

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
November 30, 2023

**SAN DIEGO COASTAL RESILIENCE MASTER PLAN**

Project No. 23-063-01  
Project Manager: Kellan Warner

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$1,072,000 to the City of San Diego to conduct community and tribal engagement and prepare engineering and design plans for nature-based solutions to sea level rise at three locations in the City of San Diego, in connection with preparing the City’s Coastal Resilience Master Plan.

**LOCATION:** City of San Diego, San Diego County

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Proposed Site Photos](#)

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 a grant of an amount not to exceed one million seventy-two thousand dollars (\$1,072,000) to the City of San Diego (“the grantee”) to the City of San Diego to conduct community and tribal engagement and prepare engineering and design plans for nature-based solutions to sea level rise at three locations in the city of San Diego, in connection with preparing the City’s Coastal Resilience Master Plan. Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.

Findings:

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

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Climate Ready Program.
  2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
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## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$1,072,000 grant to the City of San Diego (City) to conduct community and tribal engagement and prepare engineering and design plans for nature-based solutions to sea level rise at three locations in the city of San Diego, in connection with preparing the City's Coastal Resilience Master Plan (see Exhibit 1 Project Location Map).

The City of San Diego is already facing the impacts of climate change and sea level rise, and many of the City's critical assets, including beaches, habitat conservation areas, and historic and tribal cultural resources are highly vulnerable to coastal flooding and erosion. According to the City of San Diego's Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment (2019), San Diego could experience another 1.6 to 2.4 feet of sea level rise by 2050 depending on the rate of climate change, and the frequency of extreme coastal floods is expected to increase under all projections of sea level rise, as elevated water levels make it easier for waves to overtop natural barriers, increasing the relative frequency of flooding along the coast. Additionally, coastal erosion has long been an issue in San Diego, affecting cliff areas such as Sunset Cliffs, as well as eroding many of the region's sandy beaches.

The City of San Diego's Coastal Resilience Master Plan (the Plan) will identify potential nature-based solutions for locations along San Diego's coast to improve the resilience of the coastline and communities to sea level rise while also benefiting wildlife, habitat, and natural coastal resources. The Plan is currently in draft form, and Conservancy funding will support the finalization of the document. Identified within the Plan are six proposed sea-level rise adaptation project sites that were prioritized based on sea level rise vulnerability, proximity to disadvantaged communities, ability to provide habitat benefits, and feasibility for implementation of nature-based solutions for coastal resilience. Each of the six proposed project sites are highly popular beach destinations that will experience flooding and erosion impacts due to sea level rise. Using nature-based solutions for coastal resilience at the high priority sites will provide additional resilience, environmental, and socio-economic benefits such as enhanced or protected habitat, coastal access, green jobs, and environmental education opportunities. The City's goal is for the Plan to include designs for three of the six locations.

The project consists of the actions needed to complete the first version of the Plan, which are additional community and Tribal engagement, and preparing engineering and design plans for three of the six high-priority sea-level rise adaptation project locations. The preparation of

engineering and design plans for three project sites will include 15% project design, technical studies to support design, and additional environmental analyses as needed. Technical studies include coastal engineering analyses, materials sourcing study, and evaluations of the existing and historical ecological settings of the sites to include appropriate biological features and supporting physical characteristics into the designs. In the future, the City expects to release a second version of the Plan with designs for all six locations.

The community and tribal engagement component of the project includes coordinating a Stakeholder Advisory Committee (Committee) that has been assembled for the Coastal Resilience Master Plan. Committee members were identified based on jurisdiction, work within disadvantaged communities, relevant subject matter expertise, and/or participation in climate related planning processes in the San Diego region. For the proposed project, the City will regularly convene the Committee to coordinate closely with local, state, and federal agencies, community-based organizations, and tribal representatives. The Committee will be engaged in providing technical input on feasibility, design, and implementation of the nature-based solutions. The project's community engagement will also include interactive online feedback platforms, community webinars/workshops, visioning and interactive workshops, and pop-up engagement events. Pop-up events and workshops will be held at high-traffic locations, focusing both on locations surrounding the project sites as well as locations within Communities of Concern (as identified by the Climate Equity Index), to provide easily accessible opportunities for these communities' members to participate.

