

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 29, 2014

The Green Solution Project: Upper Los Angeles River Watershed, Phase IV

Project No. 06-092-04
Project Managers: Joan Cardellino and Kelly Malinowski

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$297,000 to Community Conservation Solutions for the Green Solution Project: Upper LA River Watershed, Phase IV to evaluate the storm water capture and water quality improvement projects identified in Phases I-III of the Green Solutions Project by quantifying and incorporating these projects' water supply, energy savings, and greenhouse gas emission (GHG) reduction benefits.

LOCATION: Upper Los Angeles River Watershed, City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Climate Change

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Area Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Staff Recommendation for Green Solution Project: Upper Los Angeles River Watershed, Phase I](#)

Exhibit 3: [Letters of Support](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31113 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of up to two hundred ninety-seven thousand dollars (\$297,000) to Community Conservation Solutions (CCS) for Phase IV of the Green Solution Project: Upper LA River Watershed to further evaluate the storm water capture and water quality improvement projects identified in previous Phases I-III of the CCS Green Solutions Project by quantifying and incorporating these projects' water supply, energy savings, and greenhouse gas emission (GHG) reduction benefits.

Prior to the disbursement of funds, CCS shall submit for the review and approval of the Conservancy's Executive Officer a final work program, schedule, budget, names of any contractors, and a plan for 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 authorization is consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Section 31113 regarding climate change.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. CCS is a nonprofit organization existing under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize up to \$297,000 to Community Conservation Solutions (CCS), for Phase IV of the Green Solution Project: Upper LA River Watershed to quantify water storage, reuse and recharge potential for previously identified priority parcels in the upper Los Angeles River watershed and to calculate the beneficial reuse volumes and other benefits derived from having more local water. CCS completed Phases I-III of its Green Solution Project: Upper LA River Watershed project, funded in part by the Conservancy. Phase IV would calculate reduced greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) from energy savings associated with having more local water by creating a model with metrics replicable to other projects. Phase IV would use these quantifications to evaluate the implementation of 268 opportunity projects on public parcels suitable for storm water runoff capture on 3,150 acres of existing public school, college and vacant lands identified in previous Phases I-III of the CCS Green Solution Project.

Extensive urban development in the Upper Los Angeles River Watershed has resulted in vast areas of paved surfaces with high daily volumes of contaminated runoff that flow into the L.A. River. Dry weather runoff in the Upper L.A. River Watershed produces 46 million gallons of water every day; when it rains, the storm water volume increases exponentially. Polluted runoff contaminates all 51 miles of the L.A. River, over 45 miles of the L.A. River's tributaries in the Upper L.A. River Watershed, San Pedro Bay, and the beaches north and south of the L.A. River's mouth and ocean waters. All of the Upper L.A. River and most of its tributaries are in violation of the U.S. Clean Water Act for pollutant loads well above the state and federal standards. The Upper L.A. River Watershed accounts for 20% of the total relative contribution of runoff from Los Angeles County watersheds as a whole.

Urban runoff is the largest source of pollution to Southern California's coastal waters and includes bacteria, toxic metals, pesticides, household and industrial chemicals, trash, oil, fertilizers, and other toxins. To enforce federal standards, the L.A. Regional Water Quality Control Board has established six different Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) limits – with

more anticipated – for runoff flowing into the L.A. River. The proposed Phase IV project demonstrates a practical, replicable way to transform polluted runoff into a sustainable source of usable water and can help public agencies meet Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) requirements.

In addition to polluted runoff problems, the densely-developed urban areas of the Upper L.A. River Watershed also have some of the greatest open space deficits in California. The proposed project would restore habitat, create new parks and open space, and ensure that public funds are invested wisely to ensure the greatest positive impact. Green Solution projects improve water quality by using soil and plants to capture, filter and clean polluted storm water runoff, while creating networks of new parks, natural habitat, recreation and open space lands. The 268 priority public parcels identified in Phase III of the project could treat polluted runoff from up to 20 square miles and create nearly 1,000 acres of new parks, restored native habitat and open space, while providing over 2,000 acre-feet of new water supplies.

Runoff captured and filtered through restored habitats, new parks, and open space has the potential for reuse and creates a local water source that decreases L.A. County's need to import water, which in turn has great potential for energy savings and greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) reductions.

