

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 21, 2024

ADVANCING COASTAL CO-STEWARDSHIP

Project No. 24-049-01
Project Manager: Sally Gee

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,500,000 to California Wildlife Foundation, fiscal sponsor for Climate Science Alliance, to undertake the Advancing Coastal Co-stewardship Project, which consists of providing relationship building, meaningful engagement training, workforce development, opportunities for collaboration, and other activities to integrate traditional ecological knowledge, tribal leadership, and tribal co-stewardship into the planning and implementation of coastal habitat restoration projects, including through subgrants, along the southern coast of California.

LOCATION: San Diego, Orange, Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara Counties.

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Climate Science Alliance Program Photos](#)

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 million five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,500,000) to California Wildlife Foundation, fiscal sponsor for Climate Science Alliance (“the grantee”), to undertake the Advancing Coastal Co-stewardship Project, which consists of providing relationship building, meaningful engagement training, workforce development, opportunities for collaboration, and other activities to integrate traditional ecological knowledge, tribal leadership, and tribal co-stewardship into the planning and implementation of coastal habitat restoration projects, including through subgrants, along the southern coast of California (“the project”).

1. 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:
 - a. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
 - b. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
 - c. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.
2. Prior to the grantee's disbursement of Conservancy funds for each project grantee in the regranting program, the grantee shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer a work program, schedule, budget, and signage plan for each project, and, if the project grantees do not own the land underlying the project site, evidence that each project grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement their respective project. In special circumstances, where the placement of signs or such agreements does not pertain to project activities, the Executive Officer may make a project-specific exemption in writing.
3. The grantee shall not disburse Conservancy funds for any project in the regranting program unless the Conservancy has authorized project funding for that specific project; authorization may be made by the Executive Officer for each project, if the Executive Officer determines that project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). If the Executive Officer determines that a project is not exempt from CEQA, the project must be approved by the Conservancy's Board.

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 Projects.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The California Wildlife Foundation is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$1,500,000 grant to the California Wildlife Foundation, fiscal sponsor for Climate Science Alliance, to undertake the Advancing Coastal Co-stewardship Project ("the project"), which consists of providing relationship building, meaningful engagement training, workforce development, opportunities for collaboration, and other activities to integrate traditional ecological knowledge, tribal leadership, and tribal co-stewardship into the planning and implementation of coastal habitat restoration projects, including through subgrants, along the southern coast of California.

Tribal communities have strong cultural and ancestral ties to the southern California coast. Management of coastal natural and cultural resources remains equally important to tribal communities as it is for those who now manage these resources. The project will convene tribal and non-tribal entities to collaborate on planning and/or implementing coastal habitat restoration projects at sites that have been supported by the Conservancy, are on the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Work Plan, or are culturally significant tribal areas. The sites may include, but are not limited to, Tijuana River Estuary, Los Cerritos Wetlands, Ormond Beach, Kendall Frost Reserve, Sweetwater Marsh, Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve and adjacent lands, and the Channel Islands (Exhibit 1). The restoration projects may be in any stage of development or implementation. The project includes providing financial support to tribes for their participation in these projects.

Climate Science Alliance will build on their existing partnerships with tribes and non-tribal entities, as well as develop new partnerships at the various sites. To facilitate partnership building and knowledge exchange between tribes and non-tribal entities involved in restoration efforts, the project will coordinate convenings, including site visits, 1-on-1 meetings, and group discussions (Exhibit 2). The convenings will be coupled with meaningful engagement training for non-tribal partners as needed. The trainings will cover a variety of topics, including, but not limited to, tribal data knowledge sovereignty, culturally appropriate education, tribal sovereignty and governance, and cultural awareness. The project will also develop workforce training for tribal participants at applicable coastal restoration project sites. The training will offer tuition-free, hands-on courses that provide live instructors and practical experience to trainees seeking to learn more about restoration and integration of traditional ecological knowledge in coastal land management. Potential training may cover a variety of topics, including but not limited to, western restoration science, wetlands monitoring techniques, and traditional gathering.

To support tribal participation in the project's convenings and long-term meaningful integration of traditional ecological knowledge and co-management into coastal restoration projects, the project will provide funding to tribes and tribal organizations to build their capacity for sustained participation in coastal restoration projects, and on a smaller scale to tribal participants that may only have capacity to attend one or a few convenings. Additionally, the project will provide funding for tribal fellows and advisors to help design training opportunities described above, facilitate community projects, or work collaboratively with the Climate Science Alliance team to advance the project's goals. Tribal fellows will serve as community connectors for at least one year and will be hosted at Climate Science Alliance and/or at partner organizations.

