

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 19, 2020

Marshes on the Margins in Southern California

Project No. 97-001-04
Project Manager: Eryan Sloane

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$48,210 of funds received from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to U.S. Geological Survey and Southern California Coastal Water Research Project to augment the previously authorized grant for marsh migration and estuary dynamics studies as recommended by the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project.

LOCATION: Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties coastal wetlands.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [February 2, 2017 Staff Recommendation](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Project Location Map](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Grant Application to NOAA](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31111 and 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code:

"The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed forty-eight thousand two hundred and ten dollars (\$48,210) of funds received from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to augment the Conservancy's previously authorized disbursements for marsh migration and estuary dynamics studies that will further the goals of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project in Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties."

It is anticipated that the augmented funding will be disbursed as follows:

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- 1) Up to twenty-eight thousand four hundred eighteen dollars (\$28,419) to the U.S. Geological Survey; and
- 2) Up to nineteen thousand seven hundred ninety dollars (\$19,791) to the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project.

Prior to disbursement of funds, the grantees shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of 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 Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding resource enhancement.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize disbursement of an additional \$48,210 of federal funds awarded to the Conservancy by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to support the Marshes on the Margins project which includes studies of marsh migration and estuary dynamics. The Conservancy has authorized the disbursement of a total of \$963,013 (of which all but \$17,525 was NOAA funds) for the Marshes on the Margin project in five prior authorizations, the first of which was on February 2, 2017. The additional \$48,210 will be the last NOAA funding for Marshes on the Margin. It will be granted to two public entities to complete their project work. The Marshes on the Margin project consists of the preparation of studies to increase scientific understanding of sustainable wetland restoration in Southern California. The studies will help further the goals of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (WRP), which consists of staff of several state and federal entities coordinating with each other regarding the protection, restoration and enhancement of wetlands in Southern California’s coastal watersheds.

The WRP recently completed its Regional Strategy – Wetlands on the Edge (2018) (Regional Strategy), which updates its 2001 Regional Strategy, and reflects a consensus on how to expand, restore and protect Southern California’s wetlands. The update addressed how to achieve wetland restoration that is sustainable and adaptable to the effects of sea-level rise (SLR). The Regional Strategy sets forth quantifiable restoration objectives for wetlands

recovery. These objectives were developed through a science-based analysis of the current extent and state of tidal wetlands, the historical structure and functions of those wetlands, and the future vulnerabilities in the face of sea level rise.

The Regional Strategy identifies key uncertainties regarding how wetlands in Southern California will adapt to sea level rise. One key gap in knowledge is how the dynamic estuaries of Southern California, most of which are intermittently-open estuaries (IOEs), will be affected by sea-level rise. Another deficiency is the understanding of how and where to restore upland transition zones for wetland migration—an aspect of wetland restoration that will likely become the main opportunity for many estuarine systems to persist in the future. This project has set out to answer these questions. This project has completed the analysis of transition zone restoration and marsh migration using the previously approved funds (see Exhibit 1). The transition zone studies informed the update to the Regional Strategy. The sea level rise modeling work is still underway and will be completed using these funds, if approved. When the work is completed, the team will disseminate the new information on the WRP's online tool (Marsh Adaptation Planning Tool: scwrp.databasin.org) as well as create an addendum to the updated Regional Strategy.

The proposed funding will be used by two of the same organizations that were identified in the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation: U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) and Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP) to augment the funding for their fourth year of project work. The role and activities of each for the fourth year of project work under the proposed augmentation remain the same as the roles and activities described for each organization in the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation (see Exhibit 1).

Site Description: The proposed project area consists of the coastal wetlands and watersheds within the counties of San Diego, Orange, Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara, from Point Conception south to the U.S./Mexico border (see Exhibit 2).

Grantee Qualifications: See the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation for the two grantees' qualifications.

Project History: See the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation for the history, nature, and role of the WRP and for the history of the Regional Strategy.

The Regional Strategy has been updated to reflect new data and information and contemporary approaches to ecological restoration. Incorporating an understanding of how climate change will impact approaches to restoration was a primary impetus for updating the Regional Strategy. While the previously funded work on the proposed project (Years 1-3) was included in the Regional Strategy, the final modeling results from Year 4 will be disseminated on the WRP's online tool and in an addendum to the Regional Strategy.

In September 2016, the Conservancy was awarded a grant from NOAA to further the scientific analyses supporting the regional restoration strategy for Southern California's wetlands and, specifically, to provide for studies regarding wetland restoration in the face of sea-level rise. This NOAA grant was the source of the first, second, third, and fourth year of studies authorized by the Conservancy on February 2, 2017, November 30, 2017, September 6, 2018, and August

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22, 2019 and is also the source of funding for the final year of studies under the proposed augmentation.

PROJECT FINANCING

NOAA Funding

<i>Grantee Name</i>	<i>Nov 19, 2020 Augmentation</i>	<i>Aug 22, 2019 Authorization</i>	<i>Sept 6, 2018 Authorization</i>	<i>March 22, 2018 Augmentation</i>	<i>Nov 30, 2017 Authorization</i>	<i>Feb 2, 2017 Authorization</i>	<i>Totals to Date</i>
UC Davis	\$0	\$13,215	\$78,693	\$0	\$76,991	\$39,272	208,17
USGS	\$28,419	\$25,003	\$8,127	\$0	\$63,319	\$62,187	187,05
SCCWPR	\$19,791	\$5,254	\$16,122	\$0	\$28,280	\$1,431	70,87
Point Blue	\$0	\$31,403	\$31,403	\$0	\$22,487	\$4,657	89,95
ASC	\$0	\$5,937	\$5,936	\$46,949	\$38,585	\$97,945	212,877
SWIA	\$0	\$40,584	\$37,039	\$0	\$12,401	\$11,467	101,49
USC Sea Grant	\$0	\$23,794	\$23,358	\$0	\$22,931	\$22,510	92,59
Project Totals	\$48,210	Year 4 \$145,190	Year 3 \$200,678	\$46,949	Year 2 \$264,994	Year 1 \$239,469	Total \$963,013

*ASC had two Executive Officer approved augmentations (using non-NOAA funds): \$3,300 on July 6, 2017 and \$14,225 on November 4, 2017.

The expected fund source for this project is a grant from the NOAA National Ocean Service Center for Coastal Ocean Science through the Ecological Effects of Sea-level Rise Grant Program (see Exhibit 3). These funds were awarded to the Conservancy specifically for the purpose of carrying out studies of sustainable wetland restoration in the face of sea-level rise to increase scientific knowledge and inform the update to the Regional Strategy. The proposed augmentation is for the final year of funding for the project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, as detailed in the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation (see Exhibit 1).

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

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will generate information necessary to develop plans for the restoration and enhancement of coastal wetlands. The information generated by the proposed project will be

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included as an addendum to the Regional Strategy to help local project proponents plan more successful projects by providing SLR decision-making tools and specific restoration guidance and management strategies for SLR resiliency.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The project remains consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines as detailed in the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation (see Exhibit 1).

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The project remains consistent with Local Coastal Program policies, as detailed in the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation (see Exhibit 1).

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project remains categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the reasons described in the February 2, 2017 staff recommendation (see Exhibit 1).