

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
October 27, 2005

AQUARIUM OF THE PACIFIC – *THE WATERSHED PROJECT*

File No. 05-075
Project Manager: Christopher Kroll

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse funds to the Aquarium of the Pacific to assist in the development of an environmental education exhibit as part of the aquarium's Watershed Project.

LOCATION: Long Beach, Los Angeles County (See Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: *Our Watershed Story* exhibit

Exhibit 3: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Section 31220 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of up to eighty thousand (\$80,000) dollars to the Aquarium of the Pacific (the aquarium) to assist in the development and construction of the Watershed Project, a new multi-part, environmental education exhibit at the aquarium, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to disbursement of any funds, the aquarium shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
 - a. a work program and detailed site plans
 - b. a sign plan to acknowledge Conservancy funding for the project, and
 - c. the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed on the project;
2. The aquarium shall provide written evidence to the Conservancy that all permits and approvals necessary to the completion of the project have been obtained; and

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3. The aquarium shall enter into an agreement pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 31116(c) sufficient to protect the public interest and provide for maintenance of 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 set forth in Chapter 5.5 of the Public Resources Code (Section 31220) 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. The Aquarium of the Pacific is a nonprofit organization, existing under the provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff is recommending that the Conservancy provide a grant of \$80,000 to the Aquarium of the Pacific to assist in the development of the Watershed Project, a new environmental education program at the aquarium. The \$2.1 million Watershed Project is scheduled to be completed in early 2007 and consists of the following elements: 1) *Our Watershed Story*, a new outdoor exhibit that will be located at Pierpoint Landing, a public open space adjacent to the aquarium; 2) additional exhibits in the aquarium; 3) an environmental education classroom; and 4) a native plant garden that represents the coastal habitats of the San Pedro Bay watersheds (estuarine marsh, coastal scrub, coastal bluff). The project is intended to educate the aquarium’s 1.25 million annual visitors, including 189,000 students, and the general public about the region’s environmental past and present while providing an opportunity to consider a more environmentally sustainable future.

The aquarium has already secured significant funding for different elements of the Watershed Project and has requested that the Conservancy fund the development and construction of the new outdoor exhibit, *Our Watershed Story*. This exhibit will be accessible to the general public free of charge and will illustrate the historical change in the watersheds that drain to San Pedro Bay from the natural (pre-human) state to the current highly altered and developed state.

The exhibit will consist of a harmonica billboard and two graphic display stations (see Exhibit 2). The billboard will consist of two versions of a map of the San Pedro Bay watersheds, one side depicting the pre-human settlement conditions of the watersheds and the other side showing the watersheds as they look today. The intent of the exhibit is to highlight the impact of human use and settlement on the region and show how this impact

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has altered the natural environment of the watersheds and the two important rivers that drain into San Pedro Bay, the Los Angeles River and the San Gabriel River.

Aquarium of the Pacific is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that operates the City of Long Beach aquarium facility. The 156,000 square foot aquarium houses 19 major habitat exhibits and 32 smaller exhibits focused on the ecosystems of the Pacific Ocean. The aquarium houses 1,000 species and 12,500 animals and hosted 1.25 million visitors in 2004. The aquarium serves students and teachers (235,000 in 2004) both at the aquarium and through an outreach program, *The Aquarium on Wheels*. The aquarium is the fourth most visited cultural institution in Los Angeles and Orange counties.

Site Description: The aquarium is located in Shoreline Aquatic Park (Exhibit 1), an 11-acre park, located adjacent to the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center and the Downtown Shoreline Marina.

Project History: In 2004, the aquarium began developing plans to build new exhibits to highlight the deteriorating state of the Los Angeles River and San Gabriel River watersheds with the goal of encouraging the public to act in ways that improve the health of the watersheds. The aquarium has already secured funding from the Lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC), the Southern California Water Replenishment District (WRD), the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the Metropolitan Water District (MWD), and the County of Los Angeles. The aquarium has four additional funding proposals presently under review and expects to raise \$2.1 million for this project.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Rivers and Mountains Conservancy	1,500,000
Institute of Museum and Library Services	150,000
So. California WRD	100,000
Metropolitan Water District	<u>75,000</u>
Total Funds Secured	\$1,825,000
State Coastal Conservancy (Our Watershed Story)	<u>80,000</u>
Total Funds Secured w/SCC grant	\$1,905,000
Total Project Cost	\$2,100,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding is a 2004 appropriation to the Conservancy pursuant to the “Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002” (Proposition 50). Section 79571 of the Water Code directs that 10% of Proposition 50 funds allocated to the Conservancy for coastal watershed protection be used “for the acquisition and development of facilities to promote public access to and participation in the conservation of land, water, and wildlife resources.” Subsection (b) identifies eligible projects as “(n)ature centers that are in or adjacent to watersheds and wetlands identified for protection...that provide viewing, outdoor

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experiences, and conservation education programs to the public and students...(w)ith priority to projects that are operated by or in cooperation with nonprofit organizations and are designed to serve children from urban areas that lack access to natural areas of outdoor programs.” The Aquarium of the Pacific is a nonprofit organization located in a watershed that has been identified for protection and it provides education programs for the public and students from the surrounding Los Angeles area.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 5.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31220, *et seq.*) relating to the protection of coastal and marine resources. This project is consistent with Public Resources Code Section 31220, which allows the Conservancy to provide grants for the construction or expansion of nature centers or research facilities that emphasize conservation education or research activities focusing on the marine portion of the coastal zone or the land and ocean interface. Aquarium of the Pacific is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that operates the City of Long Beach-owned aquarium facility. The aquarium provides environmental education programs for students and teachers (235,000 in 2004) both at the aquarium and through an outreach program, *The Aquarium on Wheels*.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective D**, this project will increase coastal recreational opportunities for residents and visitors by the support of a regional environmental education center. The project will result in increased opportunities for environmental education.

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:** Letters of support are included in Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The aquarium is located in the coastal zone.
5. **Need:** The aquarium has already secured the majority of the funds it needs for the Watershed Exhibit from other sources. The aquarium has approached the Conservancy to complete the funding needed for the various components of the new exhibit.

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6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The aquarium is a regional facility that hosted 1.25 million visitors in 2004.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** The aquarium hopes to complete the new exhibits, landscaping and environmental education classroom by early 2007. The majority of the needed funds have already been secured. The grant that the aquarium is requesting from the Conservancy will complete the funding needed for the project to move to construction.
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The certified Long Beach Local Coastal Program contains a Downtown Shoreline Planned Development District Plan for the downtown shoreline area. The aquarium is specifically described as a permitted use in the Subarea 6 section of the Planned Development Plan.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

Construction or placement of minor structures accessory to existing commercial, industrial, or institutional facilities is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act, pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15311.

Upon Conservancy approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.