

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

January 17, 2008

**ROSE CREEK WATERSHED ASSESSMENT
RESTORATION ALTERNATIVES**

File No. 05-042-02

Project Manager: Christopher Kroll

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$237,600 to San Diego EarthWorks to complete a detailed assessment of the hydrologic, hydraulic, sediment transport and geomorphic conditions of the Rose Creek watershed and to develop restoration alternatives based on 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

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [June 16, 2005 and August 14 2003 Staff Recommendations](#)

Exhibit 3: [Watershed Assessment: Action Recommendations \(Chap. 2\)](#)

Exhibit 4: [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 two hundred thirty seven thousand six hundred dollars (\$237,600) to San Diego EarthWorks (also known as San Diego Earth Day) for completion 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

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scope of work, 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, last adopted by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007.
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.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy provide a grant of up to \$237,600 to San Diego EarthWorks (SDEW) to complete a detailed assessment of the hydrologic, hydraulic, sediment transport and geomorphic conditions of the Rose Creek watershed to evaluate the feasibility of restoration opportunities identified in the *Rose Creek Watershed Opportunities Assessment* (watershed assessment). In addition, SDEW will develop restoration alternatives based on the opportunities identified in the watershed assessment.

The watershed assessment has received widespread support from communities in the watershed, environmental groups and elected representatives. The project has won both American Planning Association (APA) and American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) planning awards.

The proposed project would implement one of the key recommendations of the watershed assessment, completion of a watershed-wide hydrologic assessment. The Conservancy provided a grant in 2005 (see Exhibit 2) to help in funding the preparation of a hydrology study for the watershed. SDEW anticipated securing additional funding as a match for the Conservancy grant to complete the study. SDEW has, however, been unable to secure those matching funds. Using the Conservancy’s grant, SDEW’s consultants have developed a detailed scope of work for the study and have completed the following activities: 1) review and summary of existing data; 2) field assessment; 3) identification of data gaps; 4) filling data gaps; and 5) existing conditions summary. In addition, SDEW has completed environmental documentation and permitting work related to invasive vegetation removal in the lower watershed. SDEW has, however, been unable to secure additional funding to complete the detailed hydrologic assessment and several important tasks identified in the scope of work cannot be completed without further funding, specifically development of a numerical computer model and development of restoration alternatives. SDEW is, therefore, now requesting Conservancy funding to

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complete the study. The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) is preparing a utilities corridor study of the watershed which will be made available to SDEW's consultants to help in completing the hydrology study and developing the restoration alternatives.

SDEW submitted this project to the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project for incorporation into the 2008 Work Plan. The WRP Board of Governors approved this request at their November 29, 2007 meeting. Rose Creek remains an important restoration opportunity and staff is recommending funding the completion of this study so that feasible restoration alternatives can be developed.

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 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.

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 includes approximately two thirds of the Marine Corps Air Station at Miramar (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.

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 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

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Project History:

See June 16, 2005 Staff Recommendation (Exhibit 2) for a complete discussion of project history.

A stakeholder group, the Rose Creek Watershed Alliance, has been 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 watershed 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 County Bicycle Coalition, the Mission Bay Planning Group, the Clairemont Mesa Planning Group, the Nobel Recreation Council and the Clairemont Town Council.

The *Rose Creek Watershed Opportunities Assessment Draft (Existing Conditions Report)* was released in January 2005. A final draft version of the watershed assessment was released in November 2005. Since November 2005, SDEW and the Rose Creek Watershed Alliance have been working to implement recommendations of the watershed assessment while securing formal City of San Diego adoption of the plan (expected in early 2008). Key activities presently underway include: securing a programmatic permit to control exotic non-native vegetation, holding workshops/meetings with area property owners and the City of San Diego Police Department to discuss reducing illegal activities such as homeless camps and dump sites that impact watershed health, investigating the possibility of establishing a maintenance assessment district for the urbanized southern portion of the watershed, and planning for the creation of 80+/- acres of wetlands in Mission Bay at the mouth of Rose Creek.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$237,600
SANDAG	<u>216,000</u>
Total Project Cost:	\$453,600

Staff expects to use funds appropriated to the Conservancy in fiscal year 2007-08 from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). This funding source may be used for the protection of coastal watersheds, including projects to protect and restore the natural habitat values of coastal waters and lands, pursuant to the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The proposed project will develop restoration alternatives which, if implemented, would restore natural habitat values of the Rose Creek watershed by, for example, removing non-native invasive vegetation and significant reaches of concrete channel from the creek. In addition, as discussed below, the project is consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21.

Proposition 84 also requires that for restoration projects that protect natural resources, the Conservancy assess whether the project meets at least one of the criteria specified in

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Section 75071(a)-(e). The Rose Creek watershed provides landscape/habitat linkages between two large blocks of protected habitat, Mission Bay and MCAS Miramar. The proposed project would result in the development of restoration alternatives which would address improving those linkages by analyzing the possibility of removing sections of concrete channel currently in the creek which likely interfere with wildlife movement. Removal of these concrete channel sections would likely result in improved wildlife movement and in a sustainable wildlife corridor from MCAS Miramar to Mission Bay consistent with Section 75071(a).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

As described in detail in the June 16, 2005 and August 14, 2003 Staff Recommendations (both attached as 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 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES:

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objectives 5A, 5B, 5C, and 5D**, the proposed project may lead to the restoration and enhancement of coastal wetland, coastal sage scrub, oak woodland and stream corridor habitat, preservation and restoration of wildlife corridors (from coastal to inland habitat area) and control of invasive species in a coastal watershed. The watershed assessment includes specific recommendations addressing these issues and the proposed project would develop restoration alternatives from these recommendations.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objectives 6A, 6B, 6E, and 6F**, the proposed project would lead to the development of restoration alternatives which, if implemented, would preserve and restore a coastal watershed. These alternatives would address water quality improvements to benefit coastal ocean resources.

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 of the public:** The proposed project is supported by the Rose Creek Watershed Alliance and several elected officials in the area. Letters of support are provided in Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The Rose Creek watershed is a coastal watershed. It lies entirely within the City of San Diego and enters into Mission Bay
5. **Need:** The financial support and participation of the Conservancy are critical for the success of this project because SDEW and the City lack the financial resources to proceed with the planning effort.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Rose Creek watershed is one of the major watersheds of southern San Diego County and provides a corridor for wildlife between inland areas and Mission Bay. San Diego's urban canyons, like Rose Creek Canyon, are a focus of the regional MSCP planning efforts to protect biodiversity in southwestern San Diego County.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** It is important now to complete the hydrologic assessment so the restoration alternatives can be developed and implemented. SDEW has completed a portion of the assessment but needs additional funds to complete it.
8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The watershed assessment addresses the major issues needing to be addressed in the Rose Creek watershed. These issues include habitat restoration, water quality, recreation, and cultural resources.
9. **Readiness:** SDEW and its consultants are ready now to begin the work needed to complete the hydrologic assessment and develop the restoration alternatives.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The project is consistent with the Local Coastal Program policies. See June 16, 2005 and August 14, 2003 Staff Recommendations (both attached as 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

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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.