

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

February 19, 2026

LOMA ALTA SLOUGH WETLAND ENHANCEMENT PROJECT: AUGMENTATION

Project No. 17-037-02

Project Manager: Kellan Warner

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse an additional \$1,500,000 to the City of Oceanside to augment a grant previously authorized by the Conservancy on June 6, 2024 in the amount of \$1,643,344, for a total authorized amount of \$3,143,344, to undertake the Loma Alta Slough Wetland Enhancement Project, consisting of the enhancement of 5.8 acres of coastal wetlands in the City of Oceanside in San Diego County.

LOCATION: Loma Alta Slough, City of Oceanside, San Diego County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [June 6, 2024 Staff Recommendation](#)

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 disbursement of an additional one million five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,500,000) to the City of Oceanside (the “grantee”) to augment a grant previously authorized by the Conservancy on June 6, 2024 in the amount of \$1,643,344, for a total authorized amount of \$3,143,344, to undertake the Loma Alta Slough Wetland Enhancement Project (the “project”), consisting of the enhancement of 5.8 acres of coastal wetlands in the City of Oceanside in San Diego County, subject to the conditions of the June 6, 2024 authorization and the following condition:

1. The grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) a plan for signage and acknowledgement of Conservancy funding and Proposition 68 as the source of that funding.

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 remains consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize disbursement of an additional \$1,500,000 to the City of Oceanside (City) to augment a grant previously authorized by the Conservancy on June 6, 2024 in the amount of \$1,643,344 (Exhibit 2), for a total authorized amount of \$3,143,344, to undertake the Loma Alta Slough Wetland Enhancement Project (the project). The project consists of the enhancement of 5.8 acres of coastal wetlands in the City in San Diego County (Exhibit 1). The project will implement the Loma Alta Slough Wetlands Enhancement Plan, which was prepared using a Conservancy grant authorized on January 18, 2018.

To date, the City has completed project design, planning, environmental documentation, and permitting with the support of multiple State and Federal grant awards. The current source of construction funds are from three grants awarded to the City through the Conservancy, Ocean Protection Council (\$1,011,391), and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (\$500,000). However, additional funds are needed due to increased construction costs. The City went to bid on March 3, 2025 to award a public works agreement for project construction. The engineer's estimate for project construction at this time was \$2,100,000. On March 31, 2025, the City received two bids in the amounts of \$4,500,000 and \$4,700,000. After review, City staff recommended to City Council to reject all bids for the project and authorize readvertising the project due to the project bids exceeding the engineer's estimate. Since that time, City staff has conducted contractor interviews and incorporated their feedback into a revised bid package and engineer's estimate, which is \$4,900,000. The increase in cost for construction was driven by high risk due to site specific conditions, such as access, grading, dewatering, and plant establishment. The City is confident that by rejecting all bids, conducting interviews with the contractors, addressing concerns where applicable, reviewing the engineer's estimate, and re-advertising the project, the City will receive more accurate bids and will ultimately be able to construct the project. There are no changes in the scope of the project activities.

The additional \$1,500,000 from the Conservancy will complement the secured State and Federal funding. With all funding secured, the City plans to complete construction in summer

2026. Construction will involve floodplain grading over nearly six acres, removal of 8,000 cubic yards of infill to restore wetlands, and construction of a new public access nature trail to connect the surrounding community with wildlife viewing and interpretive features.

Site Description:

The City of Oceanside is located in Northern San Diego County and has multiple communities classified as a disadvantaged community or a severely disadvantaged community. Buccaneer Beach, at the mouth of Loma Alta Slough (LAS), is a popular destination that draws visitors due to its available parking and adjacent park. LAS is a small, intermittently open estuary with a watershed of six square miles. LAS was once a 44-acre wetland, but has now dwindled to less than 10 acres. Watershed urbanization, sedimentation, channel engineering, poor water quality, and wetland fill have degraded the health of LAS, leading to its classification as an impaired water body on California's Clean Water Act 303(d) list. The reduction and constriction of the wetland has also resulted in upstream and wetland flooding impacts and has left the adjacent public park and surrounding residential and commercial communities more susceptible to climate change and sea level rise.

The proposed project will restore and enhance 5.8 acres of coastal wetlands, transitional zones, and upland coastal sage scrub at the LAS. The project area consists of the north and south banks of the LAS and is comprised of five contiguous parcels of undeveloped land owned and managed by the City, undeveloped areas of the City's La Salina Wastewater Treatment Plant, and the recreational path along the southern edge of the Slough (Exhibit 1). The banks of the LAS currently consists primarily of riprap and scattered vegetation including non-native grasses, ornamental plants, and salt marsh plants.

Grant Applicant Qualifications:

Over the last 15 years, the City has laid the groundwork for the project by acquiring approximately 3 acres of vacant parcels along the creek edge at the project site with the goal of expanding the existing wetland to restore its historical extent and function. Multiple funding partners, including the Conservancy, Ocean Protection Council, and the National Fish and Wildlife Federation, have helped the City develop the project to a 100 percent construction-ready state. The City's ability to secure necessary funds and successfully manage grants from state and federal agencies for project planning, permitting, and implementation underscores its ability and commitment to execute this important project.

The City acknowledges its responsibility for leading the long-term management of the site, including maintenance and monitoring. The City will be responsible for overseeing the restoration area and trail system's ongoing management and fulfilling monitoring requirements to comply with resource agency permits.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The recommended authorization remains consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria last updated on September 23, 2021, as described in the June 6, 2024 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy (<i>this authorization</i>)	\$1,500,000
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (<i>via a grant to the Conservancy</i>)	\$979,744
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	\$500,000
Ocean Protection Council	\$1,011,391
Coastal Conservancy (<i>previous authorization in June 2024</i>)	<u>\$663,600</u>
Project Total	\$4,654,735

The anticipated sources of Conservancy funds for this authorization are fiscal years 2020/21 and 2023/24 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 9 of Proposition 68 allows funds for "protection of beaches, bays, wetlands, and coastal watershed resources" in accordance with Division 21 (PRC, Section 80120(c)), and the term "protection" includes restoration (PRC, Section 80002(l)). The project is consistent with Chapter 9 because it will enhance and restore 5.8 acres of coastal wetlands, transitional zones, and upland coastal sage scrub at the Loma Alta Slough for natural resource and wildlife protection with compatible public access. The project is consistent with the funding guidelines for expenditure of Proposition 68 adopted by the Conservancy on December 6, 2018 as described in various sections of the staff recommendation.

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 recommended authorization remains consistent with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation, as described in the June 6, 2024 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

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

The recommended authorization remains consistent with the Conservancy's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, as described in the June 6, 2024 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project remains consistent with the Conservancy's June 6, 2024, findings and authorization with respect to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (See Exhibit 2). The project elements have not changed since the June 6, 2024 authorization, and there have been no changed circumstances or new information that triggers the requirement for additional documentation under CEQA. Therefore, no further review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act is required.