

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

March 22, 2018

FRIENDS OF BALLONA WETLANDS ENHANCEMENT AND EDUCATION

Project No. 17-041-01

Project Manager: Mary Small

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to twenty thousand dollars to the Friends of the Ballona Wetlands to enhance disturbed uplands and conduct educational programs at the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve (BWER) in Los Angeles County.

LOCATION: Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve, Playa Del Rey, Los Angeles County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location](#)

Exhibit 2: [Detailed Location](#)

Exhibit 3: [Letter 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 up to twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) to the Friends of the Ballona Wetlands to enhance uplands and conduct outreach programs at the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve (BWER) in Los Angeles County. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the grantee shall submit for the review and approval of the Conservancy’s Executive Officer:
 - a. A work program, including project tasks, schedule and budget;
 - b. A plan for installation of signage that acknowledges funding by the Conservancy and the Coastal Commission from the Violation Remediation Account;
 - c. Evidence that all necessary permits and approvals for the project have been obtained.
 - d. Evidence that the grantee has entered into a written agreement with the landowner sufficient to enable the grantee to implement the project.”
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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 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding Coastal Resource Enhancement.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
 3. The Friends of Ballona Wetlands 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:

Conservancy staff is recommending authorization to disburse up to twenty thousand dollars to the Friends of the Ballona Wetlands (FBW) to enhance disturbed uplands and conduct outreach programs on a portion of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve (BWER) in Los Angeles County. The proposed project area is located on the BWER near the entrance that the Friends of Ballona Wetlands uses for its public programs. The site consists of approximately one acre of upland area characterized as “highly disturbed” in The Bay Foundation’s Baseline Assessment of the BWER.

The proposed restoration area is disturbed but suitable for dune restoration. It is a flat, sandy area that transitions into elevated dunes. No alteration of topography would occur. The proposed project involves restoration by hand, including planting native plants and removal of exotics. Public outreach will begin early, educating the public about the need for restoration and inviting participation. It is expected that community volunteers will implement much of the restoration under the guidance of the FBW. The project will require hand removal of the existing exotic vegetation and replanting with local seeds collected from adjacent coastal dune systems. Native species to be used include dune buckwheat (*Eriogonum parvifolium*), with the goal of increasing habitat for the federally endangered El Segundo Blue Butterfly. Other natives to be used include lemonade berry (*Rhus integrifolia*), silver dune lupine (*Lupinus chamissonis*), California bush sunflower (*Encelia californica*), and bladderpod (*Peritoma arborea*). Supplemental watering will be done by hand. FBW staff will monitor and report on success criteria. Removal of non-native species will continue for at least 3 years.

FBW is a nonprofit organization existing under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. FBW has been working since 1979 to protect, restore and provide educational programs about the Ballona Wetlands. FBW conducts monthly volunteer restoration events, hosts tours, and sponsors service groups, classrooms and others to participate in hands-on restoration projects. In 2003, the Coastal Conservancy funded FBW to restore dunes at the Ballona Wetlands, including removing non-native plants and re-planting of native dune species. This project will expand on FBW’s

dune restoration work which has reestablished the federally endangered El Segundo Blue Butterfly and restored 8 acres of coastal dune habitat.

Site Description: The Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve is owned and managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. The site is located in southern California, south of Marina del Rey and east of Playa del Rey. It extends roughly from the Marina Freeway (State Route 90) to the east, the Westchester bluffs to the south, Playa del Rey to the west, and Fiji Way to the north. The proposed project will occur on the southwest corner of the BWER, in Playa Del Rey on approximately one acre of disturbed uplands.

Project History: The Conservancy has supported restoration planning at the Ballona Wetlands since 2004. Conservancy funding has supported conceptual restoration planning, detailed data collection, alternative design and the production of a draft joint Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) for the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and California Department of Fish and Wildlife are the lead agencies for that document.

