

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
December 11, 2003

**SANTA MONICA BAY RESTORATION-  
BALLONA CREEK WETLANDS AND WATERSHED**

File No. 00-117  
Project Manager: Marc Beyeler

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$142,320 to the City of Culver City for the Ballona Creek Water Quality Improvement Project, and up to \$381,700 to the Ballona Wetlands Foundation to develop final plans and environmental review for Phase I of the Ballona Outdoor Learning and Discovery (BOLD) project, to implement the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan approved by the Coastal Conservancy on August 2, 2001.

**LOCATION:** Along Santa Monica Bay in the Ballona Creek sub-watershed, Los Angeles County (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Resource Enhancement

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: Regional Location Map

Exhibit 2: Bay Watershed Council Resolutions

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred forty-two thousand three hundred and twenty dollars (\$142,320) to the City of Culver City for the Ballona Creek Water Quality Improvement Project and disbursement of an amount not to exceed three hundred eight-one thousand seven hundred dollars (\$381,700) to the Ballona Wetlands Foundation for the Ballona Outdoor Learning and Discovery (BOLD) project. Both projects implement the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan (the “Bay Plan”), approved by the Conservancy on August 2, 2001. These authorizations are subject to the following condition that prior to disbursement of funds for either project, the respective grantee shall submit the following for review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

1. A final work program, schedule and budget for its project;
2. All contractors to be employed for its project;
3. Evidence of all permits and approvals for its project; and
4. With respect to the Ballona Creek Water Quality Improvement Project only, the City of Culver City shall submit a program for the installation of sign(s).”

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 projects are consistent with the guidelines and criteria set forth under Chapter 6 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-31270) regarding the enhancement of coastal resources.
2. The proposed projects are consistent with the guidelines and criteria set forth in the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted on January 24, 2001.
3. The BOLD project proposed for funding has been identified in its respective Local Coastal Plan as requiring action to resolve existing or potential resource protection problems, consistent with Public Resources Code Section 31252.
4. The Ballona Wetlands Foundation 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:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize funding for two specific projects to implement the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan (the Bay Plan). The two projects proposed for Conservancy action in this authorization are described below.

*Ballona Creek Water Quality Improvement Project*  
City of Culver City     \$142,320

This project involves the installation of a Continuous Deflective Separation (CDS) unit to trap solids and remove oil and grease at the existing storm drain west of the Overland Avenue Bridge along Ballona Creek. The Coastal Conservancy, acting on the recommendation of the Santa Monica Bay Watershed Council, initially approved \$168,500 for this project. During the course of final project development and plan review in 2003, the County of Los Angeles required additional components to the design that were not included in the original plan. On March 25, 2004 the Santa Monica Bay Watershed Council recommended that the project amount be increased to fund these project design changes.

*Ballona Outdoor Learning and Discovery (BOLD) Project*  
Ballona Wetlands Foundation     \$381,700

The Ballona Wetlands Foundation (BWF) and Loyola Marymount University (LMU) are proposing to jointly develop the Ballona Outdoor Learning and Discovery (BOLD) project. The

project proposed for funding in this authorization is the completion of final plans and feasibility analysis for phase 1 of the BOLD project. The BOLD project would restore approximately eight acres into four habitat types: tidal channels, intertidal mud banks, salt march and coastal sage scrub habitat.

**Site Description:** The Santa Monica Bay watershed encompasses approximately 400 square miles subdivided into separate sub-watershed drainages. The Santa Monica Bay watershed is divided into two major topographic areas: the Los Angeles coastal plain and the Santa Monica Mountains. The Santa Monica Bay watershed is one of the nation's most highly urbanized regions.

Bordered on the north by the Santa Monica Mountains divide, on the east by Griffith Park, on the south by Point Fermin, and on the west by the eastern portion of Ventura County, the watershed encompasses residential areas, commercial and industrial areas and undeveloped open space lands, primarily within the Santa Monica Mountains. There are 28 separate drainage basins within the Santa Monica Bay watershed.

The Ballona Creek Watershed is the largest largest draining to Santa Monica Bay. Currently the Creek is listed on the Regional Board's list of impaired coastal bodies. Most recently the state of California acquired nearly 500 acres of wetlands within the Ballona wetlands in order to restore and enhance these wetlands of statewide significance. The Coastal Conservancy is assisting the California Department of Fish and Game in wetlands restoration planning.

**Project History:** In recognition of the need to protect Santa Monica Bay and its sub-watersheds, in May, 1988, the State of California and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) nominated and included Santa Monica Bay in the National Estuary Program (NEP). Established under the Water Quality Act of 1987 and managed by the US EPA, the NEP includes more than two dozen significant estuaries and coastal water bodies nationwide.

As an NEP, the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project (SMBRP) is charged with assessing the Bay's pollution problems, and with producing the Bay Restoration Plan to serve as the blueprint for the Bay's long-term recovery. In 1995, the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan was approved by the State of California and the US EPA. The Bay Plan includes 250 actions, including specific actions focused on habitat conservation, enhancement and restoration, pollution prevention and treatment control, and assessment, education and monitoring.