The proposed project offers benefits for water quality, reduced greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), and restored parks and open space, as well as new water supplies in water-scarce Los Angeles County. Additionally, this Phase IV project will model the calculations of GHG reductions with metrics so it can be applicable and replicable to other Conservancy projects state-wide.

Community Conservation Solution's mission is to tackle the most complex and challenging problems created when people and nature intersect by developing creative, practical and lasting solutions that unite diverse communities and interests and leverage investments of public funds. CCS has successfully crafted innovative solutions to serious environmental problems affecting California's natural and human communities by integrating the protection and restoration of natural lands and waters with compatible community uses, economic benefits and permanent public benefits. CCS received Conservancy funds for Phases I and II of the Green Solution Project: Upper Los Angeles River Watershed. CCS has proven to be a valuable and effective community partner, uniquely poised to tackle the complex water quality issues of the Upper Los Angeles River Watershed.

Site Description: The area for the proposed Phase IV project includes sites within the Upper Los Angeles River Watershed, in 15 cities: Alhambra, Burbank, Calabasas, Glendale, Hidden Hills, La Canada Flintridge, Los Angeles, Montebello, Monterey Park, Pasadena, Rosemead, San Gabriel, San Marino, South Pasadena, and Temple City. (See Exhibit 1.)

The entire Los Angeles River Watershed covers a land area of 834 square miles and extends from the Santa Monica Mountains to the Simi Hills in the south and west, and from the Santa Susana Mountains to the San Gabriel Mountains in the north and east.

Project History:

The Green Solution Project: Upper Los Angeles River Watershed, Phase IV builds on three previous phases, two of which (Phase I and II), were partially funded by the Conservancy. Phase I was a feasibility study to identify pilot projects that would treat urban storm water through the creation of a network of parks and open space areas in L.A. County to help meet water quality improvement goals. Phase I identified 1,500 public parcels throughout the Upper L.A. River Watershed suitable for conversion and retrofit to multiple benefit green spaces that could act as natural filters and treatment areas, while also creating a network of new parks, restored natural habitat, and open space. Products included a series of GIS-based maps depicting publicly-owned parcels within the Santa Monica Bay watershed, along with their size and general land uses.

Phase II built upon Phase I by further evaluating the identified 1,500 public parcels in the selected land uses of elementary, middle and high schools, colleges, and vacant lands in the Upper L.A. River Watershed.

Phase III provided a strategic roadmap to help decision-makers know where – and in what order – to implement storm water runoff capture projects on a watershed scale to maximize water quality, park creation, habitat restoration and other public benefits. Results included 268 prioritized opportunity public parcels suitable for storm water runoff capture on 3,150 acres of existing public school, college and vacant lands. Phase III also included specific concept designs for four of the highest priority school and vacant land opportunity sites in the Upper L.A. River Watershed.

Phase IV builds on Phases I-III to further evaluate for implementation prioritized storm water capture and water quality improvement projects identified in previous Phases I-III by quantifying and incorporating the projects’ water supply, energy savings, and greenhouse gas emission (GHG) reduction benefits. Not only will Phase IV evaluate prioritized storm water capture and water quality improvement projects for implementation, but calculations of reduced GHG emissions will be modeled with metrics replicable to other Conservancy projects statewide.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$297,000
Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy	\$250,000
Project Total	\$ 547,000

The proposed source of Conservancy funds for this authorization is the “Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006” (Proposition 84). These funds are available for the purposes of the Conservancy under Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, and the proposed project is being undertaken consistent with section 31113 of Division 21. (See Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation, below.)

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Section 31113, regarding the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy's jurisdiction. Consistent with this section, the proposed project evaluates the storm water capture and water quality improvement projects identified in Phases I-III of the Green Solutions Project by quantifying and incorporating these projects' water supply, energy savings, and GHG reduction benefits. Pursuant to Section 31113 (a), the Conservancy may undertake projects within its jurisdiction, including, but not limited to, those that reduce GHG emissions, address extreme weather events, sea level rise, storm surge, beach and bluff erosion, salt water intrusion, flooding, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources. Consistent with this section, the proposed authorization would also serve to reduce GHG emissions, as well as conserve energy, and integrate water supply and reuse. Pursuant to Section 31113 (b), the Conservancy may award grants to nonprofit organizations for the activities authorized pursuant to subdivision (a). Consistent with this section, Community Conservation Solution is a nonprofit organization undertaking a project which meets the conditions in Section 31113(a), as explained above.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2013 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 7, Objective F**, the proposed project would quantify potential reductions in energy savings and GHG associated with storm water reuse, and would be modeled with metrics replicable to other projects.

