

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 21, 2024

SAN FRANCISCO ESTUARY INVASIVE SPARTINA PROJECT

Project No.: 99-054-03
Project Manager: Erica Johnson, Marilyn Latta

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$6,639,000, including a \$2,639,000 grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board, to the California Invasive Plant Council for the planning, management, treatment, monitoring, and restoration activities of the San Francisco Estuary Invasive *Spartina* Project from January 1, 2025-June 30, 2027.

LOCATION: The baylands and lower creek channels of the nine counties that bound the San Francisco Bay.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)
- Exhibit 2: [February 2, 2023 Staff Recommendation](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Project letters from April 2024 Wildlife Conservation Board Application](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

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

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to \$6,639,000, including a \$2,639,000 grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board, to the California Invasive Plant Council (“the grantee”) for the planning, management, treatment, monitoring, and restoration activities of the San Francisco Estuary Invasive *Spartina* Project from January 1, 2025- June 30, 2027 (“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:

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1. A work plan, schedule and budget.
2. A list of identified mitigation measures.
3. Evidence that all necessary permits and approvals for the project have been obtained.
4. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
5. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.

In carrying out any treatment or enhancement project, the California Invasive Plant Council shall comply with all applicable mitigation and monitoring measures that are set forth in the approved site-specific plans; that are required by any permit, the applicable U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Biological Opinion, or any other approval for the project; or that are identified in the “Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report, San Francisco Estuary Invasive *Spartina* Project: *Spartina* Control Program” (EIS/R), certified by the Conservancy on September 25, 2003 and addressed in the “Addendum to 2003 Invasive *Spartina* Project Control Program Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Report” considered by the Conservancy on June 16, 2005.

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

Based on the accompanying staff report 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.
3. The California Invasive Plant Council is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code.

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$6,639,000, including a \$2,639,000 grant to the Conservancy from the Wildlife Conservation Board, to the California Invasive Plant Council (Cal-IPC) to implement the planning, management, treatment, monitoring, and restoration activities of the San Francisco Estuary Invasive *Spartina* Project (ISP) from January 1, 2025-June 30, 2027 (“the project”).

This additional funding will support the activities of the ISP consistent with the Conservancy authorization dated February 2, 2023 (Exhibit 2). The ISP has conducted all activities as planned under the 2023 authorization, including successful annual invasive *Spartina* monitoring and treatment seasons in 2023-24, annual rail monitoring in 2023-24, and habitat enhancements in 2023-24, which installed 16,030 plants. Propagation of 18,000 additional native plants is underway for Winter 2024-25. The amount of invasive *Spartina* detected during the 2023 monitoring season stayed at a low 23 net acres baywide despite increased freshwater influx

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from storms that can cause an uptick in plant growth, including invasive *Spartina*. The majority of sites in the nine-county project area have either zero detection or less than 10 square meters of invasive *Spartina* remaining. The project team also successfully launched a new website where key project reports, photos, and other information can be found: <https://spartina.org/>.

In August of 2023, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS Refuge, federal lead) issued a ten-year Biological Opinion (2023 USFWS ISP BO) which allows for phased treatment on the six remaining restricted sites referenced previously in Exhibit 2. This marks a major project milestone because these sites contain approximately 80% of the remaining infestation. In this three-year project period, from 2025 to 2027, the project will continue to control and monitor invasive *Spartina* at all 222 sites around the Bay with a special focus on reducing invasive *Spartina* in East Bay marshes where phased treatment is permitted by the 2023 USFWS BO. Work at these sites—Fan Marsh (Port of Oakland), Citation Marsh (City of San Leandro), and Cogswell Marsh, MLK New Marsh, and Arrowhead Marsh East (East Bay Regional Park District)—is urgent because it will greatly reduce the potential for invasive *Spartina* to colonize nearby restoration projects nearing implementation by California Department of Fish and Wildlife, East Bay Regional Park District, the City of San Leandro, and others. Projects such as the Hayward Marsh Restoration Project and the Long Beach Restoration Design Project along the San Leandro shoreline, and the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, which have plans to reopen areas to tidal action soon, are at risk of colonization by invasive *Spartina*, which would degrade habitat and impact the projects' ability to meet ecological goals and permit requirements for native vegetation cover. In addition, ISP tasks for 2025 to 2027 include constructing an additional 20 new high tide refuge islands, propagating and planting 50,000 native plants, and engaging 20 young adults from local colleges and development early career programs for paid internships that will include technical field experience and workforce development training in environmental restoration projects.

