

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
February 19, 2026

**SANTA ANA RIVER
MARTHA MCLEAN ANZA NARROWS PARK IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT**

Project No. 25-049-01
Project Manager: Rodrigo Garcia

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$6,000,000 to the City of Riverside to implement improvements at Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park in Riverside County and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

LOCATION: City of Riverside, Riverside County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
- Exhibit 4: [Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration](#)

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 six million dollars (\$6,000,000) to the City of Riverside (“the grantee”) to implement improvements at Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park in Riverside County and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

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.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.

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.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration adopted by the City of Riverside on April 21, 2026 pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 4. The Conservancy finds that the proposed project as designed and mitigated avoids, reduces, or mitigates the potentially significant environmental effects to a less-than-significant level, and that there is no substantial evidence based on the record as a whole that the project will have a significant effect on the environment.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$6,000,000 grant to the City of Riverside to implement improvements at Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park ("the park") to transform it into a welcoming gateway that reconnects the community to the Santa Ana River. The park is a 39.5-acre, city-owned park overlooking the Santa Ana River and adjacent to the Santa Ana River Trail. The project will implement the Riverside Gateway Project Master Plan previously funded by the Conservancy to expand equitable access to recreation, arts, culture, and nature.

Although Riverside's northern edge fronts the Santa Ana River for 11 miles, residents remain largely disconnected from this natural resource. The park is developed but underutilized, with outdated amenities, no playground, and a restroom facility that has been vandalized beyond repair and is scheduled for demolition. The park is the only direct access to the river within Riverside, but it lacks clear trailhead signage, trail-support amenities, and safe, inviting features that encourage visitors to enjoy the river. Unauthorized vehicle access through the park into the river has damaged habitat, enabled encampments, increased wildfire risk, and discouraged community use of the park.

The project will address these needs through improvements that enhance access, safety, and environmental resilience to disadvantaged communities surrounding the park facing vulnerability to extreme heat. Planned improvements include new recreational amenities such as a playground, nature play area, exercise stations, swings overlooking the river, open meadows, and shade structures. A bandshell will also be constructed to provide affordable venues for arts and cultural events for residents and visitors. Two new restroom buildings will

be constructed in a different, accessible location. Interpretive installations and art installed throughout the park will tell a complete and inclusive history of the site, elevating Indigenous perspectives. The park is a popular access point to get to and enjoy the river, but many people drive their vehicles into the riverbed. Habitat improvements include bioswales, planters, and landscaping features to infiltrate stormwater and block unauthorized vehicle access to the river allowing pedestrian access only. Existing turf will be replaced with native and near-native plants. The project also includes a clearly marked Santa Ana River Trail trailhead with parking, drinking water fountains, and a decomposed granite path to showcase the park as a trail gateway.

The project builds on extensive prior community outreach conducted through the Riverside Gateway Master Plan project, funded by the Conservancy, which brought together residents, businesses, agencies, and other stakeholders to articulate the needs of the community to reconnect Riverside with its river.

Site Description: Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park is a 39.5-acre developed but underutilized park owned and managed by the City of Riverside, located on a bluff overlooking the Santa Ana River and adjacent to the Santa Ana River Trail. The park currently supports a popular frisbee golf course that will be protected during renovations, as well as a volunteer-planted native plant garden. The park serves as a gateway to both the Santa Ana River and the Santa Ana River Trail and lies within 0.2 miles of a disadvantaged community, that is vulnerable to extreme heat.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The City of Riverside Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department (PRCSD) has more than 40 years of experience successfully completing similar grant-funded projects including the design grant funded by the Conservancy for this project and many others. Over the years, PRCSD has developed many new or renovated existing parks of similar size and scope including Doty-Trust Park and Ryan Bonaminio Park.

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 was developed by previous Conservancy investments including a planning grant to the City of Riverside for the Riverside Gateway Parks project. The 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.

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.

