COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
February 19, 2026

**SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WETLANDS RECOVERY PROJECT COMMUNITY WETLAND RESTORATION GRANT PROGRAM – 2025-2026**

Project Nos. 25-047-01, 25-047-02, 25-047-03, 25-047-04, 25-047-05
Project Manager: Kellan Warner

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to $385,442 to five non-profit organizations for five community-based dune, wetland, and stream restoration projects on approximately 41 acres in Ventura, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties.

**LOCATION:** Various locations in Ventura, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties

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*EXHIBITS*

Exhibit 1: Project Location Map

Exhibit 2: Project Letters

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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 three hundred eighty-five thousand four hundred forty-two dollars ($385,442) to five non-profit organizations for five community-based dune, wetland, and stream restoration projects (the "projects") on approximately 41 acres in Ventura, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties. The Executive Officer of the Coastal Conservancy may authorize modifications to one or more of the five projects if the modified projects continue to promote the goals of the Community Wetland Restoration Grant Program. The five projects are as follows:

- Hueneme Beach Park Community Dune Restoration (The Surfrider Foundation): Eighty thousand dollars ($80,000) to restore 2.5 acres of degraded dune habitat through volunteer events in Ventura County.
- Willow Wonders: Cultivating Community Stewardship at Gardena Wetlands (South Bay Parkland Conservancy): Ninety thousand five hundred dollars ($90,500) to restore 1 acre

of wetlands and adjacent upland habitat through community-based volunteer work in Los Angeles County.

- Ocean Connectors: San Diego Bay Habitat Restoration and Education Program (The Ocean Foundation): One hundred thousand dollars ($100,000) to enhance or restore 7.5 acres of wetland habitat through educational field trips and community clean-up events in San Diego County.
- 32nd Street Canyon Task Force: Swapping Fire Fuel for Coastal Canyon Habitat (San Diego Coastkeeper): Forty thousand two hundred dollars ($40,200) to restore or enhance four acres of riparian habitat through volunteer work and to provide wetland education and access through local school engagement in the 32nd Street Canyon in San Diego County.
- Chollas Creek Community Watershed Connection Program: Swan Canyon & Creek (San Diego Canyonlands): Seventy-four thousand seven hundred forty-two dollars ($74,742) to restore or enhance 25.56 acres of wetland and riparian habitat and to expand equitable access to nature and cultural connection for Kumeyaay and surrounding communities in San Diego County.

Surfrider Foundation, South Bay Parkland Conservancy, The Ocean Foundation, San Diego Coastkeeper, and San Diego Canyonlands are each a "grantee." Prior to commencement of each project, the grantee for the specific project 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.
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.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Executive Officer shall not disburse funds from the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 ("Proposition 4"), Public Resources Code Sections 90000-95015, unless legislation is enacted that exempts program guidelines and selection criteria for the disbursement of funds from Proposition 4 from the requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act at Government Code sections 11340-11361.

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 projects are consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The five proposed grantees are nonprofit organizations organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize grants totaling $385,442 to five non-profit organizations for five community-based dune, wetland, and stream restoration projects (the "projects") on approximately 41 acres in Ventura, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties (See Exhibit 1 for project location map). These projects were selected through the 2025 Community Wetland Restoration Grant Program (CWRGP) of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (WRP). The CWRGP is a Conservancy program that provides funding annually for community-based wetland and riparian enhancement and restoration projects in coastal wetlands and watersheds in the Southern and Central California regions. The purposes of the CWRGP are to further the wetland recovery goals for Southern California as set forth in the WRP Regional Strategy (2018); build local capacity to plan and implement wetland restoration projects; promote community involvement in wetland restoration activities; and foster education about wetland ecosystems. Projects funded through the CWRGP must include robust educational opportunities and community involvement.

