

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
November 21, 2024

**SANTA ANA RIVER TRAIL  
GREEN RIVER GOLF CLUB SEGMENT PHASE 1 - CONSTRUCTION**

Project No. 11-023-07  
Project Manager: Rodrigo Garcia

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$9,200,000 to the Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District to implement the Santa Ana River Trail Green River Golf Club Segment Phase 1 Construction project, consisting of the construction of 1.71 miles of the Santa Ana River Trail in Riverside County; and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

**LOCATION:** Santa Ana River Parkway, along the Santa Ana River in Riverside County

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
  - Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)
  - Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
  - Exhibit 4: [Santa Ana River Trail – Phase 6 through Green River Golf Club Mitigated Negative Declaration](#)
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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 nine million two hundred thousand dollars (\$9,200,000) to the Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District (“the grantee”) to implement the Santa Ana River Trail Green River Golf Club Segment Phase 1 Construction project, consisting of the construction of 1.71 miles of the Santa Ana River Trail in Riverside 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 and Proposition 68 as the source of that 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 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 Santa Ana River Trail – Phase 6 through Green River Golf Club Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration adopted by the Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District on January 25, 2022, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 4. 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 grant of up to \$9,200,000 to the Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District (“District”) to implement the Santa Ana River Trail Green River Golf Club Segment Phase 1 Construction project, consisting of the construction of 1.71 miles of the Santa Ana River Trail in Riverside County (the “project”).

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 Santa Ana River Trail Green River Golf Club Segment will be a 1.71-mile Class 1 asphalt and decomposed granite equestrian and pedestrian trail. This segment will run from the Santa Ana River Trail's Orange County line south of the Burlington North Santa Fe ("BNSF") railroad, through the Green River Golf Club, and connect to the existing trail at the Chino Hills State Park boundary. This segment will include two bridges: (1) a vehicular bridge over the BNSF railroad tracks, and (2) a pedestrian bridge over Aliso Creek. The multi-use trail will serve pedestrians, hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians. Planning and environmental review documents for this project were completed by the District through a previous grant from the Conservancy.

Construction of the Santa Ana River Trail Green River Golf Club Segment has been split into two phases. The project, which consists of Phase 1, will complete acquisitions for right of way, and construct the 1.71 mile trail. Phase 2 will be implemented after completion of Phase 1 and will include the construction of the BNSF railroad and Aliso Creek bridges. Due to safety concerns, this trail segment will remain closed until both phases are completed.

**Site Description:** 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 Orange County, Riverside County, and San Bernardino County combined is approximately 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.

Designated a National Recreation Trail in 1977, the Santa Ana River Trail has been under development for more than fifty 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, serving pedestrians, cyclists, commuters, and equestrians.

The Santa Ana River watershed supports hundreds of species of birds, fish, and amphibians, including more than a dozen protected rare or endangered species such as least Bell's vireo, the Santa Ana sucker, San Bernardino kangaroo rat, and the Santa Ana River woollystar.

The upper portion of the watershed is in the San Bernardino National Forest. The middle section crosses the Inland Empire, through the urbanized areas of San Bernardino and Riverside counties. Throughout this region, the Santa Ana River is a wide, braided channel with flood control levees protecting urban development. Below this section through most of Orange County, the Santa Ana River is a concrete-encased flood control channel that leads to the coast. The mouth of the Santa Ana River between Huntington Beach and Newport Beach is part of the 1,000-acre Orange Coast River Park.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The District 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 has extensive experience with project planning and implementation, as it manages more than 44,000 acres, including 40 parks, reserves, historic and archaeological sites, and 90 miles of regional trails. The District has successfully managed several previous grant funds from the Conservancy for design and construction of the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway.

**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 constructing a segment of the 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.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$9,200,000</b>
Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District	\$2,176,373
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$11,376,373</b>

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project will come from two sources: \$7,200,000 is from FY 2020/2021, 2021/2022, 2022/2023, and 2023/2024 appropriations to the Conservancy from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68, Public Resources Code (PRC) Sections 80000-80173). Chapter 7 of Proposition 68 authorizes grants for projects consistent with the Conservancy’s Santa Ana River Conservancy Program (PRC Section 80100(a)(2)). This project is consistent with the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program, as discussed in the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section, below. Entities receiving grants under this chapter must provide a 20% match (PRC section 80100(b)). Consistent with this section, the District is providing \$2,176,373 in matching funds.

The remaining \$2,000,000 is from a FY 2019/2020 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 funding for projects to expand and improve the Santa Ana River Parkway, in consultation with local government agencies. This project will expand the Santa Ana River Parkway, and the planning for the project was performed in conjunction with local government agencies and nonprofits through the Policy Advisory Group of the Santa Ana River Conservancy.

