

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
December 6, 2018

**SOUTH BAY SALT POND RESTORATION PROJECT:  
PROJECT MANAGEMENT, OUTREACH, AND SCIENCE**

Project No. 02-070-05  
Project Manager: Laura Cholodenko

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to: (1) disburse up to \$600,000 for executive project management to support the South Bay Salt Pond (SBSP) Restoration Project for approximately three years, (2) disburse up to \$360,000 to the Aquatic Science Center for website maintenance and adaptive management activities to support the SBSP Restoration Project for approximately two years, and (3) disburse up to \$180,000 to the Consensus and Collaboration Program of Sacramento State University to conduct outreach about the SBSP Restoration Project for approximately two years.

**LOCATION:** San Francisco Bay, south of the San Mateo Bridge in Alameda, San Mateo, and Santa Clara Counties

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Project Location](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Area](#)

Exhibit 3: [South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project: Phase 2 Implementation, May 2016 Staff Recommendation](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes: (1) disbursement of up to \$600,000 for executive project management to support the South Bay Salt Pond (SBSP) Restoration Project for approximately three years, (2) disbursement of up to \$360,000 to the Aquatic Science Center for website maintenance and adaptive management activities to support the SBSP Restoration Project for approximately two years, and (3) disbursement of up to \$180,000 to the Consensus and Collaboration Program of Sacramento State University to conduct outreach about the SBSP Restoration Project for approximately two years.”

SOUTH BAY SALT POND RESTORATION PROJECT: PROJECT MANAGEMENT,  
OUTREACH, AND SCIENCE

Prior to commencement of their respective work, the Aquatic Science Center (ASC) and the Consensus and Collaboration Program (CCP) at Sacramento State University shall each submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer):

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out 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 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Conservancy’s mandate to address the resource and recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay Area.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The South Bay Salt Pond (SBSP) Restoration Project is a multiagency effort to restore tidal marsh habitat, reconfigure managed pond habitat, maintain or improve flood risk management, and provide recreation opportunities and public access in 15,100 acres of former salt evaporation ponds in South San Francisco Bay (Exhibits 1 and 2). The decision-making and management structure for the SBSP Restoration Project involves collaborative partnerships between many different public agencies, private organizations, environmental advocates as well as the public. A Project Management Team (PMT) consisting of representatives from the Coastal Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and the Santa Clara Valley Water District, provide day-to-day leadership and management for the project. This authorization would provide funds to support the ongoing management of the SBSP Restoration Project for approximately two to three years, as the SBSP Restoration Project enters the second phase of project implementation.

This authorization would provide for executive project management services for three years to support the PMT and act as the primary point of contact for the project. The Executive Project Manager helps sustain the Project vision, goals and timelines and plays a critical role in coordinating the Project Management Team’s ongoing collaborative planning efforts, as well as providing oversight for implementation of SBSP Restoration Project construction. The Executive Project Manager also coordinates with regulatory agencies, conducts outreach and coordination with local government officials and elected officials, and represents the project to the media. Consistent and sustained leadership is essential as the SBSP Restoration Project moves through the second phase of project implementation involving restoration and enhancement of over 3,300 acres within three counties along the South Bay shoreline.

*SOUTH BAY SALT POND RESTORATION PROJECT: PROJECT MANAGEMENT,  
OUTREACH, AND SCIENCE*

The SBSP Restoration Project is also supported by a lead scientist who oversees implementation of the Project's Adaptive Management Plan (see "Project Background" in Exhibit 3) and advises the PMT on all aspects of the project connected to science, especially adaptive management decision making, including changes needed in current project phases, and design of future actions. This authorization would provide approximately \$260,000 to ASC for a part-time lead scientist that will help direct the design and implementation of studies tied to understanding project uncertainties as well as monitoring essential aspects of the system to ensure that the restoration goals are on track and to inform the adaptive management process. Phase 2 of the SBSP Restoration Project Science Program is aimed at improving integration with regional efforts related to science and monitoring and it is anticipated that the lead scientist will also play a central role in developing and implementing a plan to work more closely with other restoration practitioners throughout San Francisco Bay, to determine how to share data and coordinate data collection. Regional data integration will lead to a more complete understanding of ecosystem linkages, help leverage work being done on other restoration efforts, and provide the PMT with better information about the status of resources of interest both within and outside the boundaries of the SBSP Restoration Project area. For example, understanding trends in waterbird distribution and abundance throughout San Francisco Bay would help the PMT determine how birds may be shifting their distribution in response to SBSP Restoration Project actions as well as other restoration actions in the region. The lead scientist could use this information to help inform ongoing adaptive management decisions aimed at maintaining waterbird population numbers in the South Bay and ultimately to help assess the extent to which future phases of tidal marsh restoration should be pursued.