Currently, Climate Science Alliance, through their Reciprocity and Regranting Program, re-grants funds to organizations and individuals to build capacity and support collaboration, including tribal efforts to fill gaps in existing projects. The proposed project will provide small grants to California Native American Tribes, organizations or individuals to advance tribal priorities at existing coastal restoration projects or other important tribal coastal restoration sites along the South Coast, including, but not limited to, procurement of coastal restoration project supplies; development of tribal educational materials concerning natural and cultural resources; and research, professional development, and organization of tribal community

events on and in support of coastal habitat restoration. The small grants will help integrate tribal knowledge, participation, and leadership in the planning and implementation of coastal habitat restoration projects. Grants will be distributed through a call for proposals, and reviewed and selected by a review team established by Climate Science Alliance, including members of their Tribal Working Group.

If the proposed project is approved, the Conservancy will review and decide whether to approve the grants proposed under the Reciprocity and Regranting Program. Grants for CEQA exempt projects may be approved by the Executive Officer, and grants for projects that are not CEQA exempt must be approved by the Conservancy's Board.

Site Description:

Climate Science Alliance has established relationships with partners along the southern California coast who own, manage, and/or oversee coastal areas. They have the buy-in and interest of these partners to host convenings and trainings in these sites and to explore options for access and involvement in restoration and stewardship of these lands. These partners include, but are not limited to, entities within the US. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California State Parks, Department of Defense, UC reserves, and local land trusts organizations across southern California. Locations may include (but are not limited to) Tijuana River Estuary, Kendall Frost Reserve, Sweetwater Marsh, Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve and adjacent lands, Los Cerritos Wetlands, Ormond Beach, and the Channel Islands.

Project sites for the Reciprocity and Regranting Program have not yet been identified but may include the above project sites. The Conservancy will review and decide whether to approve each proposed project. The Executive Officer will decide whether to approve CEQA exempt projects, the Conservancy's Board will decide whether to approve non-CEQA exempt projects, and Conservancy staff will review for compliance with the purposes and requirements of the funding source (see Project Financing section below).

Grant Applicant Qualifications:

Climate Science Alliance was formed in 2015 with the mission to safeguard natural and human communities in the face of a changing climate. Climate Science Alliance achieves this through leading activities and creating partnerships that increase awareness of climate change impacts, promote solutions, and facilitate action. The Climate Science Alliance staff are representative of the communities they work with. They have a proven track record of working hand-in-hand with community partners to advance community led efforts and work diligently to reduce barriers to involvement by providing stipends, travel support, childcare resources, language translation and more, in order to meet the unique needs individuals might be facing.

Climate Science Alliance established the Tribal Working Group in 2017 to facilitate collaboration among tribes and to identify ways to safeguard their lands and cultures from the threat of climate change. Since then, the group has grown to include 145 members from over twenty tribal nations. Embedded within the Tribal Working Group is the Stewardship Pathways Program, which invites participation from tribal communities who are interested in creating or expanding a career focused on climate-informed land stewardship. The Stewardship Pathways

Program emphasizes the integration of climate and Indigenous science. The intent of the program is to build capacity, support economic and workforce development, and advance co-stewardship of all ancestral lands through various training pathways. This includes a changing portfolio of trainings requested by partners and supported by the Climate Science Alliance team.

Climate Science Alliance has been awarded, and managed, a variety of grants to implement innovative programming, such as their Reciprocity and Regranting Program, Stewardship Pathways Workforce Development, and Tribal Working Group structure. Example grants include: Collaborative of Native Nations for Climate Transformation and Stewardship, University of California Office of the President, 2023 (Total award: \$7 million); Indigenous Coastal Initiative, Builders Initiative, 2023 (Total award \$450,000); and Resilient Restoration: Advancing Ecological, Cultural, and Community Resilience with Tribal Nations in Southern California, Strategic Growth Council, 2020 (Total award: \$1 million).

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 project will accelerate tribal involvement in restoration projects along the southern California coast, by increasing the capacity of tribes to participate and building relationships between tribes and non-tribal partners at active restoration project sites. Incorporating indigenous science into projects will further enhance coastal resources at each proposed project site. The project would also provide training for workforce development in careers for coastal restoration and stewardship for tribal community members.

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.

Tribal presence and leadership in coastal resilience planning and restoration projects remains underrepresented. While state, federal, and local coastal restoration project leads currently acknowledge the need for inclusion of tribal input and engagement, they are limited in the knowledge needed to facilitate meaningful engagement. Additionally, tribal partners are often burdened by multiple requests and with educating non-tribal partners on culturally sensitive topics. To address these issues, Climate Science Alliance will lean on their years of relationship and trust building with tribes to bring tribes into coastal restoration projects. That includes convening tribal partners and non-tribal partners who are planning or conducting coastal restoration projects and providing opportunities for tribal peoples to reconnect with those coastal sites. This project also provides funding to increase the capacity of tribes and tribal

organizations to participate in the development of coastal restoration and management actions. This project will directly invest in tribes by developing workforce trainings to build hands-on skills in coastal land management and by providing small grants to support tribal priorities in coastal projects.