Community outreach for this project was conducted along with outreach for the Riverside Gateway Parks project, which included park master planning and environmental compliance work for eight park sites along the Santa Ana River. As part of this outreach, a meeting was held with the Museum of Riverside and two tribal members they work with, Blossom Maciel and Lorene Sisquoc, to get their feedback on the Riverside Gateway Parks master plans and to invite them to provide ideas for creating space in the park for cultural programming and display installations. Blossom Maciel is a member of the Fort Sill Chiricahua Apache Tribe and a descendant of the Mountain Cahuilla of Southern California. She teaches Native American basketry workshops and cultural presentations for children. Lorene Sisquoc is part of the Cahuilla tribe, and the curator/cultural traditions leader at Sherman Indian High School in Riverside. The Museum of Riverside and their tribal advisors expressed many ideas to help tell the story of Native Tribes in and around Riverside and the Santa Ana River.

The PRCSD also convened its first Intertribal Summit on September 30, 2025. Members of the Cahuilla, Luiseño, Serrano, Gabrielino/Tongva, and Kumeyaay tribes participated. This will be a regularly occurring meeting to explore collaborative opportunities at different parks in the City along the Santa Ana River including Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park.

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

The materials, products, and construction methods used for the proposed project will be typical for other parks managed by PRCSD, which are built to be sustainable and serve the community for several generations. The project includes selective removal of turf, planting of native and near-native plants and trees, upgraded irrigation and lighting equipment, and creating on-site water infiltration basins. Shade throughout will make the park more comfortable to use in Riverside's hot summers. Due to the project location, the site is not vulnerable to sea-level rise.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The project will enhance the community's quality of life by providing free or low-cost recreational, cultural, arts, and educational resources, while promoting equity and environmental justice for underserved communities within a half-mile radius. It will protect riparian habitat by restricting vehicle access to the river, increase drought resilience by replacing turf with native or near-native plants, and encourage active transportation through trail amenities that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Educational benefits include interpretive installations highlighting the Santa Ana River's historical and cultural significance, including stories from local Tribes and historically excluded communities. Located in an existing developed park, the project will not cause displacement.

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

The project is one of eight sites in the Riverside Gateway Parks project, which included community outreach, master planning, and environmental analysis for park properties along the Santa Ana River in the City of Riverside. Outreach used virtual and in-person methods to gather input from residents with a half-mile of the sites and the broader community.

Engagement included five technical advisory committee meetings, three virtual workshops, presentations at neighborhood and City public meetings, and a project website with interactive tools, surveys and plan drafts. Additional outreach involved sidewalk decals, on-site signage, pop-up events, mailers, newspaper ads, social media, and local media interviews. The feedback received through all these different channels shaped the master plans.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$6,000,000
Project Total	\$6,000,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project is from three different sources. The first source is from a fiscal year 2025-2026 appropriation to the Conservancy from the “Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024,” also known as the 2024 Climate Bond or Proposition 4 (Public Resources Code (PRC), Sections 90000-95015). Proposition 4 allocates funds to the Conservancy for the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program for projects that protect and restore rivers, wetlands, streams, lakes, and watersheds, which includes actions to improve access to public open-space areas, or actions to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural, cultural, and historic resources. (PRC Sections 91032(d); 90100(h)). Such projects must improve climate resilience, water supplies, or water quality, and at least 40 percent of the allocations under this section must benefit disadvantaged communities. The proposed project is consistent with this fund source because it will improve access to public open-space through improvements to the park to surrounding disadvantaged communities that are vulnerable to extreme heat. The project will also protect the water quality of the Santa Ana River by preventing unauthorized vehicular access to the river that could damage the ecosystem, and by constructing bioswales and landscaping that will filter stormwater.

The second source is from a fiscal year 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, 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)). The proposed project is consistent with the goals of the Santa Ana River Conservancy program as discussed in the Consistency with the Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation below. Section 80100(b) states that projects funded under this section must either serve a disadvantaged community or the entity receiving the award must provide a 20 percent match. Consistent with this section, this project will serve a disadvantaged community.

The third source is from a 2020-2021 appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84, PRC Sections 75001-75130). PRC Section 75050 allocates funds for the protection and restoration of rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water, and other natural resources, and PRC Section 75050(i) specifically allocates funds for projects to expand and improve the Santa Ana River Parkway. Consistent with this fund source, the proposed project will construct improvements to the Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park, a park located

within the Santa Ana River Parkway for purposes of improving recreational opportunities, and to protect the river and park from unauthorized vehicle access and vandalism.

