

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
March 10, 2005

**COMPTON CREEK WATERSHED
PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

File No. 05-012
Project Manager: David Hayes/Christopher Kroll

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization of up to \$100,000 to the Los Angeles & San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council to complete the Compton Creek Watershed Management Plan Implementation Strategy and identify demonstration projects, and further authorization of up to \$200,000 to Heal The Bay to finalize demonstration project plans, and provide project coordination in the Compton Creek watershed.

LOCATION: Compton Creek Watershed including the cities of Compton, South Gate, Florence, Rancho Dominguez, unincorporated neighborhoods of Los Angeles County and the Dominguez Creek and San Pedro Bay/Los Angeles Harbor area. (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement, Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Maps

Exhibit 2: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251-31270 and 31400-31409 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council (“Watershed Council”) to complete the Compton Creek Watershed Management Plan Implementation strategy to identify habitat and water quality demonstration projects and further authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) to Heal the Bay (“HtB”) to finalize demonstration project plans and provide coordination for selected projects in the Compton watershed. These authorizations are subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds to both the Watershed Council and Heal the Bay, the Watershed Council and HtB shall submit for review and written approval by the Conservancy’s

Executive Officer, a work plan, budget and contractors they propose to use, if any, to complete the projects.

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 authorizations are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, specifically Chapter 6 (sections 31251-31270) regarding enhancement of coastal resources, and Chapter 9 (Sections 31400-31409) regarding public access to and along the coast;
2. The proposed authorizations are consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001;
3. That the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council and Heal the Bay are nonprofit organizations existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code, and have among their principal charitable purposes the preservation of land for scientific, historic, recreational, educational, and open space opportunities; and
4. The proposed projects serve greater than local needs.

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$100,000 to the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council (Watershed Council) to complete the Compton Creek Watershed Management Plan by developing an implementation strategy, identifying demonstration habitat, water quality and access projects, and to collaborate with Heal the Bay, to coordinate project implementation. Conservancy staff also recommends that the Conservancy grant up to \$200,000 to Heal the Bay to finalize plans for selected demonstration projects, and coordinate project implementation in the adjacent areas covered by the Compton and Dominguez watersheds and the San Pedro Bay/Los Angeles Harbor areas.

The Watershed Council is currently preparing the Compton Creek Watershed Management Plan. The management plan will identify watershed issues such as water quality, priorities for habitat restoration, and potential recreational uses in the watershed. The Coastal Conservancy, the Watershed Council and its partner, Heal the Bay require matching funding to complete an implementation strategy for the watershed plan which identifies demonstration habitat restoration, access and water quality projects. The proposed Conservancy funding would allow the implementation strategy to be completed and provide a select set of demonstration projects to be identified and finalized. Staff of the Coastal Conservancy working with the staff of HtB would coordinate project implementation within the larger area, linking the Compton Creek watershed to the adjacent areas of Dominguez watershed and the San Pedro Bay/Los Angeles Harbor.

The proposed project will enhance the Conservancy’s efforts to protect and restore coastal fish and wildlife habitat by restoring habitats within the watershed and in developing trails along the Los Angeles River and its tributaries in order to connect local and regional trails to the California Coastal Trail in the Los Angeles Harbor area. In the past three years, the Conservancy has developed Coastal Trail plans within the Los Angeles Harbor area, including habitat

enhancement projects in the Dominguez watershed, which will be linked to the work in the Compton Creek watershed.

Site Description:

The Compton Creek watershed, formerly marshland, covers a flat low lying area which drains into the Los Angeles River and San Pedro Bay. It is a 42.1 square mile watershed encompassing the cities of Compton, Lynwood, and South Gate. The watershed also includes part of the cities of Los Angeles and Long Beach, Carson and Huntington Park, in addition to the unincorporated communities of East Rancho Dominguez, Rosewood, Willowbrook, Florence, Athens. (See Exhibit 2).

Compton Creek has been largely ignored in habitat restoration and water quality improvement efforts to address the Los Angeles River basin. It is a highly urbanized area with few remaining natural areas, few recreational parks, several major transportation corridors and large areas of industrial manufacturing facilities. Though Compton Creek is an impaired waterbody, beneficial uses have been assigned to Compton Creek for municipal and domestic water supply, ground water recharge, contact and non-contact water recreation, warm freshwater habitat, and wetland habitat. The soft bottom part of the creek has significant restoration and greening opportunities.

