COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
January 17, 2008

SANTA MONICA BAY STREAM TEAM

File No. 07-110
Project Manager: Kara Kemmler

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to $300,000 to Heal the Bay for the Stream Team program to perform habitat restoration and collect data in the northern Santa Monica Bay watershed, Los Angeles County.

LOCATION: Northern Santa Monica Bay watershed, Los Angeles County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Regional Location Map

Exhibit 2: Project Area Map

Exhibit 3: Letters of Support

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 three hundred thousand dollars ($300,000) to Heal the Bay for its Stream Team program to perform habitat restoration and collect data in the northern Santa Monica Bay watershed. Prior to the disbursement of any funds, Heal the Bay shall submit for the review and written approval of the Conservancy's Executive Officer a work program, budget, and schedule; the names of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the work; and evidence of its right to access the project sites to accomplish the purposes of this authorization."

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 Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-31270) regarding enhancement of coastal resources.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Conservancy staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to $300,000 to Heal the Bay for the Stream Team program to perform riparian habitat restoration and collect data on publicly owned lands in the northern Santa Monica Bay watershed. Heal the Bay will collect data on the ecological functions of the riparian corridors and water quality. The project will involve extensive training of and use of volunteers. This project will expand riparian restoration and revegetation efforts in the Malibu Creek Watershed, develop a citizen-led Stream Watch program, and support modification of the Stream Team monitoring program to prevent the spread of invasive species. The proposed project will collect data and conduct restoration activities to enhance the ecological function and improve water quality within the Santa Monica Bay region.

Poor water quality is a health concern for humans and wildlife. Indicators of poor water quality such as excess sediments, bacteria, nutrients, and other pollutants originating within the watershed are transported downstream and ultimately into the Santa Monica Bay. This project will identify watershed activities contributing to poor water quality, identify causes of water quality degradation, and implement restoration activities that address these problems. The restoration projects will improve ecosystem function within the riparian corridor.

Heal the Bay is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1985 to improve the health and safety of Santa Monica Bay and southern California coastal waters. It has a long and extensive record of scientific, technical, and management involvement with the problems and opportunities of Malibu Creek and Lagoon. It has carried out large-scale water quality studies and long-term monitoring programs, and has successfully managed Conservancy grants in the past.

Habitat Restoration
Massive invasive non-native plant infestations occur along the creeks and streams within the north Santa Monica Bay watershed. This project proposes to restore riparian areas by initiating the control of these invasive plants, re-vegetating with native riparian plants and then maintaining the areas to ensure survival of natives and reduce the chance of re-infestation by invasive non-natives. Invasive control will be completed using trained field crew as well as trained volunteer team members. Re-vegetation, weeding and watering will be a primary responsibility of the volunteer team members. Riparian habitat restoration will be performed primarily in the Malibu Creek watershed within the Malibu Creek State Park and at Malibu Lagoon State Park. All projects will be conducted in coordination with the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) staff. New restoration opportunities have been identified at DPR's property at Malibu Lagoon, including wetland areas affected by the recent October fire, and upstream riparian areas within Las Virgenes Creek. Restoration activities at these sites will require GIS mapping, initial invasives removal using hand tools in the spring and summer, installation of native plants (lo-

cally collected and grown) during the fall, and maintenance weeding the following spring. These new sites will also require monitoring and assessment in order to assess the degree of upkeep to ensure success. Restoration activities are part of a long-term effort designed to improve ecosystem function in riparian and wetland areas with the goals to improve water quality and restore protected species habitats.

Stream Watch Program

The Stream Watch program will assess the health of the watershed, identify priority projects and increase the stewardship potential within the Malibu Creek Watershed. In 2003, more than 70 miles of riparian habitat were mapped to sub-meter accuracy. Stream Watch will use these maps to assess watershed health and locate degraded habitats or sources of pollution. This program will provide valuable information on discharge points and outfalls, unstable stream banks, artificial stream bank modifications, impacting land uses, large patches of exotic and/or invasive vegetation, possible barriers to fish passage, and illegal dump sites. The project will help direct future restoration projects within the Santa Monica Bay region by identifying future restoration opportunities. The goal of the program is to train volunteers and landowners to be successful stewards of their watersheds. A continual field presence in the watershed will enable the team to identify small problems before they become large degradation problems. It is hoped that the Stream Watch presence will increase the chances of successfully restoring and maintaining healthy watersheds. The results of the project will provide also useful insight into the status of these areas before and after the 2006 mudsnail infestation and recent fires of 2007, including status and trends in water quality, photo monitoring, GIS data tracking and assessing the success of the invasive control and restoration projects.

