

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 6, 2012

SAN DIEGO RIVER TRAIL: PLANNING FOR QUALCOMM SEGMENT

Project No. 12-047-01
Project Manager: Megan Cooper

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to one hundred sixty eight thousand dollars (\$168,000) to the San Diego Association of Governments to complete environmental review and planning of the Qualcomm Stadium segment of the San Diego River Trail.

LOCATION: City of San Diego, County of San Diego

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31111 and 31400-31410 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to one hundred sixty eight thousand dollars (\$168,000) to the San Diego Association of Governments (“SANDAG”) to complete preliminary engineering and environmental analysis for the Qualcomm Stadium segment of the San Diego River Trail.

Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, SANDAG shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, budget, schedule, and the names of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the work.”

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.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to one hundred sixty eight thousand dollars (\$168,000) to the San Diego Association of Governments (“SANDAG”), in partnership with the San Diego River Conservancy (“SDRC”), to complete planning of the Qualcomm Stadium segment of the San Diego River Trail. This approximately one-mile segment of trail will provide pedestrian and bicycle access to high-use activity centers and two light rail stations. SANDAG will develop preliminary project plans and obtain environmental clearances for this trail segment.

SANDAG, with the approval of the 2050 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) has demonstrated a commitment to planning of regional transportation systems that further enhances the quality of life of those living, visiting and working in San Diego County. Included in the RTP, the San Diego Regional Bicycle Plan promotes active transportation through the planning of interconnected and safe walk and bikeways throughout the region. The Bicycle Plan acknowledges the importance of completing the regional network of Class I bike paths, including the San Diego River Trail, to provide mobility options, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and otherwise improve public health by encouraging ‘active transportation.’

The San Diego River Trail (the “Trail”), which realizes one of the SDRC’s greatest priorities to develop a continuous trail from the Pacific Ocean to the River’s headwaters, will provide a convenient path between the communities of Ocean Beach and Lakeside, once all of the segments have been completed. Qualcomm Stadium cannot currently be accessed from the Trail. The Stadium is a major hub of activity for the region and it would be a great benefit for Trail users to have access to it. The existing trolley station at the Stadium, and the City’s discussions of converting the approximately 30 acres of land between the trolley line and the River into a park, make this location a current and future hub of recreational activities. The Qualcomm segment, once built, will connect to an existing multi-use trail and Class I bike path to the west and a redevelopment area to the east that will transform the Class III bike path into an improved trail along the River.

The project will include the following tasks: 1) identify a final trail alignment through preferred trail alignment alternatives analysis; 2) conduct stakeholder outreach; 3) develop 30 percent plans for the work; and 4) conduct California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) environmental review of the proposed design alternatives. Preliminary project plans would be developed with stakeholder engagement to ensure community support for the project. The project will be accomplished through a collaborative process between SANDAG, the SDRC and the City of San Diego. The project will enable SANDAG to proceed to the final design and construction phase as funding is identified and will result in a segment of Class I bicycle path suitable for users of all ages and skill levels.

The proposed project is made possible by a unique collaboration between the SDRC and SANDAG, the region's metropolitan planning organization. The project will benefit from the experience SANDAG has developed in regional bikeway development through its work on the Bayshore Bikeway/California Coastal Trail and the SDRC's previous work developing the San Diego River Trail. SANDAG manages almost \$8 billion in planning and capital projects each year.

Site Description: The proposed project site will stretch from Fenton Parkway to Rancho Mission Road through the Qualcomm Stadium parking lot, located in the City of San Diego (Exhibit 1, Figure 2) (segment 019 from the San Diego River Trail Gaps Analysis (2010)). The project limits are from the cul-de-sac on the south end of Fenton Parkway, east through the Qualcomm Stadium parking lot to the existing bicycle route under Interstate-15 along Rancho Mission Road. The western limit of the project, at Fenton Parkway, is adjacent to the Fenton Parkway Light Rail Station and the Mission Valley Community library. The proposed alignment would be on a previously paved slope between the light rail right-of-way area and a service road for Fenton Market Place. The proposed alignment would transition down to the grade of the existing Qualcomm Stadium parking lot. The alignment would then proceed under or adjacent to the light rail structure and tracks to the Qualcomm Stadium Station, then east to the entrance of Rancho Mission Road providing access into Qualcomm Stadium parking lot. An alternative alignment along the south side of the parking lot adjacent to the San Diego River will also be evaluated. The entire alignment will be on publicly owned land. The project also connects the Qualcomm Stadium parking lot to the south end of an existing one mile bike path that extends north along the east edge of the parking lot and along Murphy Canyon Road.

Project History: The proposed project was identified in the San Diego River Trail Gaps Analysis (2010), which was funded by the Conservancy. The Gaps Analysis provided a preliminary identification of priority projects for completing the Trail, which 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.

This project was listed as a priority in the 2012 Annual Work Plans for SDRC and the San Diego River Coalition, an organization comprising more than 70 community based conservation groups and stakeholders (Exhibit 3). The San Diego River Trail is also identified in SANDAG's Regional Bicycle Plan which is included in the Regional Transportation Plan, approved by the SANDAG Board of Directors in October of 2011. The San Diego River Trail has been identified as one of four Regional Bike Plan "Early Action Projects" by SANDAG that will be given highest priority for implementation (Exhibit 3, approved by the transportation committee on April 6, 2012).