Compton Creek has promising features such as the Compton Creek Trail, currently under construction, that follows along the upper edges of the creek channel. The next phase of recreational improvements will be to provide an equestrian trail to service the existing equestrian clubs within the watershed and link the trail system to coastal trails near Los Angeles harbor. The City of Compton is in the early conceptual stages of planning a Regional Garden Park within the creek channel. The area also has many opportunities for much needed open space projects that could address other unmet issues such as water quality, habitat enhancement, environmental education and recreational facilities.

Project History:

In the past year, the Coastal Conservancy has been an active participant in the watershed management planning process in the Compton Creek watershed. The Conservancy is a member of the Compton Creek Watershed Plan Steering Committee, composed of the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, Regional Water Quality Control Board the City of Los Angeles, and Los Angeles County Departments and the Compton Creek Task Force. The Conservancy has been assisting in the planning process and supporting the completion of the watershed management plan. The proposed project would complete the plan and identify a select number of demonstration projects. Additionally, this project would promote project coordination within adjacent watersheds draining to the San Pedro Bay. For the past three years, staff of the Coastal Conservancy has been active in planning for wetland and related coastal habitat projects in the Dominguez watershed, and planning for coastal access and coastal trail projects in the San Pedro Bay/Los Angeles Harbor area.

Conservancy staff has long been involved in regional efforts to address improvements in the larger Los Angeles River watershed. The Conservancy's involvement in the Los Angeles River

began in 1990 when the State Legislature requested that the Conservancy prepare a plan for the river that included an assessment of the river’s potential for enhancement for public recreation and wildlife habitat uses. In response the Conservancy completed the Los Angeles River Park and Recreation Area Study in 1993. Since that time the Conservancy has been involved with planning and project development in the Los Angeles River Basin and has developed partnerships with organizations such as the Watershed Council, and other non-profit organizations, cities such as Los Angeles and Long Beach, and other State agencies, like the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy (Prop 40)	\$300, 000
Watershed Council (Prop 13)	<u>\$200,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$500, 000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding is the “California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002” (Proposition 40. Under Public Resources Code Section 5096.650(b), this funding source may be used for the deployment and development of land and water resources in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. (Public Resources Code Section 5096.650(b)). The proposed project serves to assist in the development of land-based public access along a greenway designed to protect water resources. In addition, as discussed in the section found immediately below, the project is consistent with Chapters 6 and 9 of Division 21. Proposition 40 also requires the Conservancy to give priority to grant projects with matching funds (Public Resources Code Section 5096.651). The project is supported by commitment by Watershed Council to provide matching funds from the Prop 13 grant.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251—31270) provides for the Conservancy’s participation in a program of coastal resource enhancement. The proposed authorization would facilitate the possible enhancement of wetland and riparian resources in the Compton Creek watershed, which provide beneficial effects in the lower Los Angeles River and harbor area. Section 31251 of the Public Resources Code authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies for the purpose of enhancement of coastal resources that, because of improper location of improvements, natural or human-induced events, or incompatible land uses, have suffered loss of natural and scenic values. The proposed projects will enhance coastal resources by finalizing a select number of demonstration projects that protect riparian corridors, and minimize erosion and sedimentation.

Section 31251.2 authorizes Conservancy participation in projects to enhance a watershed resource that lies partly outside the coastal zone, where such action protects or enhances coastal resources within the coastal zone. Loss of habitat is a primary issue throughout the watershed as a result of channelization of the river and urbanization of the watershed. The Compton Creek Watershed is a sub-watershed of the Los Angeles River watershed, which lies partly within and partly outside the coastal zone. The proposed authorization would address habitat restoration,

trail links and urban runoff water quality issues that may improve water quality in the Lower Los Angeles River and San Pedro Bay/Los Angeles Harbor areas.

Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Section 31400) provides for the Conservancy's participation in the development of a system of accessways. Consistent with sections 31400 and 31409, identification of regional trail linkages to the Lower Los Angeles River and the Los Angeles Harbor Area parts of the California Coastal Trail would be an important part of the Conservancy's involvement in the Compton Creek Watershed Management Plan under its Open Space and Habitat and Recreation segments. The proposed authorization would enable the Conservancy to provide assistance to establish and expand an inland system of trails that could connect to the California Coastal Trail segments within the Los Angeles Harbor area.