The proposed location for this project will not be impacted by any of the proposed restoration alternatives evaluated in the draft EIS/EIR.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$20,000.00
Others	<u>\$0</u>
Project Total	\$20,000.00

The expected fund source of funds for this project is the Violation Remediation Account (VRA). See Public Resources Code Section 30823. VRA funds may be used to carry out the provisions of the Coastal Act (Public Resources Code Section 30000, et seq.). VRA funds are derived from the Coastal Commission's Coastal Act enforcement actions, and use of VRA funds is guided by a Memorandum of Understanding between the Coastal Commission and the Conservancy. This project promotes the purposes of the Coastal Act and will be conducted in conformance with the procedures outlined in that Memorandum of Understanding.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 6 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31251-31270, Coastal Resource Enhancement Projects.

Consistent with Section 31251, "(t)he conservancy may award grants to nonprofit organizations for the purpose of enhancement of coastal resources that, because of indiscriminate dredging or filling, improper location of improvements, natural or human-induced events, or incompatible

land uses, have suffered loss of natural and scenic values.” The proposed project area has suffered natural resource degradation due to human activities.

Consistent with Section 31253, the recommended amount of funding is determined by evaluating the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal resource enhancement projects, the urgency of the project relative to other similar projects, and the application of other factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority. The Conservancy’s funding is merited given the projects’ benefits to coastal habitat, the proven track record of the grantee and the use of community volunteers which provides cost savings and an important public education component.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2018 STRATEGIC PLAN
GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective B** of the Conservancy’s 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will restore approximately one acre of coastal habitat. The project is also consistent with **Goal 4, Objective A** because it will support events that promote stewardship of coastal 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 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 Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Wildlife Action Plan because it will help restore ecosystem function and biodiversity at a State Ecological Reserve. The Ballona Wetlands was designated a state ecological reserve in May 2006.
4. **Support of the public:** There is a great deal of controversy around the Ballona Wetlands but all advocates support hand restoration led by the community. Approximately 7,000 students and 2,500 community members participate in FBW restoration events each year. The project is supported by Senator Ben Allen, Congresswoman Maxine Waters and the Department of Fish and Wildlife, see Exhibit 3.
5. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of Los Angeles County.

6. **Need:** The Friends of Ballona Wetlands is a small nonprofit organization that would not be able to complete this project without Conservancy funding.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The BWER is a large open space in urban Los Angeles County. Currently, FBW programs provide one of the few opportunities for members of the public to access the wetlands. FBW restoration events create opportunities for approximately 9,500 Californians to access the wetlands each year.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed project is not vulnerable to sea level rise scenarios for the years 2050 and 2100. The location of the proposed work is more than 10 feet above sea level.

Additional Criteria

9. **Readiness:** If approved, FBW will start the project immediately.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
11. **Cooperation:** The proposed project involves cooperation of the State Department of Fish and Wildlife, the non-profit Friends of Ballona Wetlands, and thousands of community volunteers.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is located in the City of Los Angeles, in the community of Playa del Rey. The City has not developed a Local Coastal Program for this area. However, the proposed project is consistent with the Westchester – Playa Del Rey Community Plan, a part of the General Plan of City of Los Angeles. The Community Plan designates the Ballona wetlands as open space, and goal 5.5 is to “preserve and restore the Ballona Wetlands for enjoyment of the public”. The proposed project is consistent with this goal in that it will restore habitat and allow the public access on to the open space.

The project goals are consistent with the Coastal Act goals as stated in Public Resources Code Section 30001.5, as the project will protect, enhance and restore the natural resources of the site and expand public recreational opportunities consistent with conservation of those resources. The Friends of the Ballona Wetlands have a coastal development permit for their restoration program; this project is consistent with that permit.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from CEQA, under Title 14 of California Code of Regulations Section 15333, Small Habitat Restoration Projects. The proposed project is approximately one acre in size and involves the revegetation of a disturbed area with native plant species. Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the project.