

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

September 17, 2026

SANTA ANA RIVER TRAIL

RINCON TO PRADO SPILLWAY PHASE 2 SEGMENT - CONSTRUCTION

Project No. 26-044-01

Project Manager: Rodrigo Garcia

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$3,305,000 to Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District to undertake the Santa Ana River Trail Rincon to Prado Spillway Phase 2 Segment – Construction project, consisting of the construction of a 0.65-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail in Riverside County, and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

LOCATION: City of Corona, Riverside County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

Exhibit 4: Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration:

https://www.rctc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/SART-2-2A-and-3A-IS-MND-4-21-25-CLEAN_508_ie_508.pdf

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 million three hundred five thousand dollars (\$3,305,000) to Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District (“the grantee”) to undertake the Santa Ana River Trail Rincon to Prado Spillway Phase 2 Segment – Construction project, consisting of the construction of a 0.65-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail in Riverside 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 4 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 and funding for recreational opportunities and trails.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the Santa Ana River Trail Project – 2, 2A, and 3A Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration adopted by the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District on July 29, 2025 pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 4. The Conservancy finds that the Santa Ana River Trail Project – 2, 2A, and 3A 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 \$3,305,000 grant to Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District (“District”) to undertake the Santa Ana River Trail Rincon to Prado Spillway Phase 2 Segment – Construction project, consisting of the construction of a 0.65-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail in Riverside County.

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 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.

The Santa Ana River Trail Rincon to Prado Spillway Phase 2 Segment will be 0.65-mile paved trail along Rincon Street, a right-of-way managed by the City of Corona and owned by the

United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Completion of this segment closes a critical gap near the Prado Dam spillway and provides access to nature, open space, recreational opportunities, and strengthens multimodal transportation options for nearby communities. After many years of planning, primarily funded by the Conservancy through a \$3,450,000 grant in 2021, the District is ready to construct this trail segment. The multi-use trail will serve pedestrians, hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians. Once completed, this segment will connect to an existing 0.44-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail to the west of the dam, and will eventually connect to several more planned trail segments through the City of Corona. The trailhead will be located across the street from Butterfield Park, a local park in the City, providing easy access to the trail.

Project activities will include constructing the trail, grading the trail alignment, paving the newly built trail, installing a pedestrian crossing signal to allow pedestrians to safely cross Stagecoach Road, and repaving Rincon Street. Construction will require approximately 8,000 cubic yards of fill to create the at-grade trail. The District will also hydroseed the areas impacted by construction with native plants to restore vegetation along the trail. Due to the land being owned by the USACE and managed by the City of Corona, the District was required to receive permits from federal and local authorities. Compliance with permit requirements and restrictions increased the cost of construction, requiring installation of a pedestrian crossing signal, repaving Rincon Road, and restriction of the trail development to the confines of the existing easement. Upon completion, the City of Corona will assume long-term maintenance of the new trail segment, including debris removal, signage upkeep, fencing repairs, striping, and operation of the new High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk (HAWK) signal.

Site Description: The proposed project runs south of the Santa Ana River in the City of Corona and begins near Rincon Street, where it connects to another existing segment of the Santa Ana River Trail and terminates at Stagecoach Road. This segment lies within 0.5 mile of a disadvantaged community that is vulnerable to extreme heat and wildfire risk. The Santa Ana River watershed drains approximately 3,200 square miles, including portions of San Bernardino, Riverside, and Orange counties. The Santa Ana River watershed supports hundreds of species of birds, fish, and amphibians, including more than a dozen protected rare or endangered species such as the least Bell's vireo, the Santa Ana sucker, San Bernardino kangaroo rat, and the Santa Ana River woollystar.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District was created by the electorate in November 1990 and formed on January 29, 1991. The District is an independent agency governed by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, which sits as the District's Board of Directors. The District has extensive experience with project planning and implementation, as it manages more than 44,000 acres, including 40 parks, reserves, historic and archaeological sites, and 90 miles of regional trails. The District has successfully managed several previous grant funds from the Conservancy for design and construction of the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway.

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 provides recreation and health benefits to residents and visitors of the Santa Ana River Trail by constructing a segment of the trail to be used for walking, biking, and nature viewing. The project additionally supports the recreational 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.

