

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
February 15, 2024

**SANTA ANA RIVER TRAIL  
SAN BERNARDINO REACH IV-A**

Project No. 13-015-04  
Project Manager: Rodrigo Garcia

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$6,800,000 to the County of San Bernardino to prepare final designs, acquire rights-of-way, and construct a 3.9-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail in San Bernardino County and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

**LOCATION:** City of Redlands, San Bernardino County

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
  - Exhibit 2: [Project Letters](#)
  - Exhibit 3: [Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration](#)
  - Exhibit 4: [Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration Addendum](#)
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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 six million eight hundred thousand dollars (\$6,800,000) to the County of San Bernardino (“the grantee”) to prepare final designs, acquire rights-of-way, and construct a 3.9-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail in San Bernardino County.

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.
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3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.

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 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program and funding for recreational opportunities and trails.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Santa Ana River Trail (SART) Phase IV, Reach A adopted by the County of San Bernardino on April 21, 2020, and subsequent Addendum prepared by the County, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibits 4 and 5, respectively. The Conservancy finds that the proposed project as designed and mitigated avoids, reduces, or mitigates the potentially significant environmental effects to a less-than-significant level, and that there is no substantial evidence based on the record as a whole that the project will have a significant effect on the environment.

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## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$6,800,000 grant to the County of San Bernardino to prepare final designs, acquire rights-of-way, and construct a 3.9-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail running from California Street to Orange Street in the City of Redlands, San Bernardino County. The proposed project will help further completion of the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway which will become a major inland trail connecting to the California Coastal Trail.

In San Bernardino County, design and construction of the Santa Ana River Trail has been split into four phases: Phase I, II, III, and IV. Phase IV is subdivided into five smaller segments: Reach IV-A, IV-B, IV-C, IV-D, and IV-E (See Exhibit 1). Phase I was completed in 2007, Phase II was completed in 2005, Phase III is currently in construction, and Phase IV-A is the proposed project. Phases I, II, and III total 11 miles of trail starting at the San Bernardino – Riverside County line to California Street where the proposed project begins.

Since the 1950's, citizen groups have worked with leaders in the watershed to develop a 100-mile trail running adjacent to the Santa Ana River. Their goal is to create a lively parkway connecting playgrounds, schools, ball fields, commercial centers, golf courses, equestrian facilities, and neighborhoods to natural areas with a linear trail along the river corridor. The proposed project brings this vision one step closer to completion.

The conceptual designs for Phase IV-A have been completed. The proposed project will finalize these designs, obtain required approvals from the City of Redlands to develop the trail on the City's existing right-of-way and potential acquisition of right-of-way from private homeowners, and construction. This segment will be a Class 1 bike trail and will include concrete paving and installation of retaining walls, access ramps, slope protection, fencing, signage and striping, culverts, and a steel bridge.

**Site Description:** The proposed project runs along the southern bank of the Santa Ana River and begins at California Street and spans 3.9 miles to Orange Street in the City of Redlands. The Santa Ana River watershed drains approximately 3,200 square miles, including portions of San Bernardino, Riverside, and Orange counties. According to 2020 census data, the population of these three counties combined is 7.8 million. Currently the state's population is estimated to be 39.5 million; thus, just less than 20 percent of all the people in the state live in these three counties.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** San Bernardino County has completed and opened two sections of the Santa Ana River Trail to the public. The first section extends from Waterman Avenue in San Bernardino west to La Cadena Avenue in the city of Colton. Construction of this section of the trail was completed in April of 2005. The second section starts at La Cadena Avenue in Colton and extends the trail to the Riverside-San Bernardino County line where it joined Riverside County's existing trail section. This section of the trail was completed in April 2007. All sections of the trail are maintained and monitored by San Bernardino County Regional Parks and San Bernardino County Department of Public Works. As part of this work, San Bernardino County has successfully managed four grants from the Conservancy.

