects are consistent with the California Coastal Act (Public Resources Code Sections 30000 *et seq*) ("Coastal Act"). The Coastal Act Section 30012 includes the Legislative finding that "an educated and informed citizenry ... is necessary to protect California's finite natural resources [and] ... through education, individuals can be made aware of and encouraged to accept their share of responsibility for protecting and improving the natural environment." Coastal Act Section 30240 calls for protection of environmentally sensitive habitat areas.

The CWRGP projects are consistent with and promote the priorities of the Coastal Act. The projects proposed for funding are consistent with the Coastal Act because all of the proposed projects involve coastal resource education. In addition, each of the projects involves restoration or enhancement of environmentally sensitive habitat areas. Please see "Project Summary," above, and "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation", above, for how the individual proposed projects are consistent with the Coastal Act's priorities.

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

**Support of the public:** The proposed projects are supported by elected officials, numerous community and nonprofit organizations, and local agencies. See Exhibit 3 for support letters.

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**Location:** The proposed 2019 suite of CWRGP projects are located within the coastal zone or coastal draining watersheds. The projects' locations span four of the five southernmost California coastal counties constituting the California Bight, from Point Conception in Santa Barbara County to the international border with Mexico. 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, each of the proposed projects 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 projects will help restore native wetland habitat critical for migratory birds and commercially and recreationally important fish species. The proposed projects also provide educational opportunities for people throughout the region to participate in on-the-ground habitat restoration activities.

**Sea level rise vulnerability:** Three of the seven proposed 2019 CWRGP projects are not located directly at the coast, and will therefore not be affected by sea level rise. The Ormond Beach Community Restoration, Rabbit Island Restoration and Education Initiative, Sweetwater Marsh Community Restoration Project, and Crown Point Bank Restoration at Kendall Frost Marsh Reserve are the only projects out of the 2019 project sites that located at or near sea level in an area vulnerable to sea level rise. The proposed project activities include invasive plant removal and native plant revegetation, and thus are not vulnerable to sea level rise. The grantees anticipate that by restoring habitats and improving ecological functions the project sites will be more resilient to sea level rise.

### **Additional Criteria**

**Urgency:** All seven proposed projects target 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 each of the proposed 2019 CWRGP projects.

**Innovation:** All of the proposed projects demonstrate 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:** All of the proposed projects are ready to be completed within one to two years.

**Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See "Project History" section, above.

**Cooperation:** The proposed projects 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 projects.

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

#### **Ventura County**

##### **Ormond Beach Community Restoration Project**

Ormond Beach wetlands are discussed in the Ventura County Coastal Area Plan as “environmental resource areas that need protection or restoration”, and that provides nesting and feeding areas for a variety of birds and mammals, including the Belding’s Savannah Sparrow (Chapter 4.3.10 Environmentally Sensitive Habitats Areas). Educational and light recreational uses shall be conditionally permitted uses in all sensitive resource areas.

##### **Lower Ventura River Habitat Restoration**

This project aligns with the Ventura County Coastal Area Plan, last amended and certified July 1, 2017. The Coastal Area Plan is certified by the California Coastal Commission and serves to enforce and regulate many of the same land use issues that the Coastal Act addresses. In Appendix 1, Chapter VIII of the Coastal Area Plan Appendices, titled “Restoration and Maintenance of Wetland Habitat Areas,” the plan “encourages public agencies and landowners to work towards restoration and enhancement of these altered wetlands.” With the Ventura River’s large floodplain and expansive wetlands, the proposed project supports two of the Ventura County Coastal Area Plan’s Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area Goals to protect and restore wetlands and creek corridors in the Central Coast.

#### **Los Angeles County**

##### **Topanga Creek’s Theater of Plants**

The project area, specifically Topanga Creek, is identified in the Santa Monica Mountains Land Use Plan (a component of the Local Coastal Program) as particularly valuable habitat for breeding adult trout (Chapter II Conservation and Open Space Element).

This project also aligns with the goals and objectives of the Topanga Creek Watershed Committee (TCWC). One of those goals “is to encourage residents and others to recognize, take responsibility for, and minimize human impacts on the watershed. We work to protect and care for this place and the life in it so that it will remain healthy, diverse, beautiful, and wild forever”. Together with the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCD), TCWC created the Topanga Creek Watershed Management Plan, 2002 (TCWMP). Section 6 of the TCWMP, Natural Environment, describes specific actions this project addresses: Invasive Exotic Flora Eradication - Action Item 6.7, and Preserve and Enhance the function of the existing riparian vegetation – Action Item 6.9. Appendix D of the TCWMP – “Drainage and Soil Erosion”, section titled “Plants That Hold Up Slopes”, describes the non-native invasive species like *Arundo* and periwinkle impacts to water tables and competition for native plants. It further describes *Arundo*’s inability to bend in floods, causing soil erosion. Section 3 of the TCWMP, Education and Outreach, has a goal of “Promote greater awareness and understanding on the

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complex relationships between humans and the watershed so as to preserve native biodiversity and natural processes.” Specific Action Items addressed by this project are: Item 3.1- Develop watershed consciousness as a rich diverse model of community, Item 3.3 - Reach out to all stakeholders including the people of CA and beyond, since loss of biodiversity and threatened species are regional issues, and Item 3.5 - Coordinate with local schools to provide hands-on watershed education and service-learning opportunities.