The District is expanding its existing wayfinding program for the Santa Ana River Trail in collaboration with the Shiishonga Tribe, Corona Band of Gabrielino Indians through a standalone project after the trail is constructed. The project will include the installation of culturally authentic interpretive signage. A content co-creation approach will be utilized by partnering with tribal historians to identify significant cultural, ecological, and historical points of interest. The District will also implement a strict tribal review protocol for all text, graphics, and translations prior to fabrication. The District is committed to ensuring educational signage that fosters public respect for tribal sovereignty and cultural heritage is installed along this segment of the Santa Ana River Trail.

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

Portions of the Santa Ana River Trail Parkway were designated a National Recreation Trail in November 1976 linking the San Bernardino Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. The National Park Service has indicated its interest in designating the entire trail, once completed, as a National Recreation Trail, and would be protected and maintained as such. When complete, it will be one of the longest urban recreation river parkways in the United States providing recreational opportunities to residents and visitors of the area. Upon completion, the City of Corona will assume long-term maintenance, including debris removal, signage upkeep, fencing repairs, striping, and operation of the new HAWK signal.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The proposed project will bring the Santa Ana River Trail closer to completion providing the surrounding communities with access to the outdoors. The trail gives communities a safe alternative to walk, run, and bike and provides a car-free route to connect to other nearby parks.

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

As part of the planning phase, the District conducted a formal written comment/review period. This outreach provided local communities, residents, stakeholders, affected agencies, and any other interested parties with an opportunity to comment on the project. During this comment/review period, the District received over 40 comments with the majority indicating support and excitement about progress made to add additional completed phases to the Santa Ana River Trail.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$3,305,000
Project Total	\$3,305,000

There are two anticipated sources of Conservancy funding for this project. 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, where “protection” 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 the Santa Ana River, a public open-space, through the construction of a new segment of the Santa Ana River Trail. The project will improve the climate resilience of nearby disadvantaged communities that are vulnerable to extreme heat and wildfire risk as it will provide access to open-space where they can recreate in nature during periods of extreme heat. The project will also improve public access by providing residents with a trail option to walk or bike on as a form of active transportation.

The second source is from a fiscal year 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 appropriation to the Conservancy from the General Fund (The Budget Act of 2021, Section 19.57 as added by SB 170, Chapter 240, Statutes of 2021, and the Budget Act of 2022, Section 19.56, as amended by AB 179, Chapter 249, Statutes of 2022) specifically for the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program. 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 section below.

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 program goals of recreational opportunities and trails. It further states that

the Conservancy may undertake projects for “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 31174(c) requires prioritization of river-related projects that create expanded opportunities for recreation.

Consistent with these requirements, the proposed project will help implement the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway, which will become a major inland trail connecting to the California Coastal Trail and will expand opportunities for public recreation near the river.

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 and wildfire risk.

Consistent with **Goal 2.4 Build Trails**, the proposed project will build a 0.65-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

On July 29, 2025, the District adopted the Santa Ana River Trail Project – 2, 2A, and 3A Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP). The proposed project is analyzed in the 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 and soils; recreation; 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

The project will have less than significant impacts on special-status species with mitigation incorporated. Surveys following state and federal protocols documented one special-status plant, the CRPR 4.2 paniculate tarplant, within the broader survey area, but no other sensitive plant species were found. Wildlife surveys confirmed the presence of endangered least Bell’s vireo and coastal California gnatcatcher, with designated critical habitat for both species overlapping the project area. Construction could affect multiple breeding territories through habitat removal, noise above 60 decibels, or disturbance during nesting season. The site also supports nesting birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, meaning construction during the February 15-September 1 nesting window could impact active nests. With implementation of Mitigation Measures BIO-1 through BIO-6 (See Exhibit 4, page 3-11), impacts will be reduced to less than significant.

The project will temporarily impact 5.70 acres and permanently impact 1.21 acres of riparian and riverine vegetation, along with both temporary (4.31 acres) and permanent (3.73 acres) impacts to coastal sage scrub habitat suitable for coastal California gnatcatcher. These impacts stem primarily from necessary vegetation removal and habitat disturbance during construction, through the design minimizes impacts by favoring trimming over full tree or shrub removal. With implementation of Mitigation Measure BIO-7 (See Exhibit 4, page 3-11), impacts would be reduced to less than significant.

