

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
December 6, 2012

**SAN DIEGO RIVER TRAIL  
FLUME TRAIL SEGMENT CONSTRUCTION**

Project No. 12-051-01  
Project Manager: Christopher Kroll

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to four hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$450,000) to the County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation to construct the approximately 2.5-mile Flume Trail segment of the San Diego River Trail.

**LOCATION:** Lakeside, San Diego County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)
  - Exhibit 2: [San Diego River Trail](#)
  - Exhibit 3: [Flume Trail](#)
  - Exhibit 4: [Photo](#)
  - Exhibit 5: [San Diego River Conservancy Resolution](#)
  - Exhibit 6: [Project Letters](#)
  - Exhibit 7: [Mitigated Negative Declaration](#)
  - Exhibit 8: [Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program](#)
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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400-31410 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy (“the Conservancy”) hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to four hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$450,000) to the County of San Diego (“the County”) to construct the approximately 2.5-mile Flume Trail segment of the San Diego River Trail.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the County shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

- a. A work program, including final design plans and specifications, schedule and budget for construction.
- b. Evidence that all necessary permits and approvals have been obtained.
- c. A signing plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy funding.”

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 current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding a system of public accessways to and along the coast.
3. The proposed project would serve a greater-than-local need.
4. The Conservancy has independently reviewed the Mitigated Negative Declaration, public comment and Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (attached to the accompanying staff recommendation) adopted by the County on September 26, 2012 for the proposed project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act. The Conservancy finds that there is no substantial evidence that the project, as mitigated, will have a significant effect on the environment as defined in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382.”

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### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to four hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$450,000) to the County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation (“the County”) to construct the Flume Trail segment of the San Diego River Trail (see Exhibit 1). The San Diego River Conservancy (“SDRC”) is working with the County and other local agencies to complete the trail. This approximately 2.5-mile trail segment will complete a portion of the river trail identified as a high priority in the San Diego River Trail Gaps Analysis report.

The San Diego River Trail (see Exhibit 2) is the central focus of the proposed 52-mile San Diego River Park and, once completed, the trail will provide a very important regional trail link between the coast and inland communities. The San Diego River Park will be a greenbelt along the San Diego River with the river trail connecting parks, open space areas, and community facilities spread out along the length of the river. Completion of the trail is the priority of the SDRC’s mission to develop a continuous trail from the Pacific Ocean to the headwaters of the river. The San Diego River Trail has been identified as one of four Regional Bike Plan “Early

Action Projects” by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) that should be given highest priority for implementation. This project, along with the other authorizations before this board, will significantly further development of the trail.

The Flume Trail (see Exhibit 3) will complete segment 60A and a portion of segment 63 of the river trail as identified in the Trail Gaps Analysis report. The trail will be multi-use (hiking, biking, equestrian) and will be located within the existing ten-foot wide bench cut of the historic flume alignment (see Exhibit 4). This project is listed as a priority in Annual Work Plans for SDRC and the San Diego River Coalition, an organization comprising more than 70 community based conservation groups and stakeholders.

The 36-mile San Diego Flume was completed in 1889 and carried water from Lake Cuyamaca to El Cajon. From there water was sent via pipelines to several communities including the City of San Diego. The aqueduct included several tunnels and over 300 trestles and operated for 40 years until the mid-1930s. There are few remnants of the flume today. The Flume Trail project will incorporate interpretive signs that document the history of the flume.

The County constructs, operates, and manages trails on lands owned by the County as well as operates and manages trails dedicated to the County on privately-owned lands within unincorporated areas of San Diego County. The Flume Trail is part of the County of San Diego’s adopted County Trails Program, and the proposed alignment of the trail is shown on the County’s Community Trails Master Plan for Lakeside. The County is on the SDRC’s Governing Board and participates in the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG), a technical working group that reports progress on the planning and implementation of the San Diego River Trail to the SDRC Board.

**Site Description:** The proposed trail runs in an east-west direction within an existing bench cut along the 50-foot-wide County-owned historic flume alignment. The flume alignment is located along the north/northwest-facing slope approximately 1,000 feet south of El Monte County Park. Surrounding land uses include El Capitan Mountain and the El Capitan Reservoir to the east, portions of the El Capitan Preserve to the north and west, and residential development associated with the communities of Blossom Valley to the south and Lakeside to the southwest. Elevations along the trail alignment range from approximately 650 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) to 900 feet AMSL.

