

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
February 13, 2025

**SANTA ANA RIVER:  
RIVER PARK**

Project No. 24-060-01  
Project Manager: Rodrigo Garcia

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$2,000,000 to the City of Anaheim to undertake the Santa Ana River: River Park project, consisting of the construction of a 3.3-acre nature park to restore natural habitat and provide recreational opportunities along the Santa Ana River in Orange County.

**LOCATION:** City of Anaheim, Orange County

---

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
- Exhibit 4: [Site Development Plan](#)

---

**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 two million dollars (\$2,000,000) to the City of Anaheim (“the grantee”) to construct the ‘River Park,’ a 3.3-acre nature park to restore natural habitat and provide recreational opportunities along the Santa Ana River in the City of Anaheim, Orange 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.
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.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

---

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a grant of up to \$2,000,000 to the City of Anaheim to construct the 'River Park,' a 3.3-acre nature park to restore natural habitat and provide recreational opportunities along the Santa Ana River in the City of Anaheim (the "City"), Orange County. Located between the Santa Ana River Trail and Angel Stadium, the project will restore natural habitat for wildlife, provide amenities for the local community, and establish a convenient connection between local neighborhoods and the Santa Ana River and Santa Ana River Trail.

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 Santa Ana River 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.

River Park will be the City's 68<sup>th</sup> park, and the first phase and gateway of the larger OC River Walk project. The OC River Walk is a multi-benefit project to transform the Santa Ana River corridor in Anaheim and the River Park will provide a natural entrance to the River Walk. The project site currently consists of a vacant, fenced-off area along the Santa Ana River Trail. It lies in the Platinum Triangle District of Anaheim, a rapidly growing area with zero park acres per 1,000 people in half a mile. The nearest park is over half a mile away from the project site in a neighboring city and across a major freeway. The project will address critical needs for green space and recreation in a densely developed urban environment.

The City has completed final designs and engineering for River Park, including an extensive community engagement process. River Park will include features such as shaded seating areas,

walking trails, fitness equipment, a small amphitheater, nature-themed play spaces, safety lighting, drinking fountains, bike racks, and educational installations like interpretive signage and art. Sustainability features include bioswales, pervious walking trails to reduce runoff, and native vegetation to reduce greenhouse gases. The project will preserve the existing 64 mature trees on site and will plant approximately 90 native plants, shrubs, and trees. The City will partner with the Orange County Conservation Corps (Corps) to create job training opportunities. Corps members will assist in site preparation, landscaping, and other tasks.

River Park will also serve as a cultural and educational hub. A small outdoor amphitheater will be constructed to host programming led by local California Native American Tribal leaders, naturalists, and others. Art and interpretive installations, selected in partnership with Tongva Tribal leaders, will educate visitors about the Santa Ana River's ecological, historical, and cultural importance.

**Site Description:** The project site is a 3.3-acre vacant parcel between the Santa Ana River and the Angel Stadium in the City of Anaheim that is currently fenced off from the public. The park will be the first completed phase of the OC River Walk project and will serve as the official southern gateway for the entire project.

The site has 64 mature and healthy trees, including Coast Live Oaks and California Sycamore, that will be preserved as part of the project. The Santa Ana River is known to be home to two endangered bird species suffering from habitat loss, the Least Bell's Vire and the Southwestern Flycatcher.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The City has extensive experience completing construction projects of similar size and scope. The Parks Division, Capital Projects Section, of the Community Services Department, is responsible for park master planning, facility design, capital projects development, construction management, and long-range park policy planning, and will oversee this construction effort. The City has successfully managed several grants for parks projects including a grant from the Coastal Conservancy for the OC River Walk planning project.

#### **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 will be informed by previous Conservancy investments including a planning grant to the City of Anaheim for the OC River Walk.

The proposed project will ensure the Santa Ana River continues to serve as a recreational destination consistent with the goals of the 2018 *Santa Ana River Parkway and Open Space Plan* prepared by the Conservancy:

- Goal 2 (Habitat and Wildlife): Restore and enhance habitat where appropriate opportunities exist to create high value habitat that provides multiple benefits.
- Goal 3 (Education, Recreation, and Access): Provide a range of river-related opportunities for people to be active outdoors.
- Goal 6 (Education, Recreation, and Access): Prioritize increased open space access for park-deficient and disadvantaged communities along the river corridor.
- Goal 7 (Education, Recreation, and Access): Provide safe access to the river in appropriate locations.