The project is located within the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (WRMSHCP) area and is consistent with its goals of supporting recreation while protecting biological resources. A Determination of Biologically Equivalent or Superior Preservation (DBESP) and an addendum were prepared to evaluate project impacts on covered species and habitats, and these documents were reviewed by permitting agencies to confirm full compliance with WRMSHCP provisions. With implementation of the required mitigation measures, best management practices, and mitigation ratios outlined in the DBESP and its addendum, all project impacts on WRMSHCP-covered resources will be reduced to less than significant levels.

Cultural Resources

The project site contains previously documented historic-period cultural resources, but all identified resources have either been fully excavated, mitigated, or are no longer present. Record searches revealed three historic-era sites intersecting the project area; however, two ranch sites were previously subjected to extensive data recovery and later destroyed during earlier federal projects, and the remaining site was found ineligible for the California or National Register and has since been demolished. A field survey conducted in 2022 identified no cultural resources, suggesting a low likelihood that intact archaeological deposits remain on-site. With implementation of Mitigation Measure CUL-1 (See Exhibit 4, page 3-18), impacts will be reduced to less than significant.

The project could affect archaeological resources if any are uncovered during ground-disturbing activities; however, such impacts will be less than significant with mitigation. Under CEQA, any archaeological materials encountered must first be evaluated to determine whether they qualify as historical resources, and if not, whether they constitute unique archaeological resources. The project includes a mitigation measure (CUL-1) requiring that if archaeological deposits are discovered during construction, work must stop within 25 feet of the find and qualified specialists, including a District environmental specialist, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers Cultural Resources Specialist, and a Secretary of the Interior-qualified archaeologist, must assess and treat the resource appropriately. With this procedure in place, any inadvertent discoveries would be properly evaluated, documented, and mitigated, reducing potential impacts to archaeological resources to a less than significant level.

Geology and Soils

The project area contains geologic units with varying but often high potential for paleontological resources, including young axial channel deposits, old alluvial fan deposits, and very old alluvial fan deposits. Because construction will involve soil disturbance within these

formations, there is a potentially significant risk of damaging or destroying paleontological resources if they are present. This conclusion is based on a formal paleontological assessment that included museum record searches, geologic mapping review, and evaluation under Society of Vertebrate Paleontology criteria.

However, the project incorporates mitigation measures GEO-1 through GEO-4 (See Exhibit 4, page 3-26-27) designed to ensure protection of any fossil material encountered. These measures include protocols for monitoring, discovery response, and resource treatment during ground-disturbing activities. With these safeguards in place, any potential impacts to paleontological resources would be reduced to a less than significant level.

Recreation

The project involves constructing new recreational trail facilities, but with mitigation incorporated it would not create adverse physical environmental effects. Although the trail constitutes an expansion of recreational infrastructure, its potential impacts, primarily related to biological resources, cultural resources, and geology/soils, have already been evaluated and determined to be less than significant once required mitigation measures are implemented. As a result, while the project does involve new recreational development, it would not lead to environmental harm beyond what is addressed and mitigated in other sections of the analysis, ensuring overall impacts remain less than significant.

Mandatory Findings of Significance

The project has the potential to affect sensitive biological, cultural, and paleontological resources; however, all impacts would be less than significant with mitigation. Biological studies identified one special-status plant species and documented endangered least Bell's vireo and coastal California gnatcatcher within designated critical habitat. Construction would also remove portions of sensitive coastal sage scrub. Mitigation measures BIO-1 through BIO-7 ensure noise reduction, nesting-season protections, biological monitoring, habitat restoration, and off-site mitigation to prevent population declines or loss of important plant and wildlife communities.

Cultural analysis found three historic-period resources intersecting the project area, but these sites have either been previously excavated and removed or are avoided by the trail alignment. Although no archaeological resources were found during field surveys, Mitigation Measure CUL-1 would protect any unanticipated discoveries during ground disturbance. Likewise, geologic units in the project area contain high paleontological sensitivity, but mitigation measures GEO-1 through Geo-4 would prevent significant impacts to fossil resources. Overall, with all required mitigation in place, the project would not degrade environmental quality or threaten biological, cultural, or paleontological resources, and impacts would remain less than significant.

With implementation of the project's mitigation measures, environmental effects to biological resources; cultural resources; geology and soils; recreation; 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.