

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 21, 2024

LOS PEÑASQUITOS LAGOON MONITORING: 2024 - 2029

Project No. 78-046-06
Project Manager: Kellan Warner

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$153,005.50 to the Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association to undertake an additional five years of monitoring for the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Monitoring Program, a program of physical and biological monitoring at Los Peñasquitos Lagoon in San Diego County.

LOCATION: Los Peñasquitos Lagoon, City of San Diego, San Diego County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Staff Recommendation August 22, 2019](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

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 hundred fifty-three thousand and five dollars and fifty cents (\$153,005.50) to the Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association (“the grantee”) to undertake an additional five years of monitoring for the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Monitoring Program, a program of physical and biological monitoring at Los Peñasquitos Lagoon in San Diego County (the “project”).

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.

4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
5. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement, operate, and maintain the project.

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 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding coastal resource enhancement.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to \$153,005.50 to the Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association (SWIA) to undertake an additional five years of monitoring for the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Monitoring Program (the “project”), a program of physical and biological monitoring at Los Peñasquitos Lagoon (LPL) in San Diego County (See Exhibit 1). SWIA will collaborate with the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve (TRNERR) to conduct LPL monitoring. The TRNERR supports monitoring at LPL because it is a regionally significant site that informs wetlands restoration projects at the Tijuana River Estuary and elsewhere in the region.

The Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Monitoring Program is a 35-year program for physical and biological monitoring at LPL. The project will enable the long-term monitoring program at LPL to continue uninterrupted for an additional five years. Continuing the long-term monitoring for five years will result in a total of 40 years of monitoring data at LPL, a rare data set for any biological study, and particularly for Southern California’s wetlands. This monitoring will continue to provide valuable longitudinal data on the condition of LPL, which provides scientists and resource managers with a greater understanding of the shifting conditions of these fragile ecosystems along coastal California. The Conservancy has been funding the LPL monitoring program since 1986 with funds from the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Special Deposit Fund, and it was last approved in 2019 (Exhibit 2).

The LPL Monitoring Program consists of water quality, and lagoon inlet tidal exchange and water levels monitoring. The current project will add marsh resilience metrics to the existing monitoring program. Water quality monitoring will be conducted at three stations that measure temperature, salinity, dissolved oxygen, pH, turbidity, and water level every 15 minutes. In addition, a nearby weather station will measure air temperature and local rainfall. These data are telemetered and delivered via a website that is available to the public

(torreypines.trnerr.org). The open or closed state of the lagoon inlet and the level of tidal exchange is assessed with a webcam, which is streamed on the same website. Water level data are also used to analyze the spatial and temporal extent of tidal influence. Data will also be collected to track marsh resilience indicators to understand possible trajectories in the face of climate change, including multimetric approaches that account for marsh position and extent, sediment availability, and local water levels.

The long-term monitoring program is the heart of the adaptive management program at LPL and is crucial to the implementation of the LPL Enhancement Plan (Enhancement Plan). Monitoring data guide management actions by the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Foundation, the California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks), and the City of San Diego, and provide feedback on the effectiveness of management actions.

Site Description: Los Peñasquitos Lagoon is a 0.62-square-mile intertidal wetland located in the north coastal area of the City of San Diego, about sixteen miles north of downtown, and just north of the intersection of Interstates 5 and 805, between the communities of La Jolla and Del Mar (Exhibit 1). Much of LPL is owned and managed by State Parks as the LPL Preserve. It is adjacent to Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve and State Beach, which lie immediately to the west and south. The 98.5-square-mile LPL watershed is an urbanized area of the City of San Diego and is comprised of three major drainages: Carroll Canyon, Los Peñasquitos Canyon, and Carmel Canyon. LPL and its watershed have been identified by the State Water Resources Control Board as an impaired water body with sedimentation and siltation from nonpoint sources threatening habitats, particularly in the lagoon and lower stream corridors.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: SWIA has successfully managed Conservancy funding for LPL monitoring since 2012. Since its founding in 1979, SWIA has been dedicated to the acquisition, preservation, and restoration of wetlands, and to educating the public about the value of wetlands. SWIA has managed \$30 million of wetlands projects, mostly in the Tijuana Estuary, but also in LPL. SWIA works in collaborative partnerships with federal, state, and local agencies and is a cooperating association with California State Parks, which owns most of the study area, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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 LPL monitoring program is a rare long-term dataset that provides valuable information about coastal wetland health and impacts of sea-level rise. These data have been used as a baseline comparison to many other wetland health indicators and restoration projects throughout Southern California. The budget for the program is reasonable because the monitoring has been streamlined over the years to include only the most essential and valuable parameters. Continuing this monitoring program is a good investment for the State.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$153,005.50
Project Total	\$153,005.50

The Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Special Deposit Fund, in the Conservancy’s Coastal Trust Fund, consists of fees assessed on development permits issued by the City of San Diego and the California Coastal Commission in the coastal zone portion of the LPL enhancement area. (Pub. Res. Code section 30526(a)). These funds are held by the Conservancy and may be spent only for enhancement activities in the lagoon. (Pub. Res. Code sections 30526 and 31108.5.) The proposed actions are consistent with the purposes of the fund because the monitoring program is an element of the enhancement plan for the lagoon as approved by the Conservancy and Coastal Commission in 1985. The project will spend all remaining funds from this fund source.

TRNERR will provide in-kind support for the monitoring project valued at \$15,000 annually. Core operations of the TRNERR, including lab space, technical training, and project supervision, will support this project and are funded by annual awards from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The dataloggers and telemetry equipment used for monitoring were purchased with a prior grant from the County of San Diego Vector Control Program, with an approximate cost of \$40,000.

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 action is consistent with Chapter 6 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code Sections 31251-70. Consistent with Section 31251, the proposed action is part of a coastal resource enhancement plan and will provide information to enhance the natural and scenic character of an area inside the coastal zone that has been impacted by incompatible land uses. Consistent with Section 31252 the proposed action is

identified in City of San Diego, North City Local Coastal Program as requiring public action to help resolve questions concerning impact of local development on natural resources.

Consistent with Section 31263, the Conservancy may fund up to the total cost of the resource enhancement activities proposed. The amount of funding recommended for the proposed project is based on the amount of funding available for LPL resource enhancement projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant and its project partners, and the urgency of the project relative to other projects eligible for funding.

Monitoring at LPL is consistent with the policies contained in the City of San Diego North City Local Coastal Program (LCP) effectively certified by the Coastal Commission in 1988. Specifically, the LCP states that: "A coastal restoration project should be undertaken with the Coastal Conservancy in order to properly establish the environmental management strategies necessary to enhance the natural viability of the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon." (Torrey Pines Community Plan, LCP Addendum, 1981). Elsewhere, the LCP states, "The [LCP] concurs with the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Enhancement Plan and Program, which has been developed to provide the measures necessary for restoring and enhancing the environmental qualities of the lagoon..." (Torrey Pines Community Plan, p. 33) An ongoing monitoring program is necessary to inform design of future restoration projects and evaluate the effectiveness of past restoration activities.

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

Consistent with **Goal 3.2.1 (Habitat Restoration or Enhancement)**, the proposed project will inform the ongoing restoration and enhancement planning of LPL, as well as guide ongoing management actions to restore and enhance the lagoon.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

This project consists of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a major or serious disturbance to the environment. Any future enhancement projects that may be developed from this data have not been reviewed, approved or funded by the Conservancy. The project therefore is categorically exempt pursuant to Title 14, California Code of Regulations section 15306.

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