The north-facing slope of the trail area, located immediately south of the El Monte County Park, is dominated by Diegan coastal sage scrub and southern mixed chaparral. Areas along the slope burned in the 2003 Cedar Fire and are regenerating with native vegetation. The bench cut of the historic flume alignment was previously cleared of vegetation; however, it is currently overgrown. The proposed alignment of the Flume Trail traverses non-native grasslands, coast live oak woodlands, southern mixed chaparral, coastal sage scrub, and disturbed habitat.

The project area abuts large preserve areas such as the Cleveland National Forest, the El Capitan Preserve, and the County’s El Monte County Park.

**Project History:** The proposed project was identified in the San Diego River Trail Gaps Analysis, which was funded by the Conservancy. The Gaps Analysis provided a preliminary identification of priority projects for completing the trail. These projects were approved as capital priorities by SDRC and the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG). The SDRC established the IWG to institute regional collaboration among elected officials and participation

by key staff to address technical issues regarding priorities, construction and management of the trail. The Conservancy endorsed the formation of the IWG and is currently a member.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	\$450,000
<b>County of San Diego</b>	<u>154,008</u>
<b>Total Project Costs</b>	<b>\$604,008</b>

The anticipated source of funds for this project is the appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). These funds may be used to protect San Diego Bay and adjacent watersheds, as specified in Section 75060(f). Construction of a segment of the San Diego River Trail will promote access to the San Diego River and the San Diego River watershed, which is adjacent to the San Diego Bay watershed. In addition, these funds may be used to “promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state” in accordance with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Public Resources Code Section 75060(b)). The proposed project will contribute to the creation of a San Diego River Parkway from the headwaters to the ocean. Completion of the river trail will thus improve access to the coast.

Consistent with the anticipated source of funds, this project has been authorized by the SDRC for funding on September 6, 2012 (see Exhibit 5). The proposed project is consistent with the SDRC’s enabling legislation, Division 22.9 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 32630-32661. Section 32633 (b) authorizes the SDRC to provide for the public's enjoyment and enhance the public’s recreational and educational experience along the river.

The County has already contributed to the cost of this project by purchasing the needed parcel of land, and paying for all related acquisition costs, an aerial survey, and environmental studies required as part of the CEQA review for the construction project.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 (§31400-31405) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Section 31400 states that the Conservancy shall have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The proposed action will help develop public trails that will connect inland communities to the coast. Pursuant to Section 31409, the Conservancy may award grants and provide assistance to public agencies to establish and expand those inland trail systems that may be linked to the California Coastal Trail. Consistent with the evaluation criteria of Section 31400.2, staff has evaluated the cost of the project in light of the total amount of funds available for coastal accessways and finds it is reasonable for a construction project of this size, the County does not have other available funds to complete the project, and the project is a high priority for the SDRC and the Conservancy as discussed in the Project Selection Criteria, below. Consistent with Section 31400.3, the activities supported through the recommended grant to the County are

all directly related to the development and operation of a system of public accessways to and along the coast in order to meet the objectives of Division 21.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective F** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will construct approximately 2.5 miles of the San Diego River Trail, a regional trail linking inland communities with the coast.

**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 November 10, 2011, 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:** Supporters of the San Diego River Trail and construction of the Flume Trail segment include the following: Senator Christine Kehoe, Assemblymember Toni Atkins, Supervisor Dianne Jacob, Lakeside River Park Conservancy, Blossom Valley Equestrians, Lakeside Historical Society, San Diego River Conservancy, San Diego River Park Foundation, San Diego River Coalition, and San Diego County Bicycle Coalition (See Project Letters Exhibit 6).
4. **Location:** The 52-mile San Diego River Trail, once completed, will link inland communities to the coast. The Flume Trail segment of the trail is located in the inland community of Lakeside in unincorporated San Diego County.
5. **Need:** The County and other funders of the San Diego River Trail do not have the funds available to complete the remaining priority gaps in the trail without additional funding from other sources, such as the Conservancy.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The San Diego River Trail is a very significant regional trail that will serve a large population in San Diego County and will likely be used by visitors to the region as well.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed project is located well inland from the coast and will not be impacted by sea level rise.

**Additional Criteria**

8. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.