Stream Team Data Collection

The Stream Team project will collect data on water quality, stream health and macroinvertebrate biota in the watershed; to assess the effectiveness of restoration efforts and/or Best Management Practices in the Malibu Creek Watershed; and to provide valuable data for other decision makers. Heal the Bay's Stream Team volunteers have been monitoring water quality throughout the Malibu Creek Watershed since 1998. This program encourages citizen education and stewardship, and maintains an on-line database of water chemistry and stream condition data that is accessible to any interested party. The environmental mapping component of Stream Team has identified hundreds of stream restoration sites including invasive vegetation, erosion sources, and fish migration barriers.

Heal the Bay ceased monitoring in the Malibu Creek watershed in 2006 when the highly invasive New Zealand mudsnail was identified at a number of monitoring sites because of concerns that the monitoring activities could spread the invasion. Long term, comprehensive data is important to understand the status and trends of resources in the Santa Monica Mountains and ultimately the Santa Monica Bay. Conservancy funds for this project will enable the Stream Team Program to resume the program using protocols that prevent the further spread of mudsnails while allowing Heal the Bay to continue providing crucial data to resource and regulatory agencies for resource assessments, and restoration prioritization.

Stream Team data collection will target 8 to 10 monitoring sites and include habitat quality and water chemistry on a monthly basis and benthic macroinvertebrate sampling twice yearly. Monitoring protocols are outlined by The Freshwater and Marine Team Field Guide (2003) and are

consistent with the California Stream Bioassessment Procedure (1993), Measuring the Health of California Streams and Rivers (Harrington & Born, 2000), and the latest protocols approved by State Water Resources Control Board's Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program. In addition, sampling protocol will be developed with the guidance of California Department of Fish and Game and the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission. Surveys will be conducted by Heal the Bay staff prior to Stream Team activities to monitor the level of spread and infestation of exotic species (particularly, the New Zealand mudsnail) throughout the watershed and to assist in directing volunteer monitoring efforts. In addition to the monitoring teams, education materials will be designed to help educate the general public recreating in these areas. The overall goal of the Stream Team project is to collect information that facilitates consistent and accurate water quality data by volunteer monitoring groups within the Santa Monica Bay region. Data collection efforts will be coordinated with the City of Calabasas, Las Virgenes Municipal Water District, and other monitoring entities.

SITE DESCRIPTION:

The Santa Monica Bay watershed, one of the nation's most highly urbanized regions, 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. 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 northern Santa Monica Bay watershed encompasses residential areas, commercial and industrial areas and undeveloped open space lands, primarily within the Santa Monica Mountains. There are 28 separate basins that drain to the Santa Monica Bay.

Malibu Creek watershed spans 110 square miles and is the second largest watershed draining to Santa Monica Bay. The lagoon at the terminus of the watershed is a 31 acre coastal estuary with a direct link to a very heavily used public beach that is one of the most popular surfing beaches in Southern California hosting about 1.5 million visitors per year. The lagoon provides habitat for two federally listed endangered species, the tidewater goby and steelhead trout, hosts an abundance of avian species and is a critical stop-over for migrating birds along the Pacific flyway.

The proposed project will occur on publicly owned lands in the northern Santa Monica Bay watershed. Heal the Bay works cooperatively with the land owners, such as the California Department of Parks and Recreation, to access the sites and conduct project activities.

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) 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 a national estuary project, 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 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.

