

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

June 16, 2005

**ROSE CREEK WATERSHED ASSESSMENT PHASE II  
HYDROLOGY & RESTORATION ALTERNATIVES**

File No. 05-042

Project Manager: Christopher Kroll

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$150,000 to San Diego EarthWorks to prepare a detailed assessment of the hydrologic, hydraulic, sediment transport and geomorphic conditions of the Rose Creek watershed and development of watershed restoration alternatives based on the opportunities identified in the *Rose Creek Watershed Opportunities Assessment*.

**LOCATION:** Rose Creek watershed, including Rose Canyon and San Clemente Canyon, City of San Diego, San Diego County (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Resource Enhancement

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: August 14, 2003 Staff Recommendation

Exhibit 3: Letters of Support

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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 disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) to San Diego EarthWorks (also known as San Diego Earth Day) for preparation of an analysis of the hydrologic, hydraulic, sediment transport, and geomorphic conditions of the Rose Creek watershed and development of restoration alternatives, subject to the condition that, prior to the disbursement of any funds, San Diego EarthWorks shall submit for the review and written approval of the Conservancy’s Executive Officer a work program, including scope of work,

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budget and schedule, and the names of any contractors it intends to use to carry out the project.”

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 the purposes and criteria of Chapter 6 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-31270) regarding the enhancement of coastal resources.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. San Diego Earth Day (also known as San Diego EarthWorks) 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 is recommending that the Conservancy provide a grant of \$150,000 to San Diego EarthWorks (SDEW) to prepare a detailed assessment of the hydrologic, hydraulic, sediment transport and geomorphic conditions of the Rose Creek watershed in order to ensure the feasibility of restoration opportunities identified in the *Rose Creek Watershed Opportunities Assessment* (watershed assessment). In addition, SDEW will oversee the development of watershed restoration alternatives based on the opportunities identified in the watershed assessment.

The proposed project is the second phase in the process that will eventually lead to the enhancement and restoration of the Rose Creek watershed. The first phase consisted of the preparation of the Rose Creek watershed assessment by SDEW, pursuant to a Conservancy grant approved on August 14, 2003. The overall Rose Creek watershed enhancement project is described in detail in the August 14, 2003 Staff Recommendation, attached as Exhibit 2.

In preparing the watershed assessment, SDEW’s consultants determined that the existing hydrologic and hydraulic information was based on United States Army Corps of Engineers reports from 1970 and 1978. Looking at aerial photographs, consultants determined that the watershed has undergone significant development since 1978 with as much as 30 percent of the watershed’s land area being converted from natural vegetation communities to various urban and suburban land uses. Based on this analysis, the consultants have recommended that an additional hydrologic and hydraulic assessment, as well as sediment transport and geomorphology, be conducted prior to the development and implementation of any wetland or floodplain restoration projects. This further analysis is necessary to ensure that any proposed restoration alternatives are feasible, appropriately designed, and their potential downstream effects are understood.

The Rose Creek watershed is one of the largest watersheds draining into Mission Bay and serves as a wildlife corridor between the foothills south of Poway and Mission Bay. The

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watershed is a major contributor of pollutants, including bacteria, to the bay. Mission Bay has a history of “contaminated water” postings as a result of high bacteria levels that exceed state water quality standards. This problem is attributed to sanitary sewer overflows, poor tidal flushing in East Mission Bay, and urban runoff. The water quality problems have continued in spite of the City of San Diego’s attempts to improve water quality in Mission Bay. The watershed itself suffers from a number of problems other than poor water quality including habitat fragmentation, invasive plant species, homeless encampments, creek channelization, and development encroachments into the canyon.

Rose Creek and San Clemente Creek, the two largest streams in the watershed, both flow through large coastal canyons. There are approximately 40 canyons in the City of San Diego. These canyons have all been impacted by development as the City has grown around them but they still provide important habitat for many native plants and animals and maintain fragments of native plant communities in areas where this habitat has otherwise been lost to development. The City recognizes the importance of the canyons both as habitat and open space. Community concern about the canyons is also growing and several neighborhood groups have formed in the last ten years to protect the canyons.

The Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA) of the City of San Diego’s Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Subarea Plan specifically includes “urban habitat lands,” which largely consist of canyons with native habitat. The intent of the MSCP is preservation of a network of habitat and open space, and protection of biodiversity in southwestern San Diego County. The City has identified biological resource areas for conservation. Mission Bay Park, Rose Canyon Open Space Park, and Marian Bear Memorial Park (the City’s open space parks in the Rose Creek watershed) are specifically included in the MHPA. Several sections of Rose Creek are not, however, included within these designated open space areas. Mission Bay Park and Marian Bear Memorial Park both have Natural Resource Management Plans (NRMP) to govern management of the areas consistent with the goals of the MHPA and Subarea Plan. Rose Canyon Open Space Park does not.