Consistent with § 31400.2, staff recommends approval of this project after evaluating the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy in light of the total amount of available for coastal public accessway and urban waterfront projects, the fiscal resources of the grantee, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible projects (see discussion below), and the application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE COASTAL ACT:

The proposed project will help provide maximum access and recreational opportunities consistent with Section 30210 of the Public Resources Code. The proposed project will provide planning documents that will identify a strategy for future implementation of bicycle and pedestrian trail connections to the California Coastal Trail and increase inland access to the coast. Additionally, the proposed project will possibly lead to improvement in water quality, by identifying open space and habitat enhancement and restoration projects and advancing selected project plans to implementation. The proposed project will further the planning and management policies contained in Section 30231 of the Public Resources Code, which states that “[t]he biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes ...shall be maintained and, where feasible, restored through, among other things, ...maintaining natural vegetation buffer areas that protect riparian habitats, and minimizing alteration of natural streams..”

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

The proposed authorizations are consistent with **Goal 1, Objective E**, as they will identify and plan the development of regional trails and river parkway, which will connect inland populations to the Coastal Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A**, the proposed authorizations will assist in the creation of new open spaces, habitat and parks in areas of significant need.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective A**, the proposed authorizations will result in a final detailed plan for restoration of habitat and provide an implementation strategy for a river parkway in the Compton Creek watershed.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective B**, the proposed authorizations will lead to the development of projects that will improve water quality that will benefit the Compton Creek Watershed and the Los Angeles River and Los Angeles Harbor/San Pedro Bay areas.

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

The proposed authorizations 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:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** These projects have broad support including the Watershed Council, Compton Creek Watershed Steering Committee, Compton Creek Task Force, Heal the Bay, City of Compton, the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, the Watts-Los Angeles Harbor Economic Development Corporation, and Friends of Compton Creek.
4. **Location:** Loss of habitat is a primary issue throughout the watershed as result of channelization of the river and urbanization of the watershed. Compton Creek is a sub-watershed of the Los Angeles River Watershed, which lies partly within and partly outside the coastal zone. The proposed authorizations would address habitat restoration; trail links and urban runoff water-quality issues, which would likely improve water quality in the Lower Los Angeles River and San Pedro Bay/Los Angeles Harbor areas.
5. **Need:** Matching funds are needed to complete the Watershed Management Plan and implement pilot projects to demonstrate the efficacy of the plan. Without the current matching funds the Watershed Council will lose the significant momentum that has been developed through its cooperative efforts to finalize the plan. No other source of funding is available at this time.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The combined watershed areas of Compton Creek, Dominguez, and San Pedro Bay represent important areas that have not been the focus of coastal resource or coastal access improvement projects in the past. Greening Compton Creek, providing habitat improvements and providing for public recreation and regional trail access, represent major regional and statewide priorities and are an important part of a region-wide effort to improve habitat, public access, recreation, urban runoff water quality and quality of life in the Los Angeles region.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** If funding is not made available at this time, loss of community resources and momentum will result, as plan implementation will be delayed until other funding can be identified and community support for the plan will have been lost.
8. **Leverage:** Conservancy funding will leverage planning work already being undertaken by the Watershed Council and well as additional in-kind contribution by Heal the Bay through its volunteers and will also result in greater involvement by community organizations.
9. **Readiness:** Local project partners, including the Watershed Council and Heal the Bay are prepared to undertake the proposed activities. The watershed plan will be completed in the next three months. The next steps are known, but without funding cannot be carried out at this time.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** “See “Project History” above.”
11. **Cooperation:** The Compton Creek Management Plan is being undertaken as part of a broad stakeholder planning effort that includes several agencies including the Coastal Conservancy, the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, Regional Water Quality Control Board, City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County departments, and non profit organizations such as Friends of Compton Creek, and Heal the Bay.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed projects are statutorily exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in part under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations, Section 15262 as they involve planning, final project plans, final feasibility studies, and plan implementation strategies for possible future actions, which the Conservancy has not approved or funded. These plans do not have a legally binding effect on later activities to be selected or implemented. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the projects.