9. **Readiness:** The County has acquired the land needed for the trail, designed the trail and completed all environmental analysis. The County is prepared to begin work on the project as soon as possible.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
11. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** The project site may be vulnerable to increased risk of fire and associated impacts. Fuel management practices in place at El Monte County Park and the adjacent open space to the south of the project site will reduce the likelihood of fire danger to the project.
12. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The project construction will minimize greenhouse gas emissions by relying mostly on hand tools and small machines. The project is not expected to generate additional vehicle trips as it will connect with the existing trail and staging area at the adjacent El Monte County Park. Once completed, the San Diego River Trail will connect communities, provide access to the coast, and may help reduce vehicle miles traveled. The County of San Diego’s Climate Action Plan calls for developing and implementing off-street bicycle trails that can be used for recreational travel and commuting purposes to reduce carbon emissions.

#### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the County prepared and adopted a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for this project and adopted a Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (See Exhibits 7 & 8). Impacts of constructing and operating the Flume Trail were evaluated in the MND. The MND identified three potentially significant impacts that have been avoided through design and construction practices. The potential environmental impacts associated with constructing and operating the Flume Trail and the corresponding mitigation are summarized as follows:

- **Impact:** There are several sensitive plant and animal species identified in the project survey area. These species could be impacted by development of the trail.
- **Mitigation:** 1) Mitigation for unavoidable direct effects to habitat occupied by sensitive species will be set according to ratios outlined in the County of San Diego Biological Mitigation Ordinance; 2) Pre-construction training for construction crews to inform them of sensitive species that may occur along the proposed trail; 3) No brushing, clearing, and/or grading will occur within 300 feet of suitable habitat during the breeding season of the California gnatcatcher (March 1 – August 15); 4) No brushing, clearing, and/or grading will occur within 500 feet of suitable habitat during the tree-nesting raptor breeding season (January 15 – July 15) and within 800 feet of suitable habitat during the ground-nesting raptor breeding season (February 1 – July 31). Measures 3 and 4 can be waived if surveys determine that no active nests occur on-site.
- **Impact:** Development of the trail could have an adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community.
- **Mitigation:** 1) Mitigation for direct effects of the project will be compensated at a ratio of 1.5:1 for impacts to 1.78 acres of Diegan coastal sage scrub, 1:1 for impacts to 0.91 acre

of southern mixed chaparral, and 0.5:1 for impacts to 0.30 acre of nonnative grassland; 2) Impacts will be mitigated through the purchase of 2.67 acres of Tier II habitat or higher and 1.06 acres of Tier III habitat or higher mitigation credits within an approved mitigation bank or preservation of habitat in accordance with San Diego County Board Policy I-138; 3) On-going maintenance and monitoring for the trail will be coordinated with implementation of the Resource Management Plan for El Monte County Park.

- Impact: Development of the trail could have an adverse impact on historical/cultural resources.
- Mitigation: 1) Prior to construction, the County will relocate and place temporary fencing around all identified historical resources within the project area and confirm that the trail alignment avoids these resources; 2) Prior to construction, a professional archaeologist will provide cultural resource sensitivity training to construction personnel; and 3) The County will install interpretive signs along the trail to inform trail users of the presence and significance of historical resources.

In addition, the MND incorporates five critical project design measures to reduce the level of environmental impacts from the project to a less than significant level:

- Trail maintenance will be confined to the existing trail alignment and will avoid impacting biological and cultural resources within the project area. Park rangers will monitor the trail on a daily basis. Adverse effects associated with increased human use will be addressed through construction of fence segments, installation of signs or other means.
- Impacts to County Group A (rare, threatened or endangered in California and elsewhere) and B (rare, threatened or endangered in California but more common elsewhere) plant species will be avoided by construction methodology and flagging by a biologist if the plant is in bloom and can be identified. No offsite fill is allowed.
- The County will conduct annual condition monitoring of the historical resources along the trail and take any necessary corrective measures.
- The project will implement site design measures, source control, and/or treatment control Best Management Practices (BMPs) to reduce potential pollutants during construction.
- Dust control measures will be implemented as needed during construction.

The County prepared and adopted a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) to ensure that these measures are enforced (Exhibit 8). As a responsible agency under CEQA, Conservancy staff independently reviewed the County's MND and recommends that the Conservancy find there is no substantial evidence that the construction and operation of the Flume Trail, as mitigated, will have a significant effect on the environment as defined in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382. Staff will file a Notice of Determination upon approval of the proposed authorization.