Since 2001, the Conservancy and other WRP members have funded over 170 CWRGP projects in Southern and Central California, distributing over four million dollars for community-based project implementation. CWRGP prioritizes projects that serve community-based organizations rooted in underserved and/or frontline communities. To that end, the Conservancy solicits CWRGP proposals from nonprofit organizations, public and nonprofit universities, tribes, cities, counties, and other public agencies. Proposals are reviewed by a committee that includes staff from the Conservancy and other federal and state agencies that participate in the WRP. Projects funded through the CWRGP are designed to be completed in two to three years.

The 2025 CWRGP round received 13 proposals, and project selection was completed in October 2025. The five projects selected to be funded this year are as follows:

**Ventura County**

**The Surfrider Foundation**

**Hueneme Beach Park Community Dune Restoration** **$80,000**

The Hueneme Beach Park Community Dune Restoration project will restore 2.5 acres of coastal dune habitat at Hueneme Beach Park. The project is community led and utilizes nature-based methods that will enhance coastal resilience of the area and increase biodiversity. The project includes 14 volunteer stewardship events that bring community together to remove invasive plants, install sand and symbolic fencing, and plant native plant species.

The dune system at Hueneme Beach Park is degraded due to invasive species such as iceplant and Bermuda grass, as well as trampling from unmanaged public access. These pressures have left areas of open sand without stable dune forms, thereby reducing habitat quality for native species, and weakening the shoreline's natural defenses. Without restoration, invasive species will continue to spread, and uncontrolled use will further degrade the dunes, limiting their ability to buffer against erosion, flooding, and storm surges. Because the site lies directly adjacent to the Ormond Beach Wetlands Restoration Project, this effort also creates an opportunity to connect two critical ecosystems, allowing dunes and wetlands to work together to improve resilience.

The project will implement hands on education on how improved and healthy dune systems protect the surrounding coastal communities and strengthen habitat for various species. The restoration methods include: 1) controlling invasive plants; 2) planting native plant species; 3) installing sand fencing to maximize sand capture and retention; 4) installing symbolic post and rope fencing paired with interpretive signage to guide visitors on designated paths that will aid in reducing trampling of the native vegetation within the restoration zones; and 5) adaptive management informed by annual vegetation and topography monitoring. The project offers the surrounding community the opportunity to participate in regular stewardship events, fostering a sense of local ownership and ensuring that the restoration and care of the shoreline are shared responsibilities.

**Site Description:** The Hueneme Beach Park is a community public park owned and managed by the City of Port Hueneme. The project site consists of sparsely vegetated, degraded dunes, dominated by invasive ice plant and Bermuda grass. Large areas of flat, unvegetated sand sheets occur seaward of the dunes, and unmanaged public access has further limited the ability of native vegetation to establish. The site is a high-use recreation zone and has several informal access paths, making the integration of ecological restoration with managed public access a key objective. Restoration will address the current dominance of invasives, expand native foredune vegetation, and build dune topography, while symbolic fencing and wayfinding will concentrate foot traffic into defined trails to reduce trampling and provide safe, sustainable recreational access. The site is adjacent to the Ormond Beach Wetland Complex and Tsumas Creek, which is a strategic position to strengthen coastal resilience through a connected dune–wetland system.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** Surfrider Foundation is a large organization that has the expertise and organizational capacity to manage state grant requirements and deliver the Hueneme Beach Park Dune Restoration project. The project will utilize Surfrider's climate action program team to coordinate the project and to ensure the project will benefit from previous lessons learned at other coastal resilience sites. Coastal Restoration Consultants will be contracted to conduct annual assessments and provide technical guidance as needed. Both Surfrider Foundation and Coastal Restoration Consultants have worked together previously and have shown successful implementation of nature-based shoreline adaptation, which demonstrates their capacity to implement other similar projects. The project will also strengthen the ability of the Ventura Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation to plan and implement wetland associated restoration by expanding partnerships with the City of Hueneme, tribal partners, schools, and conservation groups.