Data and reports developed through the science program, as well as photos, monitoring reports, and permits related to the SBSP Restoration Project's specific restoration efforts can all be found on the project's website. The website also serves an important public information and outreach function providing information on public meetings, construction plans, and project progress. The Aquatic Science Center is finishing development of a new project website that has an up-to-date format, additional functionality, as well as new content. The new website has been programmed to allow for some content to be updated directly by PMT members so that use of contracted services for website maintenance is reduced in the future. This authorization would provide additional funding for ASC to maintain the content and project information on the website for another two years.

This authorization would provide \$180,000 to CCP to continue the SBSP Restoration Project public outreach program which includes holding public meetings, coordinating with key stakeholders, and providing public information such as brochures and reports. The funds will also provide ongoing organizational support to the Project Management Team, including support for internal meetings and deliverables, and mediation and consultation with project partners, local governments and stakeholders, and strategic consultation, as needed, to support the achievement of project goals and objectives.

**Site Description:** See "SBSP Restoration Project Site Description" in Exhibit 3.

SOUTH BAY SALT POND RESTORATION PROJECT: PROJECT MANAGEMENT,  
OUTREACH, AND SCIENCE

**Grantee Qualifications:** The CCP, part of California State University at Sacramento provides collaborative policy services. Specializing in conflict resolution, public engagement, collaborative problem solving, strategic planning, organizational development, research and training services for the public, private and nonprofit sectors, CCP has provided support to the SBSP Restoration Project for over 10 years.

The ASC is a Joint Powers Authority created by the State Water Resources Control Board and the Bay Area's five largest wastewater treatment agencies. ASC assists with scientific, monitoring, and information management support including connecting science to decision-making processes and strengthening the integration of regional monitoring information as well as providing a forum for developing and adjusting the environmental management, policy, and assessment questions that form the basis of applied research and monitoring programs in aquatic ecosystems in central and northern California. The San Francisco Estuary Institute, a 501(c)(3), is a non-signatory member of ASC's Board and provides all staffing for ASC.

**Project History:** In May 2016 the Conservancy authorized funding to support Phase 2 restoration actions at the Mountain View and Ravenswood ponds within San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties (Exhibit 3). The authorization also included \$1.1 million in funding to support website maintenance, project management support, as well as environmental, engineering, and outreach services for the SBSP Restoration Project. A portion of the management funds have been used to facilitate permitting of nearly 1,000 acres of tidal marsh restoration and approximately 300 acres of enhanced pond habitat at Mountain View and Ravenswood. In addition, the SBSP Restoration Project is nearing completion of the environmental review of another 2,000 acres of planned restoration and enhancement at the Eden Landing Ecological Reserve in Alameda County.

In April 2018, the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority authorized funding for the Phase 2 restoration projects at Ravenswood and the Alviso Island Ponds. These projects and the Mountain View Project are now fully funded with construction starting in 2018 and expected to be complete in 2022. The Authority funding also included \$1.2 million to support Phase 2 of the SBSP Restoration Project Science Program. The science funding will be used to conduct two workshops to determine how to better integrate the project's next phase of applied studies and monitoring with related efforts in the region. The funding will also support development of a climate change assessment to identify the impacts of climate change as they relate specifically to achieving the project's objectives. Finally, the funding will support monitoring of essential aspects of the environment including tracking changes in habitat area and quality, sediment availability and monitoring of species responses to the restoration efforts. It does not, however, provide funding needed to coordinate the various aspects of the SBSP Restoration Project Science Program.