Since the February 2023 authorization, the Conservancy and Cal-IPC have applied for additional grant awards to fundraise for the current, critical phase in the project. Cal-IPC has secured a \$2,500,000 grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency which will support work by its subcontractors, and the Conservancy has secured a \$2,639,000 grant from WCB to sub-grant to Cal-IPC and its subcontractors. The Conservancy has also applied for a \$1,000,000 USFWS North American Wetland Conservation grant, \$1,000,000 USFWS National Coastal Wetlands Conservation grant, and \$5,000,000 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant, for a total approximately \$13,639,000 in pending grant applications for the three-year period 2025-2027. A total of \$250,195 in support funds for Conservancy staff are included in these pending applications. All Conservancy funds authorized in February of 2023 will be expended as of December of 2024.

More details about the project components are described in the February 2, 2023 Staff Recommendation (Exhibit 2).

Site Description and Background: The project area includes 70,000 acres of tidal marshes and mudflats in the San Francisco Estuary. The funding in this authorization will fund all planning, implementation, and monitoring within 222 mapped subareas throughout the project area, according to detailed plans developed each season by the ISP.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Cal-IPC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that works to reduce invasive plants in California. Cal-IPC has been partnering with the Conservancy and Olofson Environmental, Inc. since 2019 to implement the ISP and has the organizational experience to support the project and successfully achieve its objectives. Cal-IPC brings technical resources, communication capacity to the stewardship community, and administrative capacity to coordinate contracts, invoices, and reports with the project's many contractors. See Exhibit 2 for more details.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

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

Required 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.

This project is a good investment of state resources because removal of invasive *Spartina* will help protect 70,000 acres of tidal marsh and mudflat Bay-wide and coastal wetlands outside of the Golden Gate. Preventing invasive *Spartina* colonization of mudflats will protect food resources for species that forage there. Plantings and high tide refuge islands will enhance specific, critical functional components (breeding, roosting, foraging, and high tide refuge habitat) that contribute to a fully functioning complete marsh ecosystem over the full marsh area. Plantings will also enhance native green infrastructure in San Francisco Bay, contributing to shoreline protection through wave attenuation and sediment stabilization.

The project advances statewide goals and is consistent with regional plans including: San Francisco Estuary Blueprint (2022 update), USFWS Recovery Plan for Tidal Marsh Ecosystems of Northern and Central CA (2013), San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's Coastal Management Program, and the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture's (SFBJV) Implementation Strategy (2022).

In addition, the project advances CA Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy (2022) where "Combat invasive species" is one of the "cross-cutting priorities for climate smart land management." Salt marshes are called out as "blue carbon" habitats and salt marsh restoration is identified as a key nature-based solution.

See the February 2, 2023, Staff Recommendation for more information (Exhibit 2).

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

The overall project goal is regional eradication of invasive Spartina, which is a critical piece of ongoing landscape-scale restoration that is meant to protect marshes in perpetuity. Project benefits also include enhancement of marsh-upland transition zone habitat and high tide refuge for state and federally listed endangered species including the Ridgway’s rail, and other key marsh species in the San Francisco Bay.

See the February 2, 2023, Staff Recommendation for more information (Exhibit 2).

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

Restoring healthy native vegetation and green infrastructure will increase biodiversity and climate resilience for wildlife and enhance wave attenuation and shoreline protection that benefits neighboring communities. In addition, a healthy shoreline also includes some direct and indirect public access benefits, such as open space (e.g. Hayward Regional Shoreline Park, Ravenswood Open Space Preserve), water quality, and wildlife viewing.

See the February 2, 2023, Staff Recommendation for more information (Exhibit 2).