**Los Angeles County**

**South Bay Parkland Conservancy**

**Willow Wonders: Cultivating Community Stewardship at Gardena Wetlands $90,500**

The Willow Wonders: Cultivating Community Stewardship at Gardena Wetlands project will: (1) restore a portion of vernal wetlands and adjacent upland habitat through community-based volunteer work by removing non-native invasive species and planting native species; (2) provide wetland-focused educational and hands-on experiences for community members; and (3) create an intern training program for planning and implementing community-based wetland restoration projects.

The Gardena Willows Wetlands Preserve (GWWP) is a rare, natural-bottomed vernal wetland that functions as a critical stormwater catchment basin. The wetlands are dominated by invasive species and polluted by storm drain runoff. The resulting degraded wetland habitat has compromised ecosystem services, functionality as a natural water purification system, and ability to provide resources for a diversity of native wildlife. Improving the functionality of the GWWP will benefit local residential wildlife, provide a rest stop for migratory birds, increase biodiversity, enhance water quality, and strengthen the human-nature connection for the South Bay region.

This project will result in an enhancement of 0.8 acres of lowland vernal habitat and 0.2 acres of adjacent upland habitat. Restoration efforts will involve professional and volunteer efforts to remove invasive plants. Native plant installation will be conducted by students, community volunteers, and partner nonprofit volunteers. A critical part of restoration success is the education, activation, and engagement of the local community. This project will engage local students and community members through hands-on stewardship days, educational workshops on a wide range of topics including plants, biodiversity, and Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and by developing a hands-on internship for planning and implementing community-based wetland restoration projects.

**Site Description:** The 13.6-acre Gardena Willows Wetland Preserve (GWWP) is owned and maintained by the City of Gardena. The one-acre project site is made up of 0.8 acres of wetland habitat and 0.2 acres of wetland-adjacent habitat. The GWWP is a rare, natural-bottomed vernal wetland that functions as a critical stormwater catchment basin. The GWWP is the last intact remnant of the former Dominguez Slough, a vernal marsh and riparian forest that once covered as much as 400 acres. The vegetative cover is dominated by invasive plant species, preventing native plant species specially adapted to vernal wetlands from establishing and diminishing ecosystem functionality and benefits. As a result, poor water quality, choked riparian areas, lack of food and water resources for wildlife, low biodiversity, and mosquito issues have emerged. The site is in a residential and industrial area, near major roads that result in large quantities of trash and fecal material containing bacteria and other pollutants draining into the GWWP.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The South Bay Park Lands Conservancy (SBPC) has led ongoing habitat restoration activities across five projects within multiple cities since 2017 and has a proven record of leading various types of habitat restoration paired with educational volunteer

opportunities. They have successfully restored and maintained fifteen acres of habitat like the Gardena Willows Wetland Preserve Project. SBPC has experience managing a five-year grant from the US Fish Wildlife Service to restore seven acres of native coastal dune bluff habitat in Redondo Beach. The Willows Wonders Project will enable the SBPC to build capacity in natural wetland specific habitat through restoration work that will enhance wildlife connectivity and increase biodiversity throughout the South Bay of Los Angeles.

**San Diego County**

**The Ocean Foundation**

**Ocean Connectors: San Diego Bay Habitat Restoration and Education Program $100,000**

The Ocean Connectors: San Diego Bay Habitat Restoration and Education Program will conduct (1) hands-on restoration and enhancement of 7.5 acres of upland, wetland, and river corridor habitat within the Sweetwater River Watershed and Lower Otay River Watershed; and (2) a combination of educational school programs and community outreach events.

Ocean Connectors have identified urban stream and wetland areas that are heavily impacted by litter, invasive species, and inadequate public access and awareness. Sweetwater River and San Diego Bay have, within a 5-mile radius, approximately 70 Disadvantaged Communities and 68 Severely Disadvantaged Communities (cited from the California Department of Water Resources Mapping Tool). The project will engage the local community and local public school students to address the identified areas through hands-on restoration events. The restoration events will include revegetation with native plants, hand removal of invasive plants, and litter cleanup activities. Some restoration activities will be conducted via kayak to allow access to intertidal zones with heavy load rates that are inaccessible by foot.