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 31170-31180 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)). Santa Ana River Conservancy Program goals also include public access to, enjoyment of, and enhancement of recreational and educational experience on program lands in a manner consistent with the protection of land and natural resources and economic resources in the area (Section 31173(b)).

Section 31174(c) states that the Conservancy must give priority to river-related projects that create expanded opportunities for recreation, greening, aesthetic improvement, and wildlife habitat along the corridor of the river and in parts of the river channel that can be improved without infringing on water quality, water supply, and necessary flood control.

Consistent with these sections, the proposed project will build park improvements along a portion of the Santa Ana River for purposes of public access, recreation, greening and aesthetic improvement, and water quality improvement.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.1 Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will provide free access to open space to surrounding communities that are vulnerable to extreme heat.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5 Recreation Facilities & Amenities**, the proposed project will build a park along the Santa Ana River to enhance recreational opportunities.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

On April 21, 2026, the City of Riverside adopted the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park and Jurupa Avenue Trailhead Master Plans. The proposed project is analyzed in the IS/MND. Staff concurs that there is no

substantial evidence that the proposed project will have a significant effect on the environment.

The IS/MND identified potentially significant environmental effects in the areas of Biological Resources; Cultural Resources; Geology, Soils, and Paleontological Resources; Noise; Recreation; Tribal Cultural Resources; and Mandatory Findings of Significance. With the project's incorporated mitigation measures, summarized below and available on Exhibit 4, these environmental effects will be less than significant.

Biological Resources

If development of the proposed project site occurs during the bird breeding season, the proposed project could directly affect nesting birds within the proposed project site. With implementation of MM-BIO-1, the proposed project would have a less-than-significant impact with mitigation incorporated for sensitive avian species. The proposed project would have no effect on other species or state or federal wetlands.

None of the vegetation communities are considered riparian habitat. Riversidean sage scrub and nonnative grassland are considered sensitive habitats by the Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). The Riversidean sage scrub and nonnative grassland are outside of MSHCP criteria areas and PQP Conserved Lands; therefore, impacts on these communities are considered mitigated through implementation of the MSHCP and its preserve system. Because the project is consistent with the MSHCP, impacts on sensitive vegetation communities are considered to be mitigated to below a level of significance.

No state or federal jurisdictional wetlands are within the proposed project site, and there would be no adverse effect on wetlands.

The proposed project would not substantially interfere with wildlife movement or corridors, or impede the use of wildlife nursery sites. The proposed project would have no impact on wildlife movement.

The proposed project would not conflict with Riverside's General Plan 2025 policies protecting biological resources, including those in the Open Space, Air Quality, Land Use, and Circulation and Community Mobility Elements. The City of Riverside does not have tree preservation policies applicable to the project. Therefore, the proposed project would not conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources and would have no impact.

The proposed project is within the limits of the MSHCP and complies with its requirements. The project would not conflict with any provisions of the MSHCP and is consistent with the plan. It is also within the plan area for the Upper Santa Ana River Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), which is in development, but the site is not within the HCP Preserve System and does not contain sensitive natural habitats protected by the plan. Therefore, the proposed project would not conflict with adopted habitat conservation plans or natural community conservation plans and would have no impact.

Cultural Resources

Four previously recorded archaeological sites and two isolates were identified during the records search and updated in the pedestrian survey for the Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park

site, except for the isolates whose artifacts were previously collected; no additional materials were found near their locations. All six resources were previously evaluated for California Registry of Historical Resources (CRHR) eligibility, with one site recommended as eligible, though its eligibility cannot be confirmed without subsurface testing; for the proposed project, it will be assumed eligible, and implementation of mitigation measure MM-CUL-1 through MM-CUL-5 will reduce construction-related impacts to less-than-significant levels. The remaining five resources were evaluated as not eligible and require no further consideration. Due to the site's proximity to known archaeological resources, including Native American sites, the area is considered archaeologically sensitive, and MM-CUL-1 through MM-CUL-5 will mitigate potential impacts from unanticipated discoveries during subsurface disturbance to less-than-significant levels.

No pre-contact sites or cemeteries have been identified with the study area or a 0.5-mile radius, and cultural resources records, background research, and Native American consultation indicated no evidence of human remains in the area that would be affected by the proposed project. However, ground-disturbing activities could uncover previously unknown human remains, and implementation of MM-CUL-5 would reduce potential impacts to less-than-significant levels.

