

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

April 27, 2017

HOLLYDALE REGIONAL PARK URBAN GREENING

Project No. 16-060-01

Project Manager: Megan Cooper

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$332,500 to Amigos de los Rios to design and implement an urban greening project at Hollydale Regional Park in the City of South Gate, Los Angeles County.

LOCATION: South Gate, Los Angeles County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Integrated Coastal and Marine Resource Protection

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Design](#)

Exhibit 3: [Site Photos](#)

Exhibit 4: [Support Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Section 31220 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to three hundred thirty-two thousand, five hundred dollars (\$332,500) to Amigos de los Rios (“the grantee”) to plan and implement an urban greening project at Hollydale Regional Park in the City of South Gate. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Conservancy’s Executive Officer a work program, including budget and schedule; any contractors to be employed for work program tasks; a sign plan for acknowledging Conservancy funding; and a written agreement with the landowner sufficient to enable the grantee to implement and maintain 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 authorization is consistent with Chapter 5.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding integrated coastal and marine resource protection.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
 3. Amigos de los Rios 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.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to three hundred thirty-two thousand, five hundred dollars (\$332,500) to Amigos de los Rios (“the grantee”) to plan and implement the Hollydale Regional Park Green Infrastructure Project (“project”), an urban greening project in Hollydale Regional Park in the City of South Gate, Los Angeles (“L.A.”) County.

The project will improve environmental quality and park access in South Gate. This multi-benefit project will use green infrastructure to enhance urban forestry and native habitat, improve water quality of the L.A. River, and create a safe and beautiful park to benefit critically park-deficient residents. This project will promote public health by enhancing space used for active recreation and other healthy outdoor activities. This project will also sequester carbon and reduce the effects of climate change, including the heat island effect. This project is part of Amigos de los Rios’ Emerald Necklace network, which seeks to create a sustainable, healthy L.A. through multi-objective, water-sensitive parks in underserved urban communities. These parks will incorporate Low-Impact Development elements to enhance water quality through runoff infiltration, while providing beautiful, safe parks for public enjoyment.

Tasks involved in this project include completion of design, permitting, and construction of park improvements. The grantee will remove approximately 30,000 square feet of grass in priority areas and replace it with native plants and strategically placed bioswales to reduce water and fertilizer use. They will also remove invasive, drought-intolerant plants and replace them with approximately 100 native and drought-tolerant trees and 2,000 native shrubs. In addition, the project includes removing hardscape in strategic low areas, such as parking lots, and replacing it with permeable surfaces such as concave rain gardens that capture runoff and other permeable surfaces that will to direct water flow and improve filtration, which will improve water quality in the L.A. River and the ocean.

The project includes a monitoring component that will be carried out by the grantee and its citizen science volunteers. They will monitor tree and shrub growth and input the data into the ITREES Database, which tracks aggregate benefits of trees for improving air quality and heat island mitigation over time. They will also track water savings and water quality improvement by calculating the polluted runoff mitigation using information on the amount of impermeable surfaces removed.

The City of South Gate, which owns the project site, will maintain the project area in the long-term as part of regular facility maintenance. The grantee will collaborate with California

Conservation Corps and local Youth Corps members and will host volunteer stewardship events to implement the project and empower community participation. Community members will assist with site preparation, habitat restoration and urban forestry. The site is also located immediately adjacent to Hollydale Elementary School, and students from the school will have access to the improved park for outdoor education and nature-play. The area around Hollydale Park in the City of South Gate, Los Angeles County, is in the top 10% of California's communities most at-risk to environmental pollution (CalEnviroScreen 2.0). South Gate residents are particularly vulnerable to pollution burdens such as contaminated drinking water, impaired waterways, and groundwater threats. In addition, communities in eastern Los Angeles County, such as South Gate, are the most negatively impacted communities in the state by the urban heat-island effect, due to overdevelopment and lack of trees and parks. This negatively affects health, especially harming sensitive populations including youth, elderly, and the poor. This lack of equity and green space contributes to poor environmental and public health outcomes in eastern L.A. County's primarily Latino communities.

Amigos de los Rios has been committed to protecting and restoring open space in the urban environment throughout the Los Angeles Basin for over past thirteen years. They have raised over \$40 million in competitive grant funds and completed 13 multi-objective park and urban forestry projects. They have an excellent record of working closely with the public to improve parks and open space in vulnerable communities.

Site Description: Hollydale Park is a 53-acre open space surrounded by a dense residential neighborhood in the City of South Gate in eastern Los Angeles County. It is in the drainage zone adjacent to the Los Angeles River concrete flood control channel and the stormwater that collects in the park flows directly into the River. The rectangular site is traversed by two parallel rows of Southern California Edison and L.A. Department of Water and Power lines, and borders an elementary school to the east. The park is heavily used by soccer players, and provides L.A. River Bike Trail access. Park elements include grass fields, asphalt and concrete areas, an equestrian zone, a dog park, a playground, handball courts and two restroom buildings. Residents often walk the park perimeter maintenance roads for exercise. Two asphalt parking lots currently direct contaminated runoff into storm drains to the Pacific Ocean.