The project will also conduct educational programing for students from ten public elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school in National City. All the schools are categorized as Title I and lack any other source of consistent environmental education programming outside of Ocean Connectors. The project will provide students with multiyear environmental education programs focusing on migratory species, conservation, and habitat restoration.

Over the course of two years, Ocean Connectors will run a total of 20 restoration events and 40 kayak cleanup events.

**Site Description:** The project sites include 3 acres at the Sweetwater Marsh in the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge (managed by US Fish and Wildlife), 0.75 acres at the South San Diego Bay Unit of San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge (managed by US Fish and Wildlife), and 3.75 acres in the Sweetwater Channel adjacent to Pepper Park, Bayside and Bayfront Parks (managed by the Port of San Diego). The project sites were selected for: proximity to partner elementary and high schools in National City; location within environmental justice neighborhoods of San Diego County; impaired water quality; habitat vulnerabilities; environmental challenges; the need for increased community awareness, education, and access; a strong need for climate change resilience and adaptation; and the existing

involvement of close organizational partners such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Port of San Diego.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** Ocean Connectors, with fiscal sponsor The Ocean Foundation, is a leader in providing continuous environmental education programs that achieve lasting impacts for low-income children and their families. Its relationship with the target community is well-established through 18 years working in underserved areas of San Diego County with the past decade specifically targeting schools in National City. Ocean Connectors breaks down barriers by providing continuous, multiyear coastal education programs and field trips for 100% of the schools in National City to cultivate a future generation of passionate, globally-aware, and empowered residents who take active steps to enjoy and protect ocean health. This project serves as an extension to a very successful 3-year restoration project spearheaded by Ocean Connectors and funded by the California State Water Resources Control Board. Ocean Connectors has successfully completed two other CWRGP projects awarded in 2012, 2017, and has received and completed many other projects funded by the State Coastal Conservancy.

**San Diego Coastkeeper**

**32nd Street Canyon Task Force: Swapping Fire Fuel for Coastal Canyon Habitat $40,200**

The 32nd Street Canyon Task Force: Swapping Fire Fuel for Coastal Canyon Habitat project will: (1) restore or enhance 4 acres of riparian habitat in the 32nd Street Canyon; (2) engage teachers and students from the adjacent public school in wetland education and hands-on restoration activities; and (3) support Mesa Community College interns mapping the species distribution of native and non-native species in the 32nd Street Canyon.

An epidemic of habitat-type conversion is overtaking San Diego's coastal canyons, with ill effect on wetland health and function. Weedy flash fuels, acacia, and resprouting eucalyptus crowd out native plants, raising fire risk. One such location is the 32nd Street Canyon ("the canyon"). The project site shares a boundary with a public school, and the area has no parkland, making the canyon a valuable green space for the local community.

The project will remove non-native species and install native species, with the work carried out by volunteers and overseen by a restoration ecologist. The adjacent public school will participate through teacher training on incorporating wetland ecosystem and watershed topics into their curricula, on-campus education, and field trips to the restoration site, engaging both students and teachers in wetland resilience efforts. This project will also include parent-student education and visits to the project site and will fund 10 Mesa Community College GIS interns per year to produce evaluation data, measuring diminishing ratio of nonnative plants-to-native plants.

**Site Description:** The 12.74-acre 32nd Street Canyon in the Chollas Creek watershed is located in the City of San Diego and the San Diego Unified School District. Sections of the creek that were part of a previous restoration effort in the early 2000s continue to be populated by native species. However, several sections of the creek and canyon are plagued by aggressive non-native species, including *Acacia cyclops* and *Marrubium vulgare*. The Golden Hill K-8 Dual Language School is adjacent to the project site and its student population resides to the west,

within a disadvantaged community (cited from the California Department of Water Resources Mapping Tool). The site, designated a high pollution area (per CalEnviroScreen 4.0), is surrounded by three major freeways and is directly under a flight path.

