

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
April 6, 2023

**SANTA ANA RIVER TRAIL
RINCON TO PRADO SPILLWAY DESIGN PROJECT**

Project No. 11-023-05
Project Manager: Rodrigo Garcia

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$3,000,000 to augment the Conservancy grant of \$1,200,000 previously authorized to Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District to prepare plans, designs, and environmental documentation for the 3.4-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail known as the Rincon to Prado Spillway segment in the County of Riverside.

LOCATION: City of Corona, along the Santa Ana River in Riverside County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [May 27, 2021 Staff Recommendation](#)
Exhibit 2: [Project Location Map](#)
Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed three million dollars (\$3,000,000) to augment the Conservancy grant of one million two thousand dollars (\$1,200,000) previously authorized for Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District (“the grantee”) to prepare plans, designs, and environmental documentation for the 3.4-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail known as the Rincon to Prado Spillway segment in the County of Riverside. This authorization remains subject to the same conditions contained in the Conservancy’s May 27, 2021 authorization.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's findings under its May 27, 2021 authorization.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize disbursement of \$3,000,000 to augment the Conservancy grant of \$1,200,000 previously authorized for Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District ("grantee") to prepare plans, designs, and environmental documentation for the 3.4-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail known as the Rincon to Prado Spillway segment in the County of Riverside.

The Conservancy authorized disbursement of up to \$1,200,000 for this project on May 27, 2021 (Exhibit 1). The original estimate for the completion of design work related to this project was \$3,600,000 and the grantee anticipated applying for the remaining funds from the Conservancy when additional funds became available. Since then, rising costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic has created a deficit in the project's budget. This augmentation would bring the project total up to \$4,200,000 allowing the grantee to continue the project without delays.

The project will facilitate the expansion of the existing Santa Ana River Trail network by planning and designing approximately 3.4 miles of trail referred to as Phases 2, 2A and 3A or collectively as "Santa Ana River Trail (SART) Rincon to Prado Spillway" (Exhibit 2). The planning of this segment of the Santa Ana River Trail is particularly challenging due to its proximity to the Prado Dam and the need for collaboration between the United States Army Corps of Engineers, which owns the land, and the grantee.

The project is in the City of Corona. It will begin near Rincon Road and Temescal Wash and terminate below the Prado Dam Spillway, an area identified as a disadvantaged community.

For more than 50 years, trail users and community leaders have sought to complete the Santa Ana River Trail from the San Bernardino Mountains to the coast. The proposed trail segment will close another gap in the trail, bringing the Santa Ana River Trail closer to completion. The Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway is of great importance to the region and California as it will be one of the longest urban recreation and river parkways in the United States extending approximately 100 miles connecting three counties and 17 cities. Once completed, it will connect inland communities to the California Coastal Trail and to the San Bernardino National Forest wilderness area. The trail is currently 80% completed.

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

The proposed project consists of the planning, design, and preparation of all the documentation needed for environmental review and analysis under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Site Description: The proposed project site is an industrial area in the northern part of the City of Corona. The area borders the City of Norco to the north, the City of Riverside to the east, and Chino Hills to the west. The site is currently owned by the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

Designated a National Recreation Trail in 1977, the Santa Ana River Trail has been under development for more than 50 years. Once completed, the Trail will extend over 100 miles from the San Bernardino Mountains westward to the coast. It will be one of the longest urban recreation and river parkways in the United States.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The proposed project will be undertaken by the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District, which was created by the electorate in November 1990 and formed on January 29, 1991. The District is an independent agency governed by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, which sits as the District's Board of Directors. The District manages more than 44,000 acres, including 40 parks, reserves, historic and archaeological sites, and 90 miles of regional trails. The District has also been a recipient of previous Conservancy grants for similar projects that have been managed successfully.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

Selection Criteria

1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.

See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Strategic Plan" section below.

2. Project is a good investment of state resources.

The proposed project advances the goals of the *Santa Ana River Parkway & Open Space Plan* (Coastal Conservancy, 2018). The project supports Goals 2 through 7, and Goal 10, of the Education, Recreation and Access Goals regarding connections between the river corridor and surrounding communities, river-related outdoor activities, opportunities to experience and learn about the natural environment and river's resources, open space access, safe access to the river, and protection of open space for future education, recreation and access opportunities. The project also supports Goal 1 of the Implementation Goals regarding collaborative design projects to provide multiple benefits that support the water, wildlife and habitat, and recreation, education and access goals for the Santa Ana River Parkway.

3. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The parkway will provide recreational, transportation, and health benefits to the residents and visitors of Riverside County. The trail will provide urban population with access to natural areas along the river, to the coast and national forests, and to many cultural and historic sites adjacent to the river. The trail’s development will be balanced with natural resource protection and flood management along the river.

4. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

The proposed project is supported by California State Senator (31st District) Richard Roth, the Rivers and Lands Conservancy, the City of Corona, the City of Riverside, the Riverside Bicycle Club, and the inland Empire Biking Alliance. The project is included in the Santa Ana River Parkway and Open Space Plan and was developed with broad community input.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$3,000,000
Coastal Conservancy (May 27, 2021 authorization)	\$1,200,000
Project Total	\$4,200,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project augmentation will be from two sources:

\$2,395,000 is a Fiscal Year 2017/18 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). Chapter 5 of Proposition 84 provides for funding for the protection and restoration of rivers, their watershed, and associated land, water and other natural resources. Public Resources Code section 75050(i) specifically allocates funds to the Coastal Conservancy for projects that “expand and improve” the Santa Ana River Parkway and that have been developed “in consultation with local government agencies participating in the development of the Santa Ana River Parkway.” Public Resources Code section 75050(i) further specifies that at least \$10 million of the Parkway funds must be spent in Riverside County. Consistent with this section, the proposed project is located in Riverside County and would expand and improve the Santa Ana River Parkway.

The remaining \$605,000 is a Fiscal Year 2021/22 appropriation to the Conservancy from the General Fund specifically for the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program. (The Budget Act of 2021, as amended by SB 170, Chapter 240, Statutes of 2021) The proposed project is consistent with the goals of the Santa Ana River Conservancy program, as discussed in the Consistency with the Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation section below.

The May 27, 2021 staff recommendation mistakenly stated the cost of the project as \$1,200,000. At that time, staff and the grantee understood that the project cost was estimated to be \$3,600,000 (it is now \$4,200,000), but staff inadvertently omitted the correct estimated project cost from the staff recommendation.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's May 27, 2021 authorization with respect to the Conservancy's enabling legislation. (See Exhibit 1).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective 4.1**, the proposed project will design a 3.4-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's May 27, 2021 findings and authorization with respect to the CEQA compliance (see Exhibit 1). The project has not changed and there are no changed circumstances or information that would trigger the need for additional CEQA documentation.