In 2001, the Coastal Conservancy awarded a grant to Heal the Bay to document areas of poor water quality in the Malibu Creek watershed and to initiate activities to improve it. This project was completed in April 2005 and resulted in development of data collection protocols and mapping of resources within the Malibu Creek watershed. Heal the Bay has also received funding from the State Water Board to implement riparian restoration projects at Malibu Creek State Park, including removal of an Arizona crossing in the Creek last year. The proposed project will build on the earlier Conservancy grant by continuing data collection efforts and by implementing restoration activities that will benefit riparian habitat and improve water quality in this region for years to come.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	$300,000
Heal the Bay (in-kind)	$100,000
Total Project Cost	**$400,000**

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is an appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). Consistent with the purposes of this funding source, this project will help restore the natural habitat values of coastal waters and lands and prevent degradation of coastal watersheds. The proposed project is consistent with the prioritization criteria in Proposition 84 because it will help restore the Malibu Creek watershed, which is an important landscape linkage. In addition, the project will contribute to watershed protection through improvement of water and biological quality in this important watershed. The grantee will provide $100,000 in non-state matching funds. Proposition 84 requires that water quality monitoring be integrated into the Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP) administered by the State Water Resources Control Board. Consistent with that requirement, the water quality data collected as part of this project will use the SWAMP protocols and will be integrated into that program.

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. Consistent with Section 31251, the proposed authorization would award a grant to a nonprofit organization to enhance coastal resources that have become degraded due to invasive exotic plants and human-induced events impacting habitat and water quality. The proposed project would contribute to the enhancement of the natural and scenic character of the area and the ability of the watershed to support steelhead trout and other wildlife species.

Public Resources Code Section 31253 provides that the Conservancy "may provide up to the total cost of any coastal resource enhancement project. . . ." As a nonprofit organization, Heal the Bay is eligible to receive a grant from the Conservancy. Due to the limited resources of this organization and their dependence on volunteers for a portion of the project, staff is recommending that the Conservancy contribute 75 percent of the funds needed to carry out the project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES:

Consistent with **Goal 5 Objective B**, the proposed project will help restore and enhance coastal habitats, including coastal wetlands and stream corridors by improving water quality, controlling invasive species and restoring native riparian habitat in a significant portion of the Santa Monica Bay watershed.

Consistent with **Goal 5 Objective C**, the proposed project will help preserve and restore wildlife corridors within watersheds linking coastal habitats with upland habitats in the Santa Monica Mountains. In addition, the riparian corridor along Malibu Creek and Solstice Creek provides critical habitat for the federally-listed steelhead trout as well as important wildlife movement connectivity to other areas across the Santa Monica Mountains.

Consistent with **Goal 5 Objective D**, the proposed project specifically targets the control and eradication of invasive animal and plant species that threaten native coastal habitats and by adopting monitoring protocol to avoid spreading invasive mudsnails and removing non-native invasive vegetation and planting native plants to restore the habitat. In addition, the program educates volunteers and public citizens about invasive species trains them to prevent the introduction and spread of such species.

Consistent with **Goal 6 Objective B,** the proposed project will serve to preserve and restore the northern portion of the Santa Monica Bay watershed, which is a significant coastal watershed in Southern California, by implementing multiple habitat restoration projects and contributing to improved water quality.

Consistent with **Goal 6 Objective F,** the proposed project will improve water quality, within a priority coastal watershed by collecting data and initiating focused activities to benefit water quality within each sub-watershed, such as revegetating fire damaged areas to prevent erosion and minimizing sediment input into the creeks and Santa Monica Bay, thereby improving water

quality to benefit coastal resources. In addition, the monitoring data collected by the project will help direct future projects aimed to improve water quality in the watershed.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on September 20, 2007, 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 from the public:** The proposed project enjoys widespread community and agency support. The proposed project has the support of elected officials including Senator Sheila Kuehl, Assemblywoman Julia Brownley, public agencies, including the National Park Service, California Department of Parks and Recreation, Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission, Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains, State Water Resources Control Board, and community volunteers. Letters of support are attached as Exhibit 3. Additional letters will be hand-carried to the meeting.

4. **Location:** The proposed project is in the coastal zone of the Santa Monica Mountains and will benefit stream, riparian and coastal wetland habitat and ocean resources.