**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 build a 1.71-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

On January 25, 2022, the District adopted the Santa Ana River Trail Phase 6 through Green River Golf Club Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) and approved the Santa Ana River Trail Phase 6. The proposed project is analyzed in the MND. 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 aesthetics, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, and tribal cultural resources. With the project's incorporated mitigation measures, summarized below and available on Exhibit 4, these environmental effects will be less than significant.

### Aesthetics

The project could result in potential light/glare impacts during the construction process. Although it is not anticipated that construction would be capable of producing substantial daytime glare, there is a potential for up to four nights of nighttime construction. There is a potential that nighttime lighting could be visible to motorists along SR-91 or residential uses east of the Santa Ana River. Mitigation Measure AES-2 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.1-1) will reduce short-term construction impacts to less than significant.

### Biological Resources

The MND assesses the potential impact on special status species, including those identified by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. While various species of wildlife were observed on site, including Cooper's hawk, tricolored blackbird, and least Bell's vireo, most impacts would be mitigated under the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan. Key measures to reduce impacts include controlling stormwater runoff, limiting toxic exposure, managing invasive plant species, and minimizing disruption to habitats during breeding season. With implementation of Mitigation Measures BIO-1 through BIO-5 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.4-1), potential impacts to sensitive biological species would be reduced to a less than significant level.

The Habitat Assessment identified various natural vegetation communities, including Coastal Sage Scrub, elderberry savannah, disturbed mule fat scrub, non-native grassland, and others, as well as riparian features like the Santa Ana River and Aliso Canyon. Temporary and permanent impacts on these habitats will be mitigated through a range of measures, including habitat restoration, environmental awareness training for workers, limiting vegetation removal to non-native species, and adhering to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Additionally, best management practices will be implemented to control pollutants and erosion, while noise, water quality, and hazardous materials will be managed to prevent adverse effects. With implementation of Mitigation Measures BIO-2 through BIO-13 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.4-1), potential impacts would be reduced to less than significant levels in this regard.

The project will have a less than significant impact on the movement of native or migratory wildlife with mitigation measures in place. The project site is located near important wildlife corridors such as the Santa Ana River, Aliso Creek, and Chino Hills State Park, which support species like coyotes, bobcats, and various migratory birds. The northern part of the area is within a core linkage zone connecting Orange and San Bernardino counties, crucial for species such as the Santa Ana sucker and mountain lion. The implementation of Mitigation Measures BIO-2 through BIO-6 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.4-1), including worker training, installation of barriers, and adherence to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, will ensure minimal disruption to wildlife movement and reduce impacts to less than significant.

The proposed project will have a less than significant impact on any adopted Habitat Conservation Plan or Natural Community Conservation Plan, with mitigation measures in place. While the project will result in minor permanent impacts to 0.003 acres of riverine resources and 0.010 acres of suitable riparian habitat for the least Bell's vireo, these impacts are limited

relative to the remaining habitat in the area. Mitigation measures, including habitat enhancement at the San Timoteo Canyon Mitigation Site, environmental awareness training, construction fencing, and adherence to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, will minimize the project's effects. As a result, the project's impacts are not expected to conflict with conservation plans. With implementation of Mitigation Measures BIO-1 through BIO-13 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.4-1), impacts would be reduced to less than significant levels.

### Cultural Resources

The Cultural Resources Assessment concluded that the proposed project would not cause a significant adverse change to historical resources, with mitigation measures in place. A survey and search of historical and archaeological records revealed two historic sites within the project area: CA-RIV-5522H and CA-RIV-3693H. Both were found to lack sufficient integrity and were recommended ineligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or California Register of Historical Resources. Additional built-environment resources, such as the Green River Golf Club and a 0.5-mile segment of the BNSF railroad, were also deemed ineligible for listing. Mitigation measures include cultural resource monitoring during excavation and cultural sensitivity training for construction personnel. With implementation of Mitigation Measures CUL-1 through CUL-5 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.5-1), potential impacts to unknown archaeological resources will be reduced to less than significant levels.

While the potential for encountering archaeological resources during construction is moderate, implementation of Mitigation Measures CUL-1 through CUL-5 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.5-1), including monitoring, cultural sensitivity training, and halting work if resources are found, will ensure that impacts are less than significant.