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

During the project, Climate Science Alliance will convene and support partners from tribal and non-tribal communities and organizations to provide opportunities for input and leadership on coastal restoration projects, the Stewardship Pathways Program, and the Reciprocity and Regranting Program. This will increase the capacity of tribes and tribally led organizations to participate in coastal restoration projects beyond the timeline of this project. Additionally, this project will build relationships between tribes and coastal land managers/restoration practitioners to facilitate increased integration of tribal stewardship practices into projects now and in the future. After the project, Climate Science Alliance will continue to convene and create space for partners to network, share knowledge, and build relationships to carry into the future.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The convenings and training provide opportunities to support tribal decision-making for coastal resilience and climate adaptation actions that build ecological and community resilience now and into the future. It provides space for community-led conservation and leadership for historically excluded tribal communities that fosters knowledge exchange by engaging community members with non-tribal entities that promotes understanding of tribal stewardship and regional climate impacts and solutions. Direct investments will be made to tribal-serving and tribal led organizations and individuals to increase their capacity and support their involvement in advancing coastal co-stewardship.

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

The Climate Science Alliance team will host meaningful engagement trainings to better support non-tribal collaborators to accelerate engagement efforts with community partners. These trainings are in high demand as there is an immediate need to help accelerate relationship building and cultural competencies of non-tribal entities. Meaningful engagement trainings can help inform practitioners on how to engage with community partners who have largely been excluded from management actions and decision making.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$1,500,000
Project Total	\$1,500,000

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2023/24 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy to address "urgent sea-level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies" (The Budget Act of 2023, Chapter 38, Statutes of 2023 (AB 102)). The coastal resilience funds are available as described 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, including coastal resilience projects on the coast and coastal wetlands projects and projects that protect and restore coastal habitat. The project is consistent with this funding source because it will provide the relationship building, training, skills development, tribal capacity building, and opportunities for collaboration that are necessary to integrate tribal land management and tribal knowledge into coastal resilience, coastal wetland restoration, and coastal habitat restoration projects at various sites in the southern California coast.

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 project is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (PRC), specifically with Chapter 6, Section 31251 under which the Conservancy may award grants to nonprofit organizations for the purpose of enhancement of coastal resources that have suffered loss of natural and scenic values due to indiscriminate dredging or filling, improper location of improvements, natural or human-induced events, or incompatible land uses. Grants may be used for corrective measures that will enhance the natural and scenic character of the area. The project will provide the relationship building, training, skills development, tribal capacity building, and opportunities for collaboration that are necessary to integrate tribal land management and tribal knowledge into the planning and implementation of corrective measures that will restore coastal wetlands and coastal habitats that have been degraded due to fill, improper location of improvements, and other human activities.

Section 31252 provides that all areas proposed for coastal resource enhancement must be identified in a certified local coastal plan or program as requiring public action to resolve existing or potential resource protection problems or must be so identified in other local plans which the California Coastal Commission determines to be consistent with the policies and objectives of Division 20. The proposed will focus on coastal restoration at sites that have been identified as needing enhancement or restoration by the Conservancy, the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project Work Plan, or tribes.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.2, Return Power to Tribes**, the proposed project will increase capacity for California Native American Tribes to be involved in coastal restoration projects.

Consistent with **Goal 1.4, Incorporate Workforce Development in Our Projects**, the proposed project will support coastal restoration career development training for tribal participants.

Consistent with **Goal 4.1, Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects**, the proposed project will increase coastal resiliency by incorporating tribal land management practices and stewardship with climate science in climate adaptation projects.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

Convening, Collaborating, and Training

The project consists of relationship building, training, workforce development, convening people to collaborate on projects, and other activities that will not have a significant effect on the environment such that the project is subject to the common sense exemption from CEQA at CCR Title 14, Section 15061(b)(3). The goal of the project is to integrate traditional ecological knowledge and management in coastal restoration projects, and those projects will be subject to CEQA. Further, to the extent the project involves collaborating on planning for future coastal restoration projects, such planning is statutorily exempt from CEQA at CCR title 14, Section 15262, which exempts planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted, or funded.

Regranting

The project proposes to authorize grant funds to California Wildlife Foundation for future grants by Climate Science Alliance, under their Reciprocity and Granting Program, to California Native American Tribes, organizations, and individuals for projects that will advance tribal co-stewardship. As described above, Climate Science Alliance will identify projects for potential funding, and the Conservancy will carry out a CEQA review before authorizing funding of any proposed projects and ensure compliance with the funding source. In light of this process, at the time of this authorization the Conservancy does not know which projects will be recommended for funding. Since there is not sufficient information to provide meaningful environmental review of proposed projects, no projects, under the Reciprocity and Granting Program, are authorized for funding. Further, the proposed authorization does not have a significant adverse effect or foreclose alternatives or mitigation measures for any project. Therefore, considering the balancing of competing factors described in the CEQA Guidelines, Section 15004(b) of Title 14 of the CCR, it is appropriate to undertake CEQA compliance at the time projects are selected rather than at the time of this authorization. All projects proposed for funding by Climate Science Alliance, pursuant to this grant require Conservancy review; the Conservancy will comply with CEQA prior to deciding whether to authorize use of the grant funds for any specific project.