5. **Need:** The cost of the proposed two-year project is estimated at $400,000. The requested Conservancy contribution will provide approximately 75% of the proposed restoration and monitoring costs associated with the project. The remaining 25% is anticipated to be contributed in the form of citizen volunteers. Without Conservancy funding the grantee would not be able to implement the project.

6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The project focuses on watersheds draining into the Santa Monica Bay, which has been identified by both the State of California and the US EPA as a coastal water body of national significance. Further, at the terminus of the Malibu Creek watershed, the lagoon represents an important coastal wetland resource hosting both avian and aquatic species of important statewide and regional ecological significance, including two federally listed endangered species, the tidewater goby and steelhead trout, and it is a critical stop-over for migrating birds along the Pacific flyway. The adjacent beach is a world-renowned surfing and recreational destination that receives approximately 1.5 million visitors every year. In addition, Solstice Creek is within the area designated as critical habitat for southern steelhead trout and is a part of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area which includes 153,075 acres and is the world's largest urban national park.

Additional Criteria

8. Resolution of more than one issue: The proposed project addresses stream water quality, which affects wildlife habitat as well as human recreational use of the Santa Monica Bay, and riparian resource enhancement in important coastal watersheds that are known to support (historically or currently) southern steelhead, a federally-listed endangered species.

12. **Readiness:** Heal the Bay's Stream Team volunteers have been monitoring water quality throughout the Malibu Creek Watershed since 1998, having to cease work for a period due to the discovery of the presence of the invasive New Zealand mudsnail in the creek. Protocols have been developed and the team is ready to begin monitoring again. The proposed project is part of a long-term monitoring and restoration program and is set to begin March 1, 2008.

13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The 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. Through previous Conservancy grants, Heal the Bay has documented areas of poor water quality in this watershed and initiated activities for its improvement. The proposed project builds upon this earlier work aiming to benefit water quality in this region for years to come.

15. **Cooperation:** The Stream Team is a cooperative venture involving a broad range of interested and affected stakeholders including public citizens, environmental groups, and local, regional, state and federal agencies. Heal the Bay will be working cooperatively with the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission throughout the duration of this project.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is to be undertaken within the Santa Monica Mountains area in the coastal zone. The upper portion is in the County of Los Angeles' Santa Monica Mountains Coastal Zone. The County of Los Angeles is currently in the process of updating its Local Coastal Program (LCP), which it expects to bring before the Coastal Commission in 2008. When approved, the County's LCP will replace the Malibu Land Use Plan which the Coastal Commission certified in 1986 and is a component of the Los Angeles County General Plan.

Malibu Creek watershed is identified in the 1986 Malibu Land Use Plan as a "Significant watershed" (p.59) because of its riparian habitat. The plan lays out numerous policies to prevent degradation of these resources. The proposed project is consistent with the goals of the 1986 Malibu Land Use Plan because the project would maintain and enhance the water quality of creeks draining into the Santa Monica Bay and restore the sensitive riparian habitat and quality of Malibu Creek, sustain and enhance its biological productivity, and help provide habitat suitable for healthy populations of steelhead that re-enter and inhabit the creek.

The lower portion of the project lies within the City of Malibu's certified LCP area. This project is consistent with the Malibu Local Coastal Program Land Use Plan policies, including those that call for protection of Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area (ESHA) against significant disruption of habitat values (§3.8 and 3.23), prescribe natural buffer areas around parklands (§3.24), and encourage habitat restoration and invasive plant eradication to prevent soil erosion and stream siltation (§3.45) or protect and enhance habitat values (§3.25 and 3.50). Invasive plant eradication and native habitat restoration are a permitted use in an ESHA under the LCP's Local Implementation Plan. In Section 4.2 Marine and Land Resource Protection, the LUP recognizes the importance of both sensitive marine and land resources, including the terrestrial riparian, wetland and associated upland habitats. The LUP includes several policies requiring the conservation, restoration and enhancement of these important coastal resources. The proposed project would enhance water quality and habitat values in the Malibu Creek watershed and along other creeks draining to the Santa Monica Bay.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15333 because it will affect an area of less than five acres to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife, and (a) there will be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 15065; (b) there are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed; and (c) the project will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects. Data collection activities that do not cause a major environmental disturbance are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15306.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.