#### **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 provides recreation and health benefits to residents and visitors of the Santa Ana River Trail by planning and implementing a segment of trail to be used for walking, biking, and nature viewing. The project additionally supports the recreational goals of the 2018 Santa Ana River Parkway and Open Space Plan prepared by the Conservancy.

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

Portions of the Santa Ana River Trail Parkway were designated a National Recreation Trail in November 1976 linking the San Bernardino Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. The National Park Service has indicated its interest in designating the entire trail, once completed, as a National

Recreation Trail. When complete, it will be one of the longest urban recreation river parkways in the United States providing recreational opportunities to residents and visitors of the area.

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

The proposed project will bring the Santa Ana River Trail closer to completion providing the surrounding communities with access to the outdoors. The trail will increase urban greening, carbon sequestration through tree planting, and provide equitable public access and recreation.

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

The proposed project is identified in the Santa Ana River Parkway and Open Space Plan. Completion of the Santa Ana River Trail is the top priority of the plan. The plan was developed with rigorous community involvement and outreach through in-person community meetings, participation at local and regional events and through an online platform to allow comment and input through all stages of plan development. The County of San Bernardino has worked closely with the City of Redlands, the City of Highland, Inland Empire Biking Alliance, 31<sup>st</sup> District Representative Pete Aguilar, San Bernardino County 5<sup>th</sup> District Supervisor Joe Baca Jr., San Bernardino County Chair and 3<sup>rd</sup> District Supervisor Dawn Rowe, San Bernardino County Department of Public Health, San Bernardino County Department of Public Works, Riverside County Park and Open-Space District, City of Redlands Conservancy, and the San Bernardino County Transit Authority to ensure that the communities in and around the trail have input in the project design and planning.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$6,800,000</b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$6,800,000</b>

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project is a FY 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 appropriation to the Conservancy from the General Fund (The Budget Act of 2021, Section 19.57 as added by SB 170, Chapter 240, Statutes of 2021) specifically for the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program. 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.

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

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31170 - 31180, regarding the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program. Section 31173 states that the Conservancy may undertake projects and award grants to public agencies to help achieve the program goals of recreational opportunities and trails. It further states that the Conservancy may undertake projects for “public access to, enjoyment of, and enhancement of recreational and educational experience on program lands in a manner consistent with the protection of land and natural resources and economic resources in the area.” Section 31174(c)

requires prioritization of river-related projects that create expanded opportunities for recreation.

Consistent with these requirements, the proposed project will help implement the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway, which will become a major inland trail connecting to the California Coastal Trail and will expand opportunities for recreation near the river.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2.4, Build Trails**, the proposed project will plan and construct 3.9 miles of the Santa Ana River Trail.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

On April 21, 2020, the County of San Bernardino adopted the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Santa Ana River Trail (SART) Phase IV, Reach A (IS/MND) and the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP), and approved the Santa Ana River Trail (SART) Phase IV, Reach A project. On December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the County prepared an Addendum to the IS/MND. The proposed project is analyzed in the IS/MND and Addendum. Staff concurs that there is no substantial evidence that the proposed project will have a significant effect on the environment.

The IS/MND identified potentially significant environmental effects in the areas of biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, and tribal cultural resources. With the project's incorporated mitigation measures, summarized below and available on Exhibit 4, page 91, these environmental effects will be less than significant.

Biological Resources

A project-specific Focused Biological Assessment (FBA) for the Santa Ana River Trail Phase IV, Reach A was prepared by Natural Resources Assessment, Inc. (NRAI) in January 2019 to identify plant communities and assess the presence of suitable habitat for special-status plant and wildlife species. NRAI reviewed plant and wildlife species occurring within the project vicinity and conducted field surveys and observations of potential habitat for sensitive species. The FBA focused on the proposed trail alignment and its 25-foot buffer area of potential effect.