The project site is not expected to contain human remains due to previous disturbances, and no conditions suggest their presence. However, if human remains are accidentally discovered during construction, State laws, including California Health and Safety Code Section 7050.5, require work to stop in the area until the County Coroner is notified, and the Native American Heritage Commission is consulted if necessary. Mitigation Measure CUL-6 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.5-1) ensures proper handling and treatment of any remains found. With adherence to these procedures, impacts related to disturbing human remains would be less than significant.

### Geology and Soils

The project site is in an area affected by regional active faults, posing potential seismic hazards such as ground shaking. While no active or inactive faults exist directly within the vicinity and the risk of primary seismic hazards is low, secondary hazards may occur due to proximity to regional faults. The proposed trail does not include habitable structures, but the bridge structures over the BNSF railroad and Aliso Canyon could be vulnerable to seismic damage. To minimize this risk, the Geotechnical Report recommends seismic design features, including isolation bearings and compliance with local building standards. With Mitigation Measure GEO-1 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.7-1), impacts from seismic ground shaking would be less than significant.

The project site is in an area with moderate susceptibility to liquefaction, which can occur during strong seismic activity when loose, cohesionless soils lose strength and behave like a liquid. Although the site is not officially mapped in a liquefaction zone, the geotechnical analysis indicates a potential risk due to shallow groundwater and the site's sloping nature. The primary concern involves the bridge structures, which may be vulnerable to seismic-related ground failure. To address these risks, the Geotechnical Report recommends ground improvement techniques and structural solutions for the bridge foundations. Compliance with the District's standards and building codes, along with Mitigation Measure GEO-2 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.7-1), would reduce the potential impacts to less than significant.

The project is not expected to cause significant impacts with mitigation measures incorporated related to unstable soils or ground motion, such as landslides, lateral spreading, subsidence, or liquefaction. The project will not affect subsurface geology significantly or introduce structures that could exacerbate soil instability. It will adhere to the District's Trail Development Standards, the California Building Code, and local regulations. Additionally, the implementation of Mitigation Measures GEO-1 and GEO-2 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.7-1), based on recommendations from the Geotechnical Report, will further address and minimize potential hazards related to seismic activity and unstable soils. With these measures, impacts are anticipated to be less than significant.

The project is expected to have less than significant impacts with mitigation measures incorporated related to expansive soils. The project will adhere to relevant building standards and codes. With Mitigation Measure GEO-3 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.7-1) in place, risks associated with expansive soils are anticipated to be minimized to less than significant levels.

The project is expected to have less than significant impacts on unique paleontological resources or geologic features after mitigation measures are incorporated. Although no paleontological resources were found on-site, and the area has been largely disturbed, certain geologic units with high potential for significant paleontological finds are present near the site. To mitigate potential impacts, Mitigation Measure GEO-4 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.7-1) includes training for field personnel, monitoring at high-sensitivity areas, and special handling and reporting procedures for any fossils discovered. Collected resources will be curated at accredited repositories, and a final report will summarize the monitoring efforts. With this measure in place, potential impacts to paleontological resources are anticipated to be minimized.

#### Hazards and Hazardous Materials

The project could potentially release hazardous materials during construction, especially in areas near the BNSF railroad where contaminants such as petroleum hydrocarbons, lead, and creosote may be present. Mitigation Measures HAZ-1 and HAZ-2 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.9-1) require soil sampling and proper handling of contaminated materials to reduce the risk of accidental release. Additionally, past soil contamination from a removed underground storage tank at the Green River Golf Club is not expected to impact the project. The presence of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in electrical transformers will be managed according to proper

procedures. With Mitigation Measures HAZ-1 through HAZ-3 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.9-1) in place, potential hazards from hazardous materials are expected to be less than significant. Long-term, the project will not pose significant risks as no hazardous material-related land uses will be introduced.

The project site is located within a moderate to high fire hazard severity zone, though not in a very high-risk area. While the site is near steep slopes and prone to seasonal dry weather and winds, the project does not include new structures that would be vulnerable to wildfires. However, trail users could be exposed to wildfire risks. To mitigate this, local fire departments will develop a fire response plan with standard protocols for communication and trail access restrictions during high fire danger periods. With Mitigation Measure WF-1 (See Exhibit 4, page 4.20-1) in place, the risk of wildfire exposure is considered less than significant.

### Tribal Cultural Resources

The consultation process for the proposed project as required under AB 52 was completed and no tribal cultural resources were identified within the project area. In the event that previously unknown tribal cultural resources are encountered during the earth disturbing activities, implementation of Mitigation Measures CUL-1 through CUL6 (see Exhibit 4, page 4.5-1), would reduce impacts to less than significant levels.

With implementation of the project's mitigation measures, environmental effects to aesthetics, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, 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.