Geology, Soils, and Paleontological Resources

The project area has unknown sensitivity for prehistoric cultural resources. Construction activities involving ground disturbance, such as excavating, grading, and resurfacing, in a geologic unit that may contain significant fossils could impact paleontological resources at the proposed project site. The project would create a potentially significant impact on a paleontological resource, site, or unique geologic feature, but implementation of mitigation measure MM-PAL-1 would reduce these impacts to less-than-significant levels.

Noise

Construction and operation of the park could generate significant noise impacts from both construction vehicles and onsite project construction. With implementation of mitigation measures MM-NOI-1 and MM-NOI-2 the impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level.

Construction of the park could generate significant groundborne vibration impacts. With implementation of mitigation measures MM-NOI-1, MM-NOI-4, and MM-NOI-5 the impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level.

Recreation

The project proposes improving an existing park with recreational facilities. Environmental impacts from constructing these facilities are evaluated as part of the overall project, which does not require additional recreational facility construction or expansion. The project would promote use of recreational facilities, potentially extending the life of existing parks, while maintenance activities would prevent substantial deterioration. Therefore, environmental impacts from construction or expansion of recreational facilities would be less-than-significant.

Tribal Cultural Resources

The cultural resources records search and archaeological pedestrian survey did not identify any previously recorded cultural resources at the Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park site as Tribal Cultural Resources (TCRs), and tribal consultation has not identified TCRs or other Native American resources. The site contains a pre-contact milling station, which was recommended as eligible for the CRHR for this project only due to its potential for buried archaeological resources. Buried artifacts have been found in two locations within the park, and the site is considered archaeologically sensitive with potential for unidentified resources that may be TCRs. Nine tribes were contacted; three requested formal AB 52 notification, one deferred consultation, and five did not respond. The Native American Heritage Commission identified the overall project as positive for Sacred Lands and recommended contacting the Gabrieleño Band of Mission Indians – Kizh Nation. Excavation of undisturbed soil could uncover previously unidentified resources considered TCRs, resulting in significant impacts; implementation of mitigation measures MM-CUL-1 through MM-CUL-5 and MM-TCR-1 would reduce these impacts to less-than-significant levels.

No TCRs have been identified at the Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park site, but the proposed project could encounter pre-contact Native American archaeological resources that might be considered TCRs or contain elements of TCRs. The NAHC identified the overall project area as positive for Sacred Lands and recommended additional tribal consultation to delineate resource locations before construction. No tribes have identified TCRs or other resources at the site to date. Because ground-disturbing activities could cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a TCR if present, continued consultation and implementation of MM-CUL-1 through MM-CUL-5 and MM-TCR-1 would reduce these impacts to less-than-significant levels.

Mandatory Findings of Significance

If development at the Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park site occurs during the bird breeding season, the project could directly affect nesting birds, which would violate state and federal protections; however, implementation of MM-BIO-1 would ensure compliance and prevent significant impacts on sensitive avian species. The project also has potential to affect one historical resource and could encounter archaeological, tribal cultural, paleontological resources, or human remains during ground disturbance, but implementation of MM-CUL-1 through MM-CUL-5, MM-PAL-1, and MM-TCR-1 would reduce these impacts to less-than-significant levels. With incorporation of all mitigation measures, the project would not substantially degrade environmental quality, reduce wildlife habitat, threaten plant or animal communities, or eliminate important historical or prehistoric resources.

The proposed project would improve the existing Martha McLean Anza Narrows Park and develop a public park offering recreational uses. Public parks are common suburban uses that typically do not cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, and park and recreational facilities are generally considered beneficial for communities. Any environmental effects from the proposed project would be mitigated as noted in the IS.

With implementation of the project's mitigation measures, environmental effects to Biological Resources; Cultural Resources; Geology, Soils, and Paleontological Resources; Noise; Recreation; Tribal Cultural Resources; and Mandatory Findings of Significance will be less than significant. Staff recommends that the Conservancy find that the project as mitigated avoids,

reduces or mitigates the potentially significant environmental effects to a level of less-than-significant and that there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment.

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