**Grant Application Qualifications:** The 32nd Street Canyon Task Force (the "Task Force"), an all-volunteer group, will conduct this project with fiscal sponsor San Diego Coastkeeper. The Task Force previously successfully completed a nine-year, $350,000 restoration project at the project site started in 2002. The Task Force has managed grants from many organizations including the Conservancy, the San Diego Foundation, 5-Star, Partners from Fish and Wildlife Program, and California's Urban Stream Restoration Program. The Task Force leadership also managed a $325,000 Conservancy grant for San Diego Canyonlands in Maple Canyon, where Task Force leadership received an award from then State Assemblyman Todd Gloria. San Diego Coastkeeper, the fiscal sponsor, is a major force in transforming the San Diego region into a leader in sustainable water management, guided by engaged and informed communities, and protective of a healthy environment that supports high biodiversity, resilient ecosystems, and thriving neighborhoods.

**San Diego Canyonlands**

**Chollas Creek Community Watershed Connection Program: Swan Canyon & Creek $74,742**

The Chollas Creek Community Watershed Connection Program: Swan Canyon & Creek project will: (1) restore and enhance Swan Creek's wetland and riparian habitat; (2) expand equitable access to nature and cultural connection for Kumeyaay and surrounding communities; and (3) build long-term community capacity for watershed stewardship through education and workforce development.

The project addresses a complex set of historical, social, and environmental issues. Swan Canyon and Swan Creek, part of the impaired Chollas Creek watershed, suffer from severe pollution, impacting public and aquatic health. Stormwater runoff exacerbates these issues, causing fast-track erosion, high sedimentation, and flood risk. The project will implement blue-green infrastructure in headwater tributaries to "slow the flow," enhance habitat, filter pollutants, reduce fire and flood risk, and create a resilient green space for multiple marginalized communities. Restoration of the 25.56-acre site will include invasive plant species removal and planting over 400 native plants. The project is vital to the local community, which is severely impacted by poverty, with 43% of the population at or below the federal poverty level. This marginalization has resulted in a lack of green space, nature access, and exposure to education and career pathways.

The project also provides an opportunity for Kumeyaay people to access their ancestral land. The project will include a twelve-part educational stewardship series that will engage approximately 240 local and Kumeyaay community volunteers through the co-design, implementation, and maintenance phases of the restoration program. Additionally, incorporating Kumeyaay Traditional Ecological Knowledge will serve as a model and build cultural competence within the conservation sector. The project will also incorporate Kumeyaay Traditional Ecological Knowledge by utilizing seasonal timing for planting and harvesting that

align activities with natural cycles, selecting culturally significant native plants to enhance species populations that are essential to the Kumeyaay, and applying water and soil stewardship practices to improve soil health and water management.

**Site Description:** Swan Canyon is in the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego and is part of the impaired Chollas Creek watershed. Now owned by the City of San Diego, Swan Canyon was historically utilized as a vital travel and sustenance corridor by the Kumeyaay people. The removal of the Kumeyaay people, paired with urbanization of the area, has left the project site in a moderate-declining condition. The project site is composed of 25.56 acres of ephemeral stream and a degraded cotton-willow riparian wetland. Threats to the system include severe pollution, flood risk, urban runoff, stormwater erosion, pollutants, and invasive species.