## **PROJECT FINANCING**

**Coastal Conservancy**

**\$1,140,000**

A portion of this authorization is anticipated to derive from the Conservancy's fiscal year 2016 appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84, Public Resources Code section 75001,

SOUTH BAY SALT POND RESTORATION PROJECT: PROJECT MANAGEMENT,  
OUTREACH, AND SCIENCE

et seq.). This funding source may be used for the protection of bays and coastal waters, including projects to prevent contamination and degradation of coastal waters and watersheds, projects to protect and restore the natural habitat values of coastal waters and lands, and projects and expenditures to promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state pursuant to the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. See Public Resources Code section 75060. The proposed project protects coastal waters and restores natural habitat values by planning for construction of tidal wetlands and shallow water ponds that will provide habitat for numerous species as well as improve water quality. Finally, as discussed below, the project is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21.

Consistent with Proposition 84 requirements, the proposed project also includes funding for monitoring and reporting necessary to ensure successful implementation of the Project objectives. See Public Resources Code section 75005(n).

Another requirement of Proposition 84 is that for projects that restore natural resources, the Conservancy give priority to projects that meet one or more of the criteria specified in Section 75071. The proposed restoration project satisfies the following specified criteria: (a) Landscape/Habitat Linkages – one of the largest wetland restoration projects on the west coast of North America, the project will facilitate wildlife movement, botanical transfer, and sustain large acreage of habitat over time, and (b) Watershed Protection – the project will contribute to long-term protection of and improvement to the water and biological quality of the San Francisco Bay.

Additional portions of this authorization are anticipated to derive from the fiscal year 2018/2019 appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68, Division 45, Chapters 1-13 of the Public Resources Code). Chapter 8 of that bond act allocates \$20 million to the Conservancy for projects that qualify for grants from the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority. Public Resources Code section 80110(b)(10). The proposed authorization qualifies for use of these funds because it will support the restoration and enhancement of tidal marsh along the shoreline of San Francisco Bay. These restoration efforts have already received direct financial support from the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority, as described above in "Project History."

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

This authorization will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31165, to address resource goals in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The SBSP Restoration Project is within the nine-county Bay Area as required under Section 31162 of the Public Resources Code.

Under Section 31162(b), the Conservancy may act to protect, restore, and enhance natural habitats and connecting corridors, watersheds, scenic areas, and other open-space resources of regional significance. This authorization would specifically provide funding to support ongoing restoration and future restoration of tidal wetlands, upland transition zones, and managed pond habitat in the South Bay.

SOUTH BAY SALT POND RESTORATION PROJECT: PROJECT MANAGEMENT,  
OUTREACH, AND SCIENCE

The project is consistent with Sections 31163(a) and (b), directing the Conservancy to participate in and support interagency actions and public/private partnerships in the San Francisco Bay Area to implement long-term resources and outdoor recreational goals.

Consistent with Section 31163(c), the SBSP Restoration Project: (1) is supported by adopted regional plans (*San Francisco Bay Plan, Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Report (1999)* pp. 97, 126-139, *Baylands Goals Update (2015)* pp. 198, 203, and the *San Francisco Basin (Region 2) Water Quality Control Plan (June 29, 2013)* pp. 2-2 and 4-92), (2) is multijurisdictional (involves multiple agencies) and serves a regional constituency (the restoration component will facilitate nationally and regionally significant wetland restoration efforts and will complete regional trail connections), (3) can be implemented in a timely way, (4) provides support for habitat, flood protection, and public access benefits that could be lost without sufficient management support and scientific oversight, and (5) is anticipated to involve lead scientist services from the Aquatic Science Center, an organization that can leverage their work on large scale regional monitoring and planning efforts to identify connections between current project monitoring and regional efforts.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2018-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN](#)  
GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 12, Objective D**, the proposed authorization will provide essential management support of projects that enhance tidal and managed wetlands and associated upland habitat.

Consistent with **Goal 8, Objective C**, the proposed authorization will provide management support of projects that increase resilience to sea level rise using nature-based solutions and other multi-benefit strategies.

**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 funding authorization is essential to the continued restoration and enhancement efforts of the SBSP Restoration Project; therefore, this authorization would support implementation of several state plans, including:
  - *California State Wildlife Action Plan 2015 Update (SWAP 2015 Update)*. The restoration of tidal wetlands and creation of managed pond habitat will significantly contribute to the

SOUTH BAY SALT POND RESTORATION PROJECT: PROJECT MANAGEMENT,  
OUTREACH, AND SCIENCE

SWAP 2015 Update goals for the Bay-Delta and Central Coast region by increasing the following: miles with desired level water quality, acres of salt-marsh habitat, acres with desired genetic connectivity, acres with desired structural diversity, areas connected, and acres of habitat providing high-tide refugia.