**Site Description:**

This project will further designs and plans for three of the six sites listed below. The three sites will be chosen as part of the planning process.

1. **La Jolla Shores** – This project site encompasses the coastal area near Kellogg Park. Due to the size of this project site, there is an opportunity to provide or enhance habitat area. For this site, flooding will begin to impact the park at around 2.5 ft of sea level rise, resulting in increased beach erosion and loss and flooding of park space. This site currently experiences flooding during high tide and storm events.
2. **Pacific Beach (Tourmaline)** – This project site includes the Tourmaline Beach area, parking lot, public restroom, and lifeguard driveway access path. This site will see impacts of coastal erosion at around 2.5 ft of sea level rise that will impact usable beach and reduce first responder access.
3. **Ocean Beach** – This project site is located within the Ocean Beach Planning Area and considers the beach area from the pier north towards Brighton Ave. This site location is within 2 miles of a disadvantaged community. This site will experience impacts from flooding and erosion at around 3.3 ft of sea level rise, resulting in loss of beach. This site has previously seen flood impacts during high tide and storm events. A nature-based solution at this site will also consider habitat benefits for nesting snowy plovers if feasible.
4. **Ocean Beach Dog Beach** - This project site includes the beach area north of Brighton Ave and the general Ocean Beach Dog Beach area. This site location is within 1.5 miles of a disadvantaged community. The project will be scoped to provide habitat benefits as feasible. This site will see impacts from flooding and erosion at around 4.1 ft of sea level

rise, resulting in impacts to public facilities and could potentially impact the nearby Smiley Lagoon during flood events.

5. **Mission Beach:** Mission Beach is an incredibly popular tourist destination that is a 2 mile-long, up to ¼ mile-wide peninsula located between the Pacific Ocean and Mission Bay. This project site considers the ocean side of Mission Beach. The beaches, homes, and infrastructure in this project area are currently impacted from coastal flooding during King Tides and storm events and will face increased vulnerability to coastal flooding due to sea level rise.
6. **Sunset Cliffs** – This project site encompasses the areas seaward of Sunset Cliffs Boulevard between Adair Street and Ladera Street. This site experiences impacts due to coastal erosion that may cause pedestrian hazards, loss of usability of roadway sections, or other public safety concerns. The project will also provide habitat benefits or enhance habitat area as feasible.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The City serves over one million residents and is historically proactive in embracing and investing in climate action. The City Planning Department successfully manages multiple large planning grants. Currently the department is managing 11 different grants, totaling over \$6.4 million. The City Planning Department has designated staff, including a Chief Resilience Officer who will serve as project lead, and planners who will serve as task leads and support. For current work to develop the Coastal Resilience Master Plan, the City has established an internal working group including staff from the City Planning Department, Sustainability and Mobility Department, Transportation Department, Park and Recreation Department, and Engineering and Capital Projects. The City also has an established Climate Adaptation and Resilience Working Group to support collaboration and knowledge sharing across departments.

#### **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 three projects planned as part of the proposed project, when implemented in the future, will use nature-based sea level rise adaptation strategies to protect and enhance public coastal access, and reduce or eliminate existing and projected flooding. The scope of work for the

recommended grant is feasible, the budget is reasonable, and the City of San Diego is well qualified to manage the project.

**3. Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area.**

In addition to an invitation to participate in the Stakeholder Advisory Committee, the City will offer to host tribal consultation meetings with the local California Native American tribes. Consultation meetings will seek to establish and maintain communication with tribes throughout the planning process and provide opportunity for identification of potential issues with proposed project concepts, provide useful information to tribes regarding how the six projects could affect tribal interests, provide meaningful opportunities to tribes to participate in planning process, incorporate and acknowledge Traditional Ecological Knowledge into the Coastal Resilience Master Plan, and acknowledge tribal cultural resources in and near project locations. To support participation, the City will provide travel funding and a participation stipend.