**Grant Application Qualifications:** San Diego Canyonlands (SD Canyonlands) has seventeen years of experience and the capacity to manage all financial and reporting requirements. For this project, SD Canyonlands will partner with the Kumeyaay-led organization Renascence, that will integrate culturally-informed knowledge into the long-term maintenance strategy for Swan Canyon. Alongside Renascence, San Diego Coastkeeper will provide US Environmental Protection Agency standard water quality monitoring paired with community training. The inclusion of both Renascence and San Diego Coastkeeper will allow for a holistic interdisciplinary approach to implement sustainable and culturally sensitive wetland restoration across the region. SD Canyonlands has partnered with the City of San Diego for seventeen years on open space and restoration projects throughout San Diego.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:**

The proposed projects are 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 projects help the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.**

See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Strategic Plan" section below.

2. **Projects are a good investment of state resources.**

Each project contributes to protecting wetlands or streams and adjacent habitats in Southern California. These areas are under intense stress from historical and ongoing urbanization and must be bolstered for predicted future stressors, like climate change. Wetlands are bountiful in ecosystem services that benefit all Californians, including carbon sequestration, reduced flooding, and improved water quality. Each project will have long-lasting restoration benefits and sites will continue to be maintained after the projects are completed.

**3. Projects include a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to different project areas.**

Hueneme Beach Park Community Dune Restoration: The Surfrider Ventura County Chapter has actively engaged with local tribes to ensure this project reflects and uplifts tribal perspectives. It met with tribal representatives at the project site to discuss opportunities for collaboration on this project. While details are still being confirmed, Surfrider set aside project funds to support this work so that tribal contributions are resourced and respected.

Willow Wonders: Cultivating Community Stewardship at Gardena Wetlands: The project will deepen community connections by offering honorariums to local tribal members to share Traditional Ecological Knowledge including cultural history and land practices, mentor youth, and foster residents' connection to land stewardship. By combining restoration with education and cultural programming, the project will build a multigenerational network of caretakers supported by ancestral knowledge to strengthen and ensure lasting environmental, cultural, and personal, and community healing for South Bay residents.

Ocean Connectors: San Diego Bay Habitat Restoration and Education Program: The project will collaborate with two local nonprofit organizations on shared curriculum and educational components. Native Like Water is a nonprofit organization that prepares and reintegrates teens and young adults into ocean recreation, conservation, wellness, and inter-generational cultural self-exploration. Its programs focus on the indigenous sacred relationship to water. Un Mar De Colores envisions an equitable and inclusive ocean community where every young person, regardless of background, feels they belong to nature, free to heal, thrive, and lead as protectors of the ocean and our shared future. They are by the community, for the community, and indigenous led. Un Mar de Colores will also collaborate with educational and inclusive components to events.

Chollas Creek Community Watershed Connection Program: Swan Canyon & Creek: The core of this project is the partnership between Canyonlands and Renascence, a Kumeyaay-founded and led organization, established to create healing relationships between land and people. This partnership is actively advancing the Kumeyaay Conservation Partnership Initiative to implement a new model of culturally-informed land management and Kumeyaay-led educational opportunities, centering Indigenous voices. During the project, Renascence, Coastkeeper, Canyonlands, and the community will co-design the framework for ongoing restoration in Swan Canyon. This includes developing a series of stewardship events with directed outreach to Kumeyaay youth and community members, and implementing cultural competence workshops that will inform Canyonlands' future habitat management strategy.

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

The proposed wetland restoration projects will increase natural defenses against predicted sea-level rise and ecological decline by improving the capacity of the habitats to respond to climate change and maintain healthy functions. Wetlands and riparian habitats provide a bevy of ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration, buffering against sea level rise and storm surge, and the filtration of sediments and pollutants. All proposed projects include removing

non-native species and reinstating native species, which will bolster the long-term wildfire resistance of project sites.

**5. Projects deliver multiple benefits and significant positive impact.**

Each proposed project was selected for both the restoration component of the project as well as significant community engagement. Through work to restore the wetland and dune habitats, community members will actively participate in each project and will learn more about the importance of wetland ecosystems. Additionally, the proposed projects were selected for their work to engage and benefit marginalized communities.