**Site Description:** The 23,427-acre Rose Creek watershed lies entirely within the City of San Diego and extends 27 miles from Poway to Mission Bay. The watershed is part of the Miramar Hydrologic Unit. The watershed includes all or parts of the following communities: Scripps Ranch, University Town Center, Kearney Mesa, La Jolla, University City, Clairemont, Pacific Beach, and Mission Bay. The upper watershed is located within MCAS Miramar. The lower watershed (below MCAS Miramar) contains three City of San Diego parks: Rose Canyon Open Space Park, Marian Bear Memorial Park, and Mission Bay Park.

The watershed has several plant communities, most of which are limited to the canyons, and include: Diegan coastal sage, southern mixed chaparral, southern sycamore/alder riparian woodland, southern willow scrub, arroyo willow riparian forest, and coastal oak woodland.

**Project History:** The Nature School, a local nonprofit organization, completed the Rose Creek Canyon Enhancement Plan for a portion of the proposed study area (between the Interstate-5 bridge and Grand Avenue) in 2000. The Nature School has received funding

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from the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board to begin implementing some of the recommendations of the plan.

In 2001, at his first State of the City address, Mayor Dick Murphy outlined ten goals to make the City of San Diego a “City Worthy of Our Affection.” Goal number four, “Clean up Our Beaches and Bays”, called for the reduction of beach postings and closures by fifty percent by 2004. Mission Bay became the focal point for meeting this goal as over half of the postings had occurred in Mission Bay. In early 2002, the Mission Bay Water Quality Management Plan was created and is being implemented by the City’s Storm Water Pollution Prevention Program. At this time, seven projects are included in the Plan. One project, the Rose and Tecolote Creeks Water Quality Improvement Project, proposes various treatment controls to protect the water quality in the two creeks. The draft Rose and Tecolote Creeks Water Quality Improvements Project Plan was completed in 2002.

In 2000, The Nature School submitted a proposal to the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (WRP) for funding for an enhancement plan for an area of Rose Creek between Interstate 5 and Grand Avenue. The WRP Board of Governors added Rose Creek to the work plan in June 2000.

SDEW, working with the Sierra Club, has initiated a campaign for protection of San Diego’s canyons. In addition, a new advocacy group, the Rose Creek Watershed Alliance, was recently established to help integrate the activities and interests of the non-profit groups working in the Rose Creek watershed with the development and implementation of the *Rose Creek Watershed Opportunities Assessment*. Current members include Discover Pacific Beach (a business improvement district), San Diego Audubon, the Friends of Rose Canyon, the Friends of Rose Creek, the Marian Bear Memorial Park Committee, the Rose Canyon Recreation Council, the San Diego Bicycle Coalition and the Clairemont Town Council.

SDEW hired a consultant team in March 2004. The *Rose Creek Watershed Opportunities Assessment Draft (Existing Conditions Report)* was released in January 2005. A final version of the watershed assessment will be completed in July 2005.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	\$150,000
TBD	120,000
County of San Diego	<u>30,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost:</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Fund (Proposition 40). Proposition 40 allows funds to be used for restoring land and water resources in accordance with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy’s enabling legislation. As described below, the proposed project serves to further the enhancement of the Rose Creek watershed and is consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation. In addition, the project is appropriate for funding priority under

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Proposition 40, since the Conservancy grant will be matched by monies from other sources.

SDEW is currently seeking commitments for the remaining funds from public agencies with an interest in the watershed.

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

As described in detail in the August 14, 2003 Staff Recommendation (Exhibit 2), the Rose Creek watershed enhancement project, of which the current proposal is a part, is consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251 *et seq.*), which authorizes the Conservancy's participation in coastal watershed enhancement projects.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, as set forth in the August 14, 2003 Staff Recommendation (Exhibit 2)

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

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, as described in the August 14, 2003 Staff Recommendation (Exhibit 2)

### **CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

See August 14, 2003 Staff Recommendation (Exhibit 2) for a complete discussion.

### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from the provisions of CEQA under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262 in that it involves planning for possible future actions, which the Conservancy has not approved, adopted, or funded. By definition and necessity, the proposed assessments and studies will thoroughly account for and consider environmental factors. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the proposed authorization.