**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.**

The design of River Park is the result of collaborative and comprehensive input from residents and stakeholders, including Tongva Tribal leaders, and other representatives of local California Native American Tribes. The City worked with Tongva Tribal leaders to select interpretive opportunities at the park, and culturally significant landscaping. The City will continue to work with Tongva Tribal leaders through the construction of the park for the development and installation of these interpretive exhibits.

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

The proposed project incorporates multiple features to ensure resiliency to climate change impacts and long-term sustainability over the project's lifespan. Approximately 90 drought-tolerant, California native plants, shrubs and trees will be planted. Other nature-based infrastructure improvements will include bioswales, pervious walking trails, and tree watering basins designed to capture, utilize and infiltrate stormwater.

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

The proposed project will provide multiple benefits by preserving green space for recreational use, and habitat conservation through the installation of drought-tolerant, native plants, shrubs, and trees. In addition, the City will partner with the Orange County Conservation Corps (Corps) to create job training opportunities through the implementation of the project. The Corps' mission is to serve young, at-risk adults through training, employment, and educational programs that build self-sufficiency and benefit the community through conservation-driven projects.

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

The City made a concerted effort to involve multiple stakeholders and the surrounding community in the design of River Park. Engagement began before preliminary designs were prepared and continued through final design. Planning involved seven stakeholder and public workshops, surveys, and social media campaigns to solicit community input, develop park

design, and select park amenities. The result is a design that reflects the needs and desires of interested stakeholders and local community members. The City will continue to engage the community throughout the construction of the project, providing updates on the City’s webpage, and welcoming them to the ribbon-cutting event once completed.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$2,000,000</b>
Land and Water Conservation Fund (LCWF) Grant	\$1,900,000
City of Anaheim	\$750,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$4,650,000</b>

The anticipated sources of Conservancy funding for this project will come from two sources: \$34,203 is from a FY 2022/2023 appropriation to the Conservancy from the General Fund for the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program. These funds are available for projects consistent with the purposes of the Santa Ana River Program. The remaining \$1,965,797 is from a FY 2022/2023 appropriation 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.

Projects utilizing funds granted under Chapter 7 of Proposition 68 must serve a disadvantaged community or the grantee must provide a 20% match. (PRC section 80100(b)). Consistent with this section, the park is located within half a mile of disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities including parts of Orange, Santa Ana, and Anaheim, and the proposed project will offer free recreational opportunities to local residents and visitors.

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 project is consistent with Chapter 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31170 to 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 goals of the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program, including recreation opportunities, open space, trails, protection and maintenance of the quality of the

waters in the Santa Ana River for all beneficial uses. (Section 31173(a)). The proposed project will build a park along a portion of the Santa Ana River for purposes of public access and recreation.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.1.1 Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the project will improve recreational conditions within a distance of 0.5 miles from a disadvantaged community.

Consistent with **Goal 1.4.1 Incorporate Workforce Development in Our Projects**, the project will be partially implemented by local Conservation Corps.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5.2 Recreation Facilities & Amenities**, the proposed project will build a park along the Santa Ana River to enhance recreational opportunities.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed project is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Section 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land), which exempts projects which consist of minor alterations to land which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees. Consistent with this section, this project involves only minor alterations to the existing land such as planting trees and installing walking paths.

The proposed project is also exempt from CEQA review pursuant to Section 15303 (New Construction of Small Structures), which exempts projects that will install limited numbers of small structures or facilities. Consistent with this section, the proposed project will install small equipment and structures, including benches, water fountains, art, and a small amphitheater.

The proposed project is also exempt from CEQA review pursuant to Section 15333 (Small Habitat Restoration Projects), which exempts projects under five acres that will restore, enhance, or protect habitat. Exempt projects may not cause significant adverse impacts to threatened species, disturb hazardous materials, or result in significant impacts when viewed cumulatively with other projects. Consistent with this section, the proposed project is under five acres and will restore natural habitat by planting native trees and plants. No significant impacts or disturbances to hazardous materials are anticipated.

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