The Bay Plan includes several goals, including: (1) reducing pollutant loadings to and prevent degradation of the waters of Santa Monica Bay; (2) reducing human health risks associated with swimming in or harvesting seafood from the Bay; and (3) restoring, rehabilitating and protecting the marine ecosystem, living resources and biodiversity of the Bay and its watersheds. Specifically, the Bay Plan has identified the protection, restoration, and creation of wetlands within the Bay as a major goal of the project.

The Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000 (Proposition 12) earmarked \$25,000,000 to the Coastal Conservancy for restoration of Santa Monica Bay in accordance with the goals and priorities of the Bay Plan.

Proposition 12 requires the Bay Watershed Council, the stakeholder board of the Restoration Project, to determine project eligibility and grant priorities. Working with Conservancy staff, the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project staff has solicited project proposals that would achieve the goals of the Bay Restoration Plan and address its water quality and natural resource

protection objectives. Both the projects recommended for funding in this authorization have been approved for funding by the Bay Watershed Council (Exhibit 2).

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Proposition 12-Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan:	
Ballona Creek Water Quality Demo Project	\$ 142,320
Ballona Outdoor Learning and Discovery (BOLD)	<u>381,700</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$424,020</b>

The source of Conservancy funds is an appropriation to the Conservancy from Proposition 12, the "Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000," for projects to implement the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan. The state budgets for FY 2000/01 and FY 01/02 include \$15,000,000 for implementing the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 6 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resource Code Sections 31251-31270.

Pursuant to §31251, the Conservancy may award grants to enhance coastal resources. The projects proposed for funding will enhance fish and wildlife habitat in coastal wetlands and coastal watersheds in Santa Monica Bay, and is consistent with this section.

Consistent with §31252, the BOLD project area has been identified in the respective certified local coastal plan as requiring public action to resolve existing or potential resource protection problems or so identified in other local plans. See the "Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies" section below for details.

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

Consistent with **Goal 5 Objective A**, the proposed projects will increase Coastal Resource Conservation by restoring and enhancing coastal wetland and stream corridor resources within the Ballona Creek watershed.

Consistent with **Goal 5 Objective C**, the proposed **BOLD** project will plan for the removal of non-invasive plants along the Santa Monica Bay watershed within the Ballona wetlands and allow for their replacement with native vegetation.

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

The proposed projects are 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:** These projects will be funded with monies appropriated to the Conservancy from Prop.12 for implementing the Santa Monica Bay Plan.
3. **Support from the public:** Implementation of the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan has widespread public and agency support. The Santa Monica Bay Watershed Council includes members from private industry, the general public, community environmental organizations, as well as local, regional, state and federal agencies.
4. **Location:** The proposed projects are located within Santa Monica Bay and the Ballona Creek sub-watershed drainage.
5. **Need:** The Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan identifies the significant natural coastal resources that require public action to conserve, enhance and restore natural resources of statewide interest.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Santa Monica Bay has been identified by both the State of California and the US EPA as a coastal water body of national significance. The Santa Monica Bay watershed contains much of the remaining wetlands within Los Angeles County, a priority of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project.

**Additional Criteria**

13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The Coastal Conservancy has been involved in resource protection, enhancement and restoration projects within the Santa Monica Bay watershed for more than a decade, including projects focused on the remaining coastal wetlands within the Bay. Implementation of these projects at this time will contribute to the fulfillment of long-standing Conservancy goals. The Coastal Conservancy has also been involved in enhancement and restoration planning for the Ballona Creek watershed for the past several years. Currently the Coastal Conservancy is providing staff and financial resources for the several habitat restoration and coastal access projects within the Ballona Creek watershed.
15. **Cooperation:** The Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project is a cooperative venture involving a broad range of interested and affected stakeholders including private industry, citizens, environmental groups, and local, regional, state and federal agencies.

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The projects address improvements to habitat and water quality in the Ballona wetlands and creek. These projects are consistent with the County of Los Angeles Local Coastal Plan and the Playa Vista Land Use Plan section of the City of Los Angeles Local Coastal Program. Both plans call for the protection of the Marine and Land Resources of the Ballona Creek Flood Control Channel and adjacent areas. Both plans call for the "reduction of harmful pollutants from storm drain waters, pollution traps...in the community to the east to limit pollutants from entering the wetlands system from fresh water sources." (City of Los Angeles Local Coastal Program-Playa

Vista Land Use Plan) Wait, where does the quote begin? You don't have any beginning quotations.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed projects are categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262, the Ballona Outdoor Learning and Discovery (BOLD) Project is exempt because it involves only planning and feasibility analysis. Pursuant to §15301, the Ballona Creek Water Quality Improvement Project is exempt because it involves only minor alterations of existing public structures and facilities involving negligible or no expansion of an existing use. Staff will file Notices of Exemption upon approval.