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:** This project is supported by a number of elected officials and organizations, as demonstrated by the letters of support provided in Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is not located within the Coastal Zone, but it would address polluted storm water and urban runoff that affects the coast as the proposed project locations in the L.A. River Watershed drain directly to the coast. The Upper L.A. River Watershed accounts for 20% of the total relative contribution of runoff from all L.A. County watersheds, and as urban runoff is the largest source of pollution threatening Southern California's coastal waters, improvements in the Upper L.A. River Watershed would benefit coastal waters.

5. **Need:** Without Conservancy funding, the proposed project would either not proceed, or have to be scaled back considerably, given that the Conservancy would contribute 54% of the total project cost and project tasks are dependent upon each other and needed for future project implementation.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Methods used to develop the CCS's 'Green Solution' tool to identify and select public lands for water quality improvement projects (that provide multiple benefits), can be replicated and adapted to help public agencies meet requirements of the State's Regional Water Quality Control Board and the U.S. Clean Water Act. It can also be used to restore habitat and create new parks and open space in other urbanized counties throughout California which suffer from water quality problems caused by urban and storm water runoff, impacting watersheds that drain to the coast. Further, replication and adaptation of the 'Green Solution' model can also serve to increase energy savings and decrease GHG emissions through storm water reuse.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The Upper L.A. River Watershed is not vulnerable to sea level rise.

Additional Criteria

8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** Impaired water quality in the Upper L.A. River Watershed impacts human health, as well as habitat function. The proposed project would provide information critical to improving water quality and storage; create multiple benefit parks; and promote water reuse to increase available water sources, increase energy savings and decrease GHG emissions.
9. **Leverage:** See the Project Financing section above. The proposed project leverages funds at a level greater than 1:1.
10. **Innovation:** 'Green Solution' is truly an innovative approach as the proposed project overturns long-held, conventional assumptions about the perceived limitations on reusing storm water and dry weather runoff, and demonstrates a practical, replicable way to transform polluted runoff into a sustainable source of usable water. In addition, the proposed project yields positive externalities by increasing open space, parks, and habitat, as well as increasing energy savings and reducing GHG emissions.
11. **Readiness:** Community Conservation Solutions has already conducted a scoping analysis for the proposed project, and is ready to start work immediately upon approval.
12. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See Project History, above.
13. **Return to Conservancy:** See the Project Financing section, above.
15. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** If implemented, the proposed project would increase energy savings and reduce GHG emissions through increasing the local water supply.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The project area for Phase IV of the Green Solution Project: Upper Los Angeles River Watershed is located in the upper watershed of the Los Angeles River which lies outside the Coastal Zone, which is not included in Los Angeles City's LCP.

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN/
STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board's Basin Plan which incorporates (by reference) all applicable State and Regional Board plans and policies and other pertinent water quality policies and regulations. The proposed project will specifically help achieve the adopted TMDLs for Los Angeles, as well as preserve and enhance water quality and protect the beneficial uses of all regional waters as detailed in the Basin Plan.

Additionally, the proposed project is consistent with the year 2035 planning targets outlined in the Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Plan for Greater Los Angeles County (GLAC) including improved water supply, improved surface water quality, enhanced habitat, and enhanced open space and recreation.

The proposed project also helps to meet goals identified in the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan to enhance water quality, restore a functional ecosystem, and extend open space, recreation, and water quality features into neighborhoods.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

This project is statutorily exempt from the provision of the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15262 because the proposed project involves feasibility and planning studies for future actions which the Conservancy has yet to fund, approve or adopt. The project will further evaluate prioritized projects identified in Phase III of the Green Solution Project to quantify and incorporate projects' water supply, energy savings, and greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) reduction benefits, in preparation for future implementation in a subsequent phase. The project is also categorically exempt under CCR Section 15306 because the proposed project involves basic data collection and resource evaluation activities. Consistent with this section, environmental factors will be considered in the proposed project. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon authorization of the proposed project.