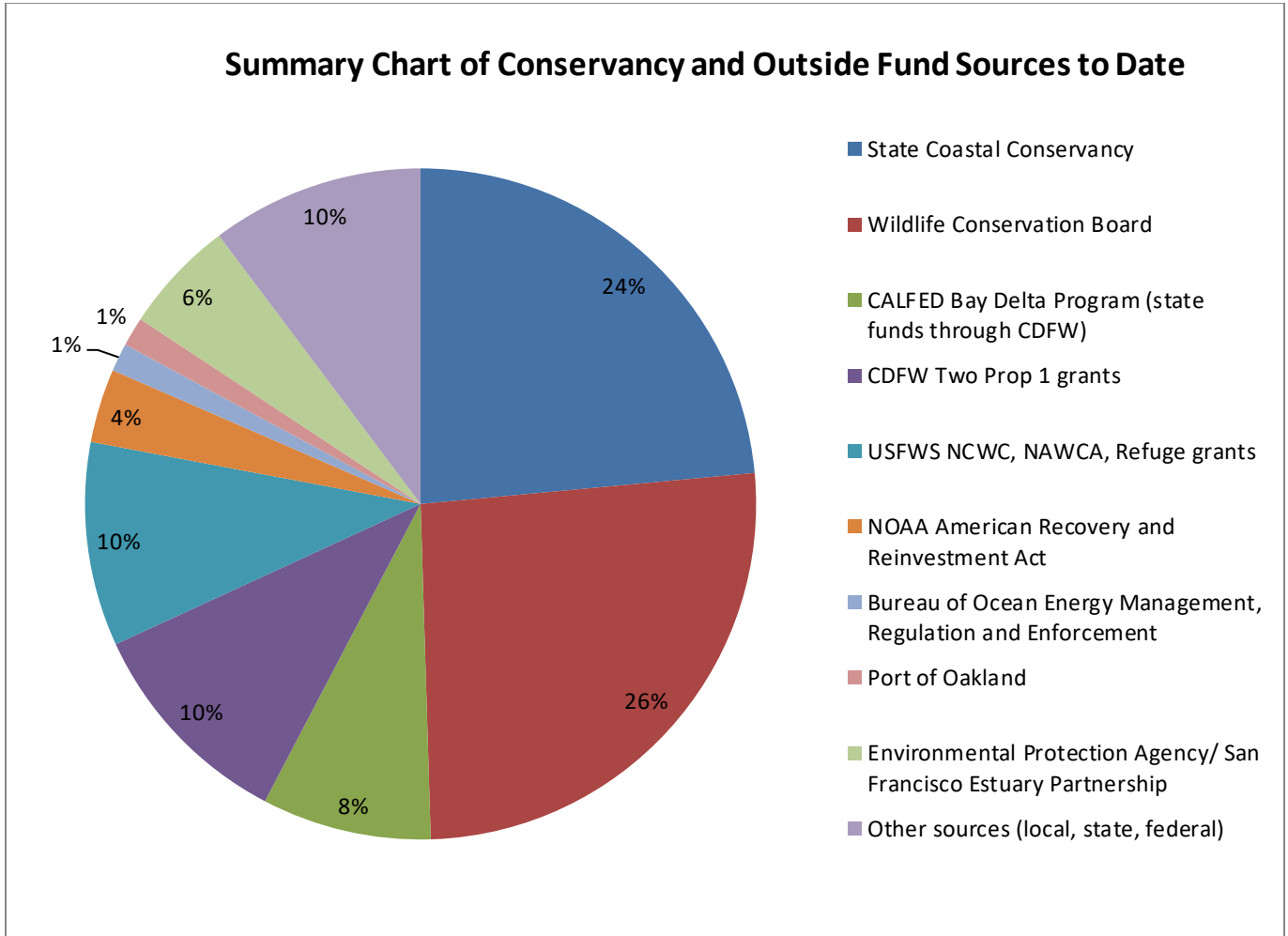
5. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

The project will continue its outreach and engagement practices as described in the February 2, 2023, Staff Recommendation (Exhibit 2).

