

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
March 25, 2004

LOS ANGELES GREEN VISION PLAN

File No.: 04-014
Project Manager: Marc Beyeler

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$50,000 to the University of Southern California–Center for Sustainable Cities to develop a plan for coastal land conservation focused on wetland, riparian, and related coastal habitat and open space lands as part of a regional Green Vision Plan for the greater Los Angeles coastal region.

LOCATION: Watersheds from the Santa Clara River to the San Gabriel River (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Regional Location Map

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Section 31111 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement to the University of Southern California of an amount not to exceed fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) to develop a plan for coastal land conservation within coastal draining watersheds from the Santa Clara River to the San Gabriel River focused on wetland, riparian resources and related coastal habitat and open space lands, as described in the accompanying staff recommendation, subject to the condition that prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the University of Southern California shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, schedule and budget, and the names and qualifications of any subcontractors that it intends to employ.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with Section 31111 of the Public Resources Code which authorizes the Conservancy to provide grant funding for plans and feasibility studies that implement the purposes of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31000 et seq.;

2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001; and
 3. The University of Southern California is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U. S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

The proposed authorization would provide a grant to the University of Southern California–Center for Sustainable Cities to develop a “Green Vision Plan,” a feasibility and planning study for use by local and regional organizations for planning future conservation activities in southern California. The Center for Sustainable Cities of the University of Southern California (Center) was formed to address the environmental impacts of regional economic growth within the greater Los Angeles region of southern California. The Center has been studying regional sprawl for the past several years and produced policy reports and undertaken policy projects.

As part of its study and analysis of regional growth, the Center initiated a project to study the natural resource, open space and related recreation needs of the region. The Center proposed the development of a Green Vision Plan (Plan) for the region focused on natural resources conservation, including importantly the conservation of coastal resources. The Plan will assist in identifying areas of interest for the acquisition, preservation, restoration and enhancement of natural resources, open space and recreation lands. The products will be used by local, regional, and state agencies and decision-makers, as well as interested stakeholders and members of the public.

The Center has requested financial assistance from the several State-chartered Conservancies with projects and jurisdiction within the regional study area. The Center has proposed a collaborative project that will meet the objectives of the Coastal Conservancy, the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and the Baldwin Hills Conservancy. The proposed project will improve the ability of State-chartered Conservancies, as well as other organizations, to plan, identify, and articulate regional land conservation priorities.

Project History: Since 1998 University of Southern California–Center for Sustainable Cities has been studying and analyzing the environmental impacts of regional growth within the greater Los Angeles region of southern California. The Center was formed in 1998 by faculty from engineering, the natural and social sciences, urban planning, and environmental health sciences, and is housed in the Geography Department.

The four State-chartered Conservancies in greater Los Angeles have been discussing the need for increasing collaboration and expertise in the Los Angeles area for the past few years, and specifically the need to identify what resources have already been protected and to create a regional vision and goals for future conservation efforts. The Center for Sustainable Cities and the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy took the lead in developing the proposed project. Other Conservancies have in the past several months approved participation and financial support. Coastal Conservancy staff has participated in developing the final project description so that it incorporates a focus on coastal-draining wetland, riparian, and related habitat lands into the overall plan.

PROJECT FINANCING:

State Coastal Conservancy	\$ 50,000
Rivers and Mountains Conservancy	100,000
Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy	25,000
Baldwin Hills Conservancy	10,000
In-kind	<u>15,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$200,000

The University of Southern California is a 501(c)(3) organization whose purpose is education. The Center for Sustainable Cities of the University of Southern California was formed to assist in studying, analyzing, and developing environmental sustainable development patterns and practices within the region. The Conservancy's contribution to the proposed project is anticipated to be funded through an appropriation to the Coastal Conservancy from the Habitat Conservation Fund (HCF). Funds appropriated to the Coastal Conservancy from the Habitat Conservation Fund can be used to protect and conserve sensitive coastal resources, including wetland, riparian and related coastal habitats.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The Conservancy is authorized by Section 31111 of the Public Resources Code to award grants to nonprofit organizations for feasibility and planning studies that will assist in implementation of the Conservancy's statutory objectives under its enabling legislation (Division 21 of the Public Resource Code). The proposed grant to the University of Southern California will fund a feasibility and planning study that will serve that purpose. The study will provide the Conservancy with the information it will need in the future to identify and select projects that will best serve the Conservancy's mandate to undertake or provide grants for: watershed and habitat water quality protection and restoration under Public Resources Code §31220; coastal resource enhancement under §§31251 *et seq.*; and reservation of significant coastal resource sites for park or fish and wildlife habitat under §§31350 *et seq.*

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective A**, a regional vision for open space and parks, especially in disadvantaged areas will be developed.

Consistent with **Goal 4 Objective A**, the proposed project will assist in the identification of significant coastal resource properties for acquisition, focused on the preservation of coastal riparian and related habitat lands.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objectives A and B**, the regional collaboration will help identify opportunities to preserve and restore coastal watersheds, create river parkways, and improve water quality.

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

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The project is supported by all state Conservancy organizations within the greater Los Angeles region.
4. **Location:** The proposed project includes the coastal zone and coastal watersheds from the Santa Clara River in the northern and west to the San Gabriel River to the east and south. The project would benefit coastal resources by developing a regional vision and goals, mapping protected lands, and facilitating the protection and enhancement of habitat and open space resources.
5. **Need:** There is a continuing need for a coordinated approach to land conservation among state-chartered Conservancies within the greater Los Angeles region. The proposed project would address current needs for coordinated land conservation activities.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The greater Los Angeles coastal region of southern California contains coastal resources of statewide significance. Regional collaboration will assist in the preservation and restoration of these resource lands.

Additional Criteria

8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** There are a number of needs within the Los Angeles conservation community that the proposed project would address: identification of regional vision and goals, mapping of protected lands, improved communication, and greater collaboration among Conservancies to improve expertise to carry out projects.
9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
12. **Readiness:** The matching funds for the project are in place and ready for expenditure. The grantee is experienced in the work proposed, and is ready to start.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See the "Project History" section above.
15. **Cooperation:** The project will have financial and in-kind contributions from all the state-chartered Conservancies.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE COASTAL ACT:

The proposed project is consistent with the following provisions of the Coastal Act, Public Resources Code Sections 30000 *et seq.*:

An assessment and coordinated plan for future conservation activities within coastal southern California will further the planning and management policies contained in §30231, which states, in part, that “the biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes appropriate to maintain optimum populations of marine organisms and for the protection of human health shall be maintained and, where feasible, restored. . . .”

Section 30240(a) specifies that “environmentally sensitive habitat areas shall be protected against any significant disruption of habitat values, and only uses dependent on those resources shall be allowed within those areas.” Section 30251 states, in part, that “[t]he scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance.” The proposed coordination of conservation efforts would help ensure that environmentally sensitive habitats, wildlife corridors between habitat areas, and the scenic qualities of the coast are protected.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed regional collaboration is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306, which exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities. Upon Conservancy approval of this project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.