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

The five proposed CWRGP projects meaningfully engage their respective communities. One of the main purposes of the CWRGP is to build local capacity to plan and implement wetland restoration projects and to promote community involvement in wetland restoration. Projects funded through the program must include educational and community involvement elements as strong components of the project.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

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| **Coastal Conservancy** | **$385,442** |
| **Project Total** | **$385,442** |

Conservancy funds are anticipated to come from the fiscal year 2025/2026 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 ("2024 Climate Bond" or "Proposition 4"), codified at Public Resources Code sections 90000-95015. Section 92010 allocates funds to the Conservancy for projects to increase the resilience of habitats including coastal dunes, wetlands, and riparian areas, and public access facilities. The proposed projects are consistent with Section 92010 because: (1) they will restore wetlands so that they can migrate in response to sea level rise and therefore will be resilient to the effects of climate change; (2) they will support dune restoration as a nature-based solution to buffer against erosion, flooding, and storm surges; (3) they will restore and enhance riparian habitats that support watershed health; and (4) will provide public access and educational recreation events to local youth and/or community members, involving hands-on access to wetland, dune, or riparian habitats. The proposed projects are consistent with this funding source because they will increase natural defenses against predicted sea-level rise and ecological decline by improving the capacity of coastal and coastal watershed habitats to respond to climate change and maintain healthy functions. All five projects recommended for funding will enhance and protect wetland and coastal watershed resources.

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 authorization for each project is consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21, Sections 31251-31270 and 31316 of the Public Resources Code (PRC), regarding resource enhancement projects.

Section 31251 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations "for the purpose of enhancement of coastal resources that, because of indiscriminate dredging or filling, improper location of improvements, natural or human-induced events, or incompatible land uses, have suffered loss of natural and scenic values." Grants shall be used for, among other things, corrective measures that will enhance the natural and scenic character of the areas. All proposed projects will enhance or restore natural resources that have been degraded by human activities.

Section 31252 requires that all areas proposed for resource enhancement by a state agency, local public agency, or nonprofit organization shall be identified in a certified local coastal plan or program as requiring public action to resolve existing or potential resource protection problems or shall be so identified in other local plans which the commission determines to be consistent with the policies and objectives of Division 20 (commencing with Section 30000). In addition, to enhance natural coastal resources within the coastal zone, Section 31251.2 authorizes funding of projects outside the coastal zone to enhance a watershed resource that is partly outside the coastal zone.

- The Hueneme Beach Park Community Dune Restoration Project by the Surfrider Foundation is located within the coastal zone and is consistent with Section 31252 because the City of Port Hueneme's current Local Coastal Program highlights the importance of preserving and protecting dune habitat in Port Hueneme Beach Park (Page 32, Section 5).
- Consistent with Section 31251.2, the Willow Wonders: Cultivating Community Stewardship at Gardena Wetlands project by the South Bay Parkland Conservancy; the 32nd Street Canyon Task Force: Swapping Fire Fuel for Coastal Canyon Habitat project by San Diego Coastkeeper; and the Chollas Creek Community Watershed Connection Program: Swan Canyon & Creek by San Diego Canyonlands projects, while not located within the coastal zone, will enhance a watershed resource that is partly in the coastal zone and is consistent with policies of the California Coastal Act/California Coastal Management Program, including the Chapter 3 policy on restoring the biological productivity and quality of coastal waters (PRC section 30231).
- The Ocean Connectors: San Diego Bay Habitat Restoration and Education Program project by The Ocean Foundation has restoration sites that are not identified in any local coastal plan. However, the project furthers policies of the California Coastal Act/California Coastal Management Program, including Chapter 3 policy of the Coastal

Act on restoring the biological productivity and quality of coastal waters (PRC section 30231).

Section 31253 requires that the recommended amount of funding is determined by evaluating the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal resource enhancement projects, the fiscal resources of each applicant, the urgency of the projects relative to other similar projects, and the application of other factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority. Consistent with Section 31253, for each of the proposed projects, the Conservancy's funding was deemed appropriate through a competitive grant process that included selection because each of the projects' benefits to coastal habitat is significant.