**4. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.**

Project design will account for the latest guidance from the State of California on planning for sea level rise (Ocean Protection Council State of California Sea Level Rise Guidance Document and California Coastal Commission Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance) as well as the latest sea level rise projections available (NOAA 2022 Sea Level Rise Technical Report). The proposed nature-based solution concepts and engineered designs will consider future conditions and sea level rise projections to ensure the project is able to function as intended over the project's lifespan and continue to deliver project benefits. Maintenance and monitoring will be scoped and funded in future efforts to finalize engineering and design of these project concepts.

**5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.**

Nature-based solutions included in the Coastal Resilience Master Plan could include a range of project types, including living shorelines, dune restoration, native plantings, habitat restoration, floodable park space, and/or oyster reefs. These solutions provide many additional benefits beyond climate risk mitigation, such as improved water quality, nature resource protection, greenhouse gas mitigation through carbon sequestration, economic continuity, and recreation and tourism benefits. Nature-based solutions are widely accepted as offering environmental, economic, and social benefits while simultaneously increasing resilience. For this project, the proposed nature-based solutions will address risk to coastal flooding and erosion while also aligning with the City's mitigation goals, protecting key habitat and sensitive species, increase coastal access, address climate risk for disadvantaged communities, and support a thriving coastline.

**6. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.**

Community engagement will include multiple opportunities and ways to engage to ensure diverse community voices are heard and community feedback is incorporated throughout the planning process for both the Plan and the three site-specific engineering and design plans.

Engagement will include a variety of options to increase accessibility and support broader engagement.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$1,072,000</b>
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	\$250,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$1,322,000</b>

The above table identifies the total cost of the proposed project. Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a FY 2022/23 appropriation to the Conservancy from the General Fund for the purpose of “urgent sea level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies” (Budget Act of 2022, SB 154 as amended by the Budget Act of 2023, SB 101). The coastal resilience funds are available for the purposes described in Section 52 of SB 155 (Chapter 258, Statutes of 2021). The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it is a coastal resilience project along the coast and will build resilience for coastal communities, public access, and critical infrastructure.

Unless specifically identified as “Required Match,” the other sources of funding and in-kind contributions described above are estimates. The Conservancy does not typically require matching funds or in-kind services, nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders or of in-kind services. Typical grant conditions require grantees to provide any funds needed to complete a project.

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

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy’s jurisdiction (Section 31113(a)). Section 31113(b) and (c) authorize the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address extreme weather events, sea level rise, flooding, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources. The Conservancy must, to the extent allowed, prioritize projects that maximize public benefits and accomplish one of several purposes, including reducing flood risk and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat.

Consistent with these requirements, the proposed project will help develop sea level rise adaptation strategies by furthering project design plans for nature-based solutions that will address and mitigate risk to sea level rise at multiple locations along the City’s coastline.

Section 31113 also requires the Conservancy to prioritize projects that use natural infrastructure to help coastal communities adapt to climate change and projects that provide multiple public benefits, including, but not limited to, protection of communities, natural resources, and recreational opportunities. See Section 31113(d)(1). As discussed above, the

proposed project will help develop future nature-based adaptation measures to protect public access and community infrastructure from sea level rise in the city of San Diego.

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

Consistent with **Goal 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects**, the recommended grant is for planning projects that will increase resiliency by adapting ecosystems to protect communities, public access infrastructure, and natural resources from sea level rise.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The recommended authorization to fund community engagement and preparation of design plans is exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Sections 15262 and 15306 because these activities involve only data gathering, resource evaluation, planning, and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been approved. Consistent with Section 15262, the project will consider environmental factors. Consistent with Section 15306, the data collection and resource evaluation components of the project will not cause major or serious disturbance to the environment.

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