### **Orange County**

#### **Rabbit Island Restoration and Education Initiative**

In the Coastal Element (aka Local Coastal Plan) of the City of Huntington Beach’s General Plan, the Bolsa Chica wetlands are identified as important amphibian, bird, and mammal habitat, including the federally and state endangered bird, the California least tern (Chapter IV-C-76). Even further, the proposed project will restore native habitat in the Bolsa Chica wetlands, directly aligning with the Coastal Element’s Goal C7 to “preserve, enhance and restore, where feasible, environmentally sensitive habitat areas in the City’s coastal Zone, including the Bolsa Chica.”

This project aligns with Chapter 2 of the California State Wildlife Action Plan, which underscores the importance of biodiversity in California’s sensitive ecosystems and recognizes invasive species as a major pressure on them. The Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve, where the Bolsa Chica Rabbit Island Habitat Restoration and Education Initiative will take place, can be found within the “Public Conservation Land” designation of the Orange County Green Vision Map. BCC’s Rabbit Island habitat recovery initiative will expand its on-going restoration efforts on the BCER by continuing its collaboration with community-based and educational groups in hands-on restoration to remove invasive vegetation and aid the re-establishment of sensitive populations of plants and animals.

### **San Diego County**

#### **Sweetwater Stewards: Community River Restoration**

Although not located within the coastal zone, this project is consistent with multiple policies of the California Coastal Act/California Coastal Management Program including the policies of providing recreational opportunities for all people (Public Resources Code section 30210) and restoring the biological productivity and quality of coastal waters (Public Resources Code section 30231). The project will provide public access and recreation by engaging children from families whose incomes have limited their awareness of access to coastal areas, their habitats, and stewardship actions, and building their knowledge of and comfort level with coastal/wetland open spaces; and the project will protect the biological productivity of coastal waters by enhancing and restoring riparian habitat along a river that affects the water quality of coastal waters.

The project will also address multiple goals, objectives, and strategies of the SDNWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan including: Goal 1. Protect, manage, and, where appropriate,

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enhance or restore habitat to support the recovery of the federally and State listed endangered and threatened species and other species of concern currently or historically present on the Refuge; Goal 2. Protect, manage, and, restore the Refuge's native habitats, MSCP-covered species, and other species of concern; Goal 4. Provide safe and high-quality opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses that foster public appreciation of the unique natural heritage of the San Diego region.

### **Sweetwater Marsh Community Restoration Project**

The project will restore a portion of the D Street Fill to intertidal wetlands consistent with the recommendations presented in the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) (USFWS 2006). The proposed restoration is necessary to assist the Refuge to achieve the goals and objectives of the CCP, including the CCP's goal to provide opportunities for reversing the trend of historical wetlands loss in San Diego Bay by restoring, where possible, the Refuge's historical native habitats.

This project is also consistent with the policies of the Coastal Act in that it will help restore the biological productivity of coastal waters, it will provide public access and recreational opportunities by engaging community members in the project, and it will help restore the scenic qualities of a coastal area. (See Public Resources Code Sections 30231, 30210, and 30251.)

The project supports the goals of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Projects' *Regional Strategy 2018* Goals 1 (to preserve and restore resilient tidal wetlands and associated marine and terrestrial habitats) and 3 (to support education and compatible access related to coastal wetlands and watersheds).

### **Crown Point Bank Restoration at Kendall Frost Marsh Reserve**

This project will enhance and increase the wetland complex in the northeast corner of Mission Bay, as called for in the Mission Bay Park Master Plan, which serves as the Local Coastal Program for Mission Bay Park (Chapter VI. Environment). An important component to this work is the San Diego Audubon-led ReWild Mission Bay project, which has brought considerable focus to the biological and management options for this wetland complex over the last five years. The ReWild Mission Bay Feasibility Study was completed in late 2018 and provides science-based information on the options for creating and restoring up to 270 acres of wetland (including the creation of approximately 100 acres of tidal marsh and 30 acres of transitional/upland habitat) in northeast Mission Bay, San Diego. Preparation of the Study was added to the WRP Work Plan in 2013. The Study specifically identifies the needed restoration work that the Crown Point Bank Restoration Project will accomplish (pages 144-147, specifically section 6.4.2).

This project also aligns with the WRP *Regional Strategy 2018* transition zone objectives; including Goal 1, Objective 5A, "Protect all existing natural areas of wetland-upland transition zones from the wetland boundary/edge (depending on topography) out to 1,600 feet (500m).

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**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The CWRGP 2019 proposed projects are categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304, minor alterations to the land, water and/or vegetation, 14 CCR Section 15306, information collection, and 14 CCR Section 15333, habitat restoration or enhancement projects not exceeding five acres in size. The applicability of the categorical exemptions for each proposed project is described above in the “Project Summary”.

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