Section 31316 authorizes the Conservancy to support projects and activities that are compatible with the preservation, restoration, or enhancement of ocean, coastal, or watershed resources, or that facilitate environmental education related to these resources. And, the Conservancy may undertake activities and support events or infrastructure related to coastal, watershed, or ocean resource education and maritime history. Consistent with Section 31316, every project listed above includes an important public education component; will provide public access and recreation by engaging local youth and/or community members with access to wetland, dune, or riparian habitats with opportunities to build their knowledge of and comfort level with open spaces; and the projects will protect the biological productivity of coastal waters by enhancing and restoring wetlands, or riparian habitat along tributaries, that affects the water quality of coastal waters.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN:**

Consistent with **Goal 1.1 Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, all five proposed projects aim to engage and include participation with people from systemically excluded communities.

Consistent with **Goal 3.2 Restore or Enhance Habitats**, the five proposed projects will restore or enhance coastal habitats, including coastal wetlands and riparian areas. Across all five projects, approximately 41 acres of habitat will be restored or enhanced.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

Hueneme Beach Park Community Dune Restoration: This project is categorically exempt from CEQA under Title 14 CCR, Section 15333, which exempts habitat restoration projects that do not exceed five acres to maintain, restore, enhance, or protect the habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife provided that there will be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to Section 15065; there are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed; and the project will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects. This project is categorically exempt under Section 15333 because it is a 2.5-acre habitat restoration

project that will not result in the impacts mentioned above. Upon approval of the project, Staff will file a Notice of Exemption.

Willow Wonders: Cultivating Community Stewardship at Gardena Wetlands: This project is categorically exempt from CEQA under Title 14 CCR Section 15333, which exempts habitat restoration projects that do not exceed five acres to maintain, restore, enhance, or protect the habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife provided that there will be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 15065; there are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed; and the project will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects. This project is categorically exempt under Section 15333 because it is a 1-acre habitat restoration project that will not result in the impacts mentioned above. Upon approval of the project, Staff will file a Notice of Exemption.

Ocean Connectors: San Diego Bay Habitat Restoration and Education Program: This project is categorically exempt from CEQA under Title 14 CCR, Section 15333, which exempts habitat restoration projects that do not exceed five acres to maintain, restore, enhance, or protect the habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife provided that there will be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to Section 15065; there are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed; and the project will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects. The project sites are all less than 5 acres in size and there would be no significant adverse impact on listed species or their habitat. This project would not disturb or remove hazardous material and no significant cumulative impacts from the restoration.

The exemption under Section 15304 also applies to the restoration site components of the project because the project's minor alterations of land will not involve removal of existing healthy, mature, scenic trees. Particularly, the restoration sites proposed, Sweetwater Marsh Units 1 & 2, South San Diego Bay Unit, and Chula Vista National Wildlife Refuge, are categorically exempt from the provisions of CEQA pursuant to Section 15304(d), which exempts minor alteration in land, water, and vegetation within an officially designated wildlife management area. Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.

32nd Street Canyon Task Force Swapping Fire Fuel for Coastal Canyon Habitat: This project is categorically exempt from the provisions of CEQA pursuant to Title 14 CCR Section 15304, which exempts projects that consist of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees. This project will replace non-native plant species with native plant species that are both water efficient and fire resistant and no healthy, mature, scenic trees will be removed. Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.

Chollas Creek Community Watershed Connection Program: Swan Canyon & Creek: This project is categorically exempt from the provisions of CEQA pursuant to 14 CCR Section 15304, which exempts projects that consist of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land,

water, and vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees. This project will replace non-native plant species with native plant species that are both water efficient and fire resistant and no healthy, mature, scenic trees will be removed. Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.