PROJECT FINANCING

<u>Coastal Conservancy</u>	<u>\$168,000</u>
Total Project Costs	\$168,000

The anticipated source of funds for this project is the FY 2008/2009 (reappropriated FY 2011/2012) 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). This project is located in the San Diego River Watershed. In addition, Proposition 84 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 § 75060 (b)). Planning for the construction of approximately one mile of the San Diego River Trail will promote access to the San Diego River and will continue to realize the goal of creating a San Diego River Parkway from the headwaters to the ocean, which will provide greater access to the coast. As discussed below, the project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21.

Consistent with the relevant Budget Act requirements for these funds, this project has been authorized by the SDRC for funding on July 12, 2012 (Exhibit 3). The proposed project is consistent with the SDRC’s enabling legislation, Division 22.9 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 32630-32661, specifically § 32633 (b) which allows funding to provide for the public's enjoyment and enhance the recreational and educational experience along the River.

SANDAG has committed \$8,000 of in-kind services to this project, and has also committed \$250,000 to the further development of the San Diego River Trail. This \$250,000 will be used to identify and design the next trail segment that has been prioritized by the Intergovernmental Working Group and the SDRC. In addition to these planning funds SANDAG has also committed to completing development of the Qualcomm Stadium trail segment, which will involve identifying funding from a variety of sources.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Section 31111 broadly authorizes the Conservancy to fund or provide grants to public agencies like SANDAG for the preparation of plans and feasibility studies, as appropriate to implement the objectives of Division 21, the Conservancy’s enabling legislation.

The proposed project also 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. 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. The proposed action will help develop public trails that will connect inland communities to the Coastal Trail. Consistent with Section 31400.2, the proposed project

cost is reasonable for planning project of this size, SANDAG does not have other available funds to complete the project, and the project is a high priority for public access in the region. Consistent with Section 31400.3, the activities supported through the recommended grant to the City 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 E**, the proposed project would fund the design of approximately one mile of a river parkway trail to connect inland populations to the coast and expand recreational opportunities.

**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:** SANDAG represents 18 jurisdictions in San Diego County and the elected officials representing those jurisdictions serve as policy makers for regional planning. The San Diego River Coalition, representing 70 community-based groups, places the San Diego River Trail as a high priority on its Work Plan. State Senator Christine Kehoe and the County of San Diego are also strong supporters of efforts to implement the San Diego River Trail. See Project Support Letters, Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The project is not located in the coastal zone but will benefit coastal resources by providing for public access from inland communities to the ocean.
5. **Need:** With limited funds to implement the Regional Bike Plan and San Diego River Trail, not receiving funds for this project from the Conservancy could result in a significant delay in the implementation of this project, slowing important improvements to the regional bike network and in achieving the San Diego River Conservancy's goals for improving access to the river.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The project will create a continuous transportation corridor for non-motorized travel through the heart of the region, connecting inland areas around the San Diego River to public transit and to the heavily-used beaches near the mouth of the River. Mission Valley, near the project location and in the center of the San Diego River watershed,

contains numerous visitor facilities and accommodations. The trail will link these facilities to the beaches.

7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The Qualcomm Stadium Segment project of the San Diego River Trail is not located close to a shoreline and is not vulnerable to sea level rise. It is located significantly inland and at least 45 feet above sea level at all points.

Additional Criteria

10. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
13. **Readiness:** SANDAG is prepared to start the project immediately after receiving funding and can complete the project within two years.
14. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** “See “Project History” above.
16. **Cooperation:** The project is a result of cooperation among State and local governments and community members. The SDRC, a State agency, developed a relationship with SANDAG to initiate the project. The project also has the endorsement of over 60 community groups represented on the San Diego River Coalition.
17. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** Being in the floodplain of the San Diego River (along with most of Mission Valley), the proposed project could be vulnerable to increased flooding related to climate change. This phase of the project will determine the features of this trail segment and the potential climate change impacts will be taken into account.
18. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The long-term effects of the San Diego River Trail, including the Qualcomm Stadium Segment, will encourage non-motorized transportation from the coast to east San Diego County. This will translate into less vehicle trips taken, for work and recreation, by San Diegans thus reducing greenhouse emissions. In addition, the development of the Qualcomm Stadium Segment of the bike path will offer those who live in that community to have access to the bike and walking path as an alternative to driving to reach destinations for physical activity. This project is supportive of SANDAG’s Regional Climate Action Plan (2010), which calls for expanding low-carbon modes of transportation within the region.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

This project is located outside of the coastal zone. However, the project will have a positive impact on the coastal resources located at the terminus of the San Diego River Watershed by providing public access along the River to the coast, and connecting inland communities to the ocean and the Coastal Trail.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262 as it involves only planning or feasibility studies for possible future actions which have not yet been approved and the proposed

project will consider environmental factors. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the proposed project.