Project History: The grantee proposed this project on June 30, 2016 during the Los Angeles County Urban Greening round of Proposition 1 funding (i.e. the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014). This project is part of Amigos de los Rios' Emerald Necklace network, creating a sustainable, healthy L.A. through multi-objective, water-sensitive parks in underserved urban communities. The grantee completed the Emerald Necklace Expanded Green Infrastructure Plan in 2014, funded in part by the Strategic Growth Council, which identified the current project as a link in the 1,500 interconnected greenways around the Rio Hondo, San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers. In 2012 the grantee and the City of South Gate worked together on an earlier phase of this project to create pilot native habitat and stormwater management areas. Through the success of the earlier pilot project, the City encouraged the grantee to implement a larger scale project to improve water quality and native habitat in the park.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$332,500
Others	\$10,000
Project Total	\$342,500

The anticipated source of funding for the proposed project is the fiscal year 2016 appropriation from the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 (Proposition 1, Water Code § 79700 *et seq.*). Funds appropriated to the Conservancy derive from Chapter 6 of the Act (commencing with § 79730) and may be used “for multi-benefit water quality, water supply, and watershed protection and restoration projects for the watersheds of the state” (Section 79731). More specifically, the proposed project will help achieve three of the thirteen Chapter 6 purposes outlined in Section 79732(a), including:

- “Implement watershed adaptation projects in order to reduce the impacts of climate change on communities and ecosystems” (79732(a)(2)) by planning and designing green infrastructure elements to reduce impacts of climate change, such as the heat island effect, in the L.A. River watershed;
- “Protect and restore rural and urban watershed health to improve watershed storage capacity, forest health, protection of life and property, storm water resource management, and greenhouse gas reduction” (79732(a)(9)) by planning and designing green infrastructure elements aimed to increase carbon sequestration through tree planting and to capture storm water in a more natural and efficient manner that improves public health and water quality; and
- “Reduce pollution or contamination of rivers, lakes, streams, or coastal waters, prevent and remediate mercury contamination from legacy mines, and protect or restore natural system functions that contribute to water supply, water quality, or flood management”(79732(a)(11)) by naturally cleaning storm water and recharging the groundwater via soil infiltration.

The proposed project was reviewed and subsequently recommended for funding through a competitive grant process under the Conservancy’s *Proposition 1 Grant Program Guidelines* adopted in June 2015 (“Prop 1 Guidelines”). The proposed Project meets each of the evaluation criteria in the Prop 1 Guidelines as described in further detail in the following sections of this staff recommendation: “Project Financing” and “Project Summary” (sections above) and “Consistency with Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines” (section below).

The grantee will provide a \$10,000 match from Southern California Edison and \$70,000 as an in-kind contribution of staff time and resources to the project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 3 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, (Public Resource Code Sections 31111 and 31113) and Chapter 5.5, integrated coastal and marine resources protection (Public Resources Code Sections 31220).

Section 31113 permits the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within its jurisdiction. Pursuant to this authorization, the proposed project will increase carbon sequestration levels, reduce the urban heat island effect of an urban area, and improve water reliability through storm water capture.

Section 31220 permits the Conservancy to provide grants for coastal watershed and coastal and marine habitat water quality, sediment management, and living marine resources protection and restoration projects. As required by Section 31220 staff has notified the State Water Resources Control Boards of the nature of the Project and provided the opportunity for comment, input and review. Pursuant to Sections 31220(b)(1) and (7), the Conservancy is authorized to undertake a project or award a grant for a project that reduces contamination of waters within the coastal zone or marine waters and that reduces the impact of population and economic pressures on coastal and marine resources. By installing green infrastructure along the Los Angeles River, the proposed project will help improve water quality of coastal waters and reduce the impacts of dense population along the Los Angeles coast.

Consistent with section 31220(c), the project includes a monitoring and evaluation component and is consistent with local watershed management plans and the water quality control plan adopted by the regional water quality control board as described in the "Consistency with Local Watershed Management Plan/State Water Quality Control Plan" section, below.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2013 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S), AS REVISED JUNE 25, 2015:

Consistent with **Goal 7, Objective G** of the Conservancy's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will implement tree and vegetation planting projects to reduce the urban heat island effect and provide multiple benefits such as enhanced storm water management and an improved quality of life.

Additionally, the proposed project is consistent with two of the major efforts outlined in the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan for the South Coast program: "[c]ollaborate with the City and County of Los Angeles on green infrastructure projects to address water quality and supply issues" and "[i]mplement tree planting and other multi-benefit projects which reduce the heat island effect in urban areas." (2013-2018 Strategic Plan, page 15.)