The FBA identified several potential impacts to sensitive biological resources within the proposed project's vicinity. Based on subsequent field surveys and an evaluation of the FBA the following plant species may be present within the proposed trail alignment's area of potential effect: slender-horned spineflower and the Santa Ana River wooly star. The FBA also identified several special status wildlife species that may be present within the proposed trail alignment. Based on subsequent field surveys and an evaluation by qualified biologists it was determined that the following wildlife species may be present within the proposed trail alignment: the San Bernardino kangaroo rat, the California gnatcatcher, and the burrowing owl.

Implementation of mitigation measures BIO-1 to BIO-17 (see Exhibit 4, page 91) will minimize potential impacts to habitat and wildlife, including potentially occurring special status species, to a less than significant level.

No significant loss to raptors and migratory birds or their habitats are expected, and therefore no mitigation is required. However, construction activity may indirectly affect nesting birds, especially in areas of native habitat.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure BIO-5 to BIO-7 (see Exhibit 4, page 91) will minimize impacts to an established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, to a less than significant level.

Once finalized, the proposed project will comply with applicable conservation measures and will minimize conflict with an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan, to a less than significant level.

#### Cultural Resources

No known human remains are present on the project site. If human remains are inadvertently uncovered during project activities, Mitigation Measure CUL-2 below will reduce impacts to less than significant:

CUL-2 If human remains or funerary objects are encountered during any activities associated with the project, work in the immediate vicinity (within 60-foot buffer of the find) shall cease and the County Coroner shall be contacted pursuant to State Health and Safety Code 7050.5 and that code enforced for the duration of the project.

#### Geology and Soils

A paleontological overview for the trail alignment was completed and it was concluded that the project area consists of younger Quaternary alluvium originating from the San Bernardino Mountains via the Santa Ana River. Alluvial deposits of this type are not typically conducive to yield fossil specimens. However, fossil specimens have been recovered in similar settings at depths that may be as shallow as 9-10 feet. Mitigation Measure GEO-1 below would minimize potential impacts to paleontological resources incidental finds to a less than significant level:

GEO-1 Should the project require relatively deep excavations, generally in areas with disturbance exceeding nine feet below the present surface, where older alluvium deposits are possible; a paleontological monitor shall be present and have authority to recover, analyze, and curate any specimens of paleontological significance. The paleontological monitoring program shall be conducted in a manner consistent with the protocols of the San Bernardino County Museum.

#### Tribal Cultural Resources

In September 2017, The County of San Bernardino Department of Public Works Environmental Management Division mailed project notices in accordance with AB 52 to local tribes. One Tribe expressed interest in the project and requested further consultation. Mitigation Measures TCR-1 and TCR-2 as recommended by the Tribe have been incorporated into the IS/MND:

- TCR-1 In the event that Native American cultural resources are discovered during project activities, all work in the immediate vicinity of the find (within a 60-foot buffer) shall cease and a qualified archaeologist meeting Secretary of Interior standards shall be hired to assess the find. Work in other portions of the project, outside of the buffered area, may continue during this assessment period. Additionally, consulting tribes will be contacted if any such find occurs and be provided information after the archaeologist makes his/her initial assessment of the nature of the find, so as to provide Tribal input with regards to significance and treatment. The archaeologist shall complete and isolate/site record for the find and submit this document to the applicant and the Lead Agency for dissemination of the consulting Tribes.
- TCR-2 If significant Native American historical resources, as defined by CEQA (as amended, 2015), are discovered and avoidance cannot be ensured, an SOI-qualified archaeologist shall be retained to develop a Cultural Resources Treatment Plan, as well as a Discovery and Monitoring Plan, the drafts of which shall be provided to consulting tribes for review and comment. The Lead Agency and/or applicant shall, in good faith, consult with consulting tribes on the disposition and treatment of any cultural materials encountered during the project.

With implementation of the project's mitigation measures, environmental effects to biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, and tribal cultural resources will be less than significant. Staff recommends that the Conservancy find that the project as mitigated avoids, reduces, or mitigates the potentially significant environmental effects to a level of less-than-significant and that there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment.

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