• *CA Climate Adaptation Strategy/Safeguarding California: Reducing Climate Risk Plan (July 2014)*. The plan identifies Actions Needed to Safeguard Biodiversity and Habitats including #2 “Implement adaptive management studies to refine approaches for conserving biodiversity, especially for species and communities vulnerable to climate change” such as coastal wetlands. Lead scientist support funding will help the PMT assess the risks of climate change to vulnerable species in the project area and will ensure that the project benefits are sustainable in the long term.

4. **Support of the public:** See “Required Criteria” in Exhibit 3.
5. **Location:** The SBSP Restoration Project is located in the southern San Francisco Bay Area, within San Mateo, Alameda, and Santa Clara Counties.
6. **Need:** The Conservancy, as established in the partner agencies’ 2009 Memorandum of Understanding, provides coordination support for the SBSP Restoration Project and has been providing funding for management, outreach, website maintenance, and environmental services for the SBSP Restoration Project since 2009. Without Conservancy support for these critical roles, they will remain unfilled because the other PMT partner agencies cannot currently provide the needed financial support.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The SBSP Restoration Project is the largest restoration project on the west coast of the United States that will aid in the recovery of several endangered species, provide flood protection for adjacent communities, as well as recreational opportunities. The planned science work during Phase 2 of the project will allow the project to coordinate with restoration practitioners in other parts of the region to increase scientific understanding of resources that are of mutual interest.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** See “Required Criteria” in Exhibit 3.

#### **Additional Criteria**

9. **Urgency:** Continued support for project management is critical to moving the SBSP Restoration Project through Phase 2 implementation and for expanding the science program to include regional data integration and analysis.
11. **Innovation:** The SBSP Restoration Project is a national model of how to coordinate a scientifically sound, publicly-supported, multi-objective, multi-agency project, on scale with the Everglades and Chesapeake Bay. The successful use of adaptive management to guide planning and implementation has made the project a model for other projects around the nation.
10. **Cooperation:** The Conservancy is facilitating the long-term restoration planning, working closely with CDFW and USFWS. The Conservancy and other state and local agencies are cooperatively funding the restoration planning. In addition, an extensive group of stakeholders, including local, state, and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations,

SOUTH BAY SALT POND RESTORATION PROJECT: PROJECT MANAGEMENT,  
OUTREACH, AND SCIENCE

special districts, utilities, and the general public, have participated in planning of both phases of this restoration project.

**CONSISTENCY WITH SAN FRANCISCO BAY PLAN:**

This authorization supports implementation of the SBSP Restoration Project which is consistent with the following policies of BCDC's San Francisco Bay Plan (Reprinted March 2012):

**Part III: The Bay as a Resource**

Fish, Other Aquatic Organisms and Wildlife (p. 16)

- To assure the benefits of fish, other aquatic organisms and wildlife for future generations, to the greatest extent feasible, the Bay's tidal marshes, tidal flats, and subtidal habitat should be conserved, restored and increased.

Water Quality (p.19)

- The Bay's tidal marshes, tidal flats, and water surface area and volume should be conserved and, whenever possible, restored and increased to protect and improve water quality.

Water Surface Area and Volume (p. 20)

- Water circulation in the Bay should be maintained and improved as much as possible.

Tidal Marshes and Mudflats (p. 23-24)

- Where a transition zone does not exist and it is feasible and ecologically appropriate, shoreline projects should be designed to provide a transition zone between tidal and upland habitats.
- Where feasible, former tidal marshes and tidal flats that have been diked from the Bay should be restored to tidal action in order to replace lost historic wetlands or should be managed to provide important Bay habitat functions, such as resting, foraging and breeding habitat for fish, other aquatic organisms and wildlife.
- Any ecosystem restoration project should include clear and specific long-term and short-term biological and physical goals, and success criteria, and a monitoring program to assess the sustainability of the project.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed authorization will fund management activities that will not cause either a direct physical change in the environment or a reasonably foreseeable indirect change in the environment, and is therefore not a project under CEQA. Phase 2 of the SBSP Restoration Project was analyzed in an Environmental Impact Report (see Exhibit 3).