In the 2024 treatment season, the ISP piloted a workforce development program during which five young adults from local colleges and environmental workforce development programs were recruited for a paid internship that included training with the project’s highly skilled staff and supporting their work in the field. This project phase will engage 20 additional paid interns who will receive technical environmental training and help implement baywide mapping and treatment work. Work protecting San Francisco Bay’s valuable marshes provides an incomparable setting for learning professional skills for young people interested in a career in environmental restoration - from plant identification, field safety, GIS documentation, invasive plant control techniques and equipment, and implementing conservation measures for sensitive species and habitats. This workforce development component will provide a “pulse” of staffing during summer months when treatment and monitoring activities are at their busiest and the project needs more boots on the ground to conduct all activities in a short seasonal timing window. Through technical training and direct site-based environmental field work opportunities, the project will support training the emerging generation of field contractors and professionals needed to work on restoration in the coming decades.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$4,000,000
Wildlife Conservation Board (administered by Conservancy)	\$2,639,000
Proposed Authorization Total	\$6,639,000



It is anticipated that the Conservancy’s funding under this authorization for this project will come from an FY23/24 appropriation of General Funds to the Conservancy for the purpose of “urgent sea level rise and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions and other strategies” (Budget Act of 2023, Chapter 12, Statutes of 2023 (SB 101) as amended by Chapter 38, Statutes of 2023 (AB 102)). The coastal resilience funds are available for the purposes set forth in Section 52 of Chapter 258 of the Statutes of 2021, which sets forth a detailed description of the purposes of the coastal resilience funds and includes projects in the San Francisco Bay Area. The proposed authorization qualifies for use of these funds because it will support coastal resilience in all nine counties through restoration and enhancement of native wetlands that help address extreme weather events, sea level rise (SLR), and flooding. This funding to a non-profit organization will protect and enhance native wetlands that support natural infrastructure providing multiple benefits including fish and wildlife enhancements and buffering bay shorelines against SLR and erosion, as well as recreational opportunities such as birdwatching and kayaking.

The remaining Conservancy funding under this authorization will come from a grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board which authorized \$2,639,000 on Thursday, August 22nd, 2024 to support the activities described in the proposed project.

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In addition to the proposed authorization total, Cal-IPC has secured a \$2,500,000 grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency. The Conservancy has also applied for a \$1,000,000 USFWS North American Wetland Conservation grant, \$1,000,000 USFWS National Coastal Wetlands Conservation grant, and \$5,000,000 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant, for a project total of approximately \$13,639,000 for the three-year period 2025-2027. A total of \$250,195 in support funds for Conservancy staff are included in these pending applications.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The project is consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21, specifically Section 31113 which authorizes the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy's jurisdiction (Section 31113(a)). For more information with respect to consistency with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, please see the February 2, 2023 Staff Recommendation (Exhibit 2).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2023 STRATEGIC PLAN

GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

The project is consistent with objectives 3.2 Restore or Enhance Habitats and 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects in the Conservancy's 2023-27 Strategic Plan.

See the February 2, 2023, Staff Recommendation for more information (Exhibit 2).

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The "Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report, San Francisco Estuary Invasive *Spartina* Project: *Spartina* Control Program" prepared for the ISP pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) was certified by the Conservancy on September 25, 2003. At its June 16, 2005 meeting, the Conservancy considered and certified the "Addendum to 2003 Invasive *Spartina* Project Control Program Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Report." Subsequently, the Conservancy has authorized funding for treatment and eradication projects each year through 2023. See the February 2, 2023, Staff Recommendation for more information (Exhibit 2).

Since the project activities proposed for funding under this authorization, including the potential environmental impacts and required mitigation measures, are the same activities in the same project area covered by the FEIR and Addendum, the proposed authorization remains consistent with the CEQA findings adopted by the Conservancy in connection with the June 16, 2005 authorization for the 22 original treatment sites and with subsequent Conservancy findings made in connection with authorizations for treatment at the new sites added over the years. No further environmental documentation for these treatment activities is required under CEQA.