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 October 2, 2014, 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. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** The proposed project is consistent with the following state plans and policies promoting global climate change resilience and adaptation in watershed management:
 - a. The proposed project will implement the *California Water Action Plan* (Governor’s Office of Planning and Research, 2014) by enhancing storm water capture and improving water quality in the LA River.
 - b. The proposed project will implement the *California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report* (Governor’s Office of Planning and Research, 2013 Draft) by developing mechanisms to reduce storm water run-off and enhance groundwater recharge, promote climate change resilience, and develop healthy, equitable, and sustainable communities.
 - c. The proposed project will implement the *California Climate Adaptation Strategy/Safeguarding California: Reducing Climate Risk Plan* (CA Natural Resources Agency, July 2014) by promoting climate change resilience with its efforts to expand urban forestry.
 - d. The proposed project will implement the *California Wildlife Action Plan* (CA Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2015) by planting native vegetation, enhancing groundwater recharge, and reducing storm water run-off.
4. **Support of the public:** This project was developed collaboratively with the South Gate Department of Recreation and Parks, which has jurisdiction over the land and the City is in full support of the project (see Exhibit 4). The San Gabriel Mountains Forever (SGMF) Coalition also supports the project. In addition, this project was identified in the greater Emerald Necklace Expanded Vision Plan and has the support of the Emerald Necklace Coalition of Agencies, comprising 48 signatory municipalities, agencies, school districts, and other stakeholders. The City of South Gate is an Emerald Necklace Coalition member, as are the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, the State San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.
5. **Location:** The project is located in the City of South Gate in eastern Los Angeles County. It is in the drainage zone adjacent to the Los Angeles River concrete flood control channel and the stormwater that collects in the park flows directly into the River.
6. **Need:** The City of South Gate does not have the financial capacity to implement this project. Conservancy funds are needed because projects such as this will demonstrate to the City that native plants and stormwater capture measures can be implemented and maintained in their parks, which will inspire them to implement more of these projects in the future.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** As part of the regional Emerald Necklace, and the Los Angeles River Greenway, this project will foster greater connections between underserved South Gate

neighborhoods of eastern Los Angeles County and regional resources such as the LA River Bike Path. This green infrastructure transformation project will provide opportunities for South Gate community members to participate and experience, learn from, and enjoy a microcosm of the region's natural resources. In addition, this project will provide an important demonstration for other municipalities around the State to pursue urban greening techniques.

8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed project area is not vulnerable to sea level rise.

Additional Criteria

9. **Urgency:** The grantee has begun working with the City of South Gate on permitting and necessary permissions and would like to begin work as soon as possible in order to take advantage of current momentum.
10. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The proposed project will have multiple benefits including increased climate change resiliency, improved public health and quality of life, and increased local water independence.
11. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
13. **Innovation:** Removal of permeable surfaces, rain gardens, bioswales and urban forestry using native vegetation have been tested in multiple settings throughout Los Angeles, but are still uncommon in broad implementation, or in depth within a given community. In the City of South Gate, they are highly innovative and new solutions.
14. **Readiness:** The grantee has begun working on approvals from the City and is ready to begin work on the project right away.
15. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** "See "Project History" above."
17. **Cooperation:** The grantee is working closely with the City of South Gate, and will collaborate with local Youth Corps members and host Emerald Necklace Volunteer Stewardship events to implement the project and empower community participation. Youth Corps Members and Emerald Necklace Volunteers will assist with site preparation, habitat restoration and urban forestry.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The City of South Gate is not located within the coastal zone and does not have a Local Coastal Program. The project does, however, align with the Lower Los Angeles River Watershed Management Plan (see below).

In addition, the proposed project will help to implement the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles' Water Resources Action Plan (2009). This plan calls on the Ports to, "Employ all available means to support efforts to reduce upstream pollutant loadings that adversely affect harbor water and sediment quality."

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

The City of South Gate is part of the Lower Los Angeles River Watershed Management Plan. This plan calls for various measures to reduce pollution loads in wastewater systems, such as a call for grant-funded projects that incorporate stormwater capture and infiltration. This project will directly support this goal of the Watershed Management Plan.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

This project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code Regs. Section 15301, Existing Facilities and Section 15304, Minor Alterations to Land. Section 15301 exempts repair and maintenance of existing public structures, facilities and topographical features involving no expansion of use. This exemption applies because the project consists of repair and maintenance of the structures, facilities and topographical features (i.e., parking areas, lawns, hardscape areas) of Hollydale Regional Park, with no expansion of use. Section 15304 exempts minor alterations in the condition of land and vegetation that do not involve the removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees. The examples include replacement of existing conventional landscaping with water resistant landscaping. This exemption also applies to the project because it consists of minor alterations to the land and vegetation of Hollydale Regional Park, including replacement of lawn and hardscape areas with native plants, rain gardens and bioswales, without removing any healthy, mature, scenic trees. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval.