

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

January 21, 2021

River Rangers Summer Day Camp

Project No. 20-047-01

Project Manager: Emely Lopez

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$30,000 to Inland Empire Resource Conservation District to provide low-income youth and their family members with environmental education and recreational access to sites in the Santa Ana River watershed in the vicinity of Redlands, CA.

LOCATION: Redlands, San Bernardino County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31170 - 31180 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000) to Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (“the grantee”) to provide low-income youth and their parents with environmental education and recreational access to sites in the Santa Ana River watershed in the vicinity of Redlands, CA. Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee 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
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.”

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 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy disburse up to \$30,000 to Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (IERCD) to provide approximately 150 individuals, including students and their family members, with environmental education and recreational access to sites in the Santa Ana River watershed in the vicinity of Redlands, CA. IERCD will work in partnership with Micah House, a community-based non-profit, to inspire connections to local recreational spaces within the Santa Ana River watershed by running two weeklong summer camps.

In Redlands, most families live within a 30-minute drive to a river access point. However, many students have never been to the river due to a variety of barriers—primarily economic. The Redlands community suffers from heavy urban sprawl, homelessness, and stagnant wages compared to living expenses. IERCD will help alleviate barriers to river access for program participants. IERCD will partner with Micah House to engage students in Micah House existing afterschool program. Micah House is an established community partner in Redlands that supports students, especially first-generation English language learners, in bridging the gap from school to home. Micah House provides homework help, tutoring, literacy education, and character-building programs. IERCD will provide a weeklong summer camp to two groups of 30 Micah House students, with follow-up programs for students’ family members. Participants will explore the wonders of the river, learn about the watershed, and take part in activities that will inspire a love of the outdoors. This program will be free to participants to ensure all students and families can participate and will include complementary meals and transportation.

This project will engage parents and youth, ranging from first to fifth grade, to experience four scenic locations of the Santa Ana River. The participants will visit Lytle Creek, Vivian Creek, Bigg Falls, and the south fork of the river. All the sites are under U.S. Forest Service (USFS) jurisdiction in the San Bernardino National Forest. All materials will be in English and Spanish to ensure that first-generation English language learners feel welcomed in the program. Additionally, IERCD facilitators are bilingual and experienced in engaging with Spanish-speaking communities.

The program will engage participants with multiple hands-on recreation and education activities to introduce the many ways they can engage with the outdoors. Participants will go on guided nature walks with IERCD Field Ecologists and learn how to identify common plants. California Department of Fish and Wildlife staff will provide lessons on fly fishing, including safety protocols. An American Bird Conservancy biologist will teach participants to identify common birds and how to use binoculars and other birding techniques. Home Depot staff will teach participants to build birdhouses for students’ homes. There will also be fun team-building

exercises at the River, such as “Sponge Tag” and “Music of the River,” spotlighting the importance of recreating responsibly to conserve resources. The camp will teach responsible recreation principles, such as being safe in nature and leaving no trace behind to keep the wilderness wild for others to enjoy as well. Throughout the program, IERCD will introduce the students to professionals in recreation and conservation who can serve as a source of future career inspiration.

To engage with river watershed education, participants will experience a scientist's life and learn about water quality testing by collecting water samples and macroinvertebrates. Staff from California State University, San Bernardino, will lead this activity. IERCD will also engage students and teach them about human impacts on the river. A river clean-up day will be scheduled so students can visualize their own and other's human impact on the earth. Lastly, a short film screening will be held to connect watershed health to larger climate change concepts. The grantee will foster communication among the participants to share their connection to nature, what they enjoy about the river, and how they see themselves enjoying the river in the future with their families. Each weeklong camp will conclude with a Family Fun Day on Saturday for youth participants and their families. At the end of the program, all families will receive a Forest Adventure Annual Pass to encourage continued use of USFS land on their own. About half of the sites in the San Bernardino National Forest require a \$5 parking fee to be displayed on all vehicles to access the trails. A Forest Adventure Annual Pass, worth \$30, covers the parking cost to access San Bernardino County trails for a year.

At this time, IERCD will delay the River Ranger Summer Day Camp program because of the COVID-19 pandemic. IERCD will follow the Center for Disease Control and prevention guidelines along with local municipalities guidelines to coordinate future river exploration. The program is not expected to commence until public health orders allow large gathering in San Bernardino County.

Site Description: The Santa Ana River watershed is the largest coastal watershed in Southern California, and flows through several highly urbanized areas, including the City of Redlands. The river is a vital natural and recreational resource for communities near the river, providing a key water source for many residents and opportunities for accessing open space. The recreational opportunities provided by the river are critical to residents of the Redlands area, which has limited open space.

The watershed supports several sensitive habitats. It is home to a wide range of plants and animals, including threatened and endangered species such as the Santa Ana sucker, San Bernardino kangaroo rat, southwestern willow flycatcher, arroyo toad, and Santa Ana River woolly-star.

Participants in the program will be visiting U.S. Forest Service (USFS) recreational areas in the San Bernardino National Forest, specifically Lytle Creek, Vivian Creek, Big Falls, and South Fork. Each site is described below:

- Lytle Creek lies at the eastern-most extension of the San Gabriel Mountains. Deep canyons, chaparral-covered hillsides with perennial and intermittent streams and fragmented riparian vegetation, coastal sage scrub, scattered groves of large sugar pine and big cone Douglas-fir. It provides important wildlife habitat and is a popular recreation destination.
- Vivian Creek is east of San Gabriel Mountains. It is a very scenic destination with an overlook of the San Gabriel mountain. The area is highly dissected by deep canyons, steep slopes, cliffs, narrow ridges, and big cone Douglas-fir.
- Big Falls is a five-tiered waterfall, located east in the San Gabriel Mountains. The mountain canyon is filled with giant redwood trees and plenty of gentle eddies in the river to swim and relax.
- South Fork is located at the confluence of South Fork Creek and the river, and is managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. There are remote mountain streams, some eddies, and pine forests in gentle terrain. Towering cedars, pines and firs provide respite from hot Los Angeles summers.

Grantee Qualifications: The Inland Empire Resource Conservation District is a local government entity working to preserve open space, enhance natural resources, and educate youth and adults on land stewardship. Their service area covers 1,286 square miles of the Upper Santa Ana Watershed, from the headwaters in the San Bernardino National Forest to the Prado Basin. A major part of IERCD's mission involves educating the local communities about their watershed and the importance of stewarding and enjoying our outdoor spaces.

The IERCD has been the recipient of many grants including funding for educational field trip programs, sustainable agriculture programs, and regional planning through the California Department of Conservation's Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Grant Program. IERCD carries out much of their work through strong regional partnerships enabling projects to have a greater impact.

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 below.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section below.
3. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** The project is consistent with the following goals of the 2018 *Santa Ana River Parkway and Open Space Plan* prepared by the Conservancy:

- GOAL 2 – Create physical and figurative connections between the river corridor and surrounding communities and destinations. The project will foster a figurative connection between program participants and their communities with recreational areas along the river corridor.
- GOAL 3 – Provide a range of river-related opportunities for people to be active outdoors. The project will provide river-related recreational experiences for participants.
- GOAL 4 – Provide a variety of opportunities for people to experience the natural environment. The project will provide educational and recreational opportunities focused on art, biology, water quality, and other topics for participants to experience nature.
- GOAL 5 – Provide a diversity of opportunities for people to learn about the river corridor and its resources. See Goal 4 above.
- GOAL 6 – Prioritize increased open space access for park-deficient and disadvantaged communities along the river corridor. The project facilitates visits to open space for low-income youth with barriers to access.
- GOAL 7 – Provide safe access to the river in appropriate locations. The project will provide safe river access and teach participants the principles of safe outdoor recreation.
- GOAL 8 – Raise awareness of the river corridor as a local, regional, and statewide resource. The project will educate participants and their families about the Santa Ana River watershed and its significance.
- GOAL 9 – Develop a river corridor identity that communities can proudly embrace. The project will encourage participants to see the river as a treasured part of their community that they share with other communities in the watershed.

The project is consistent with recommended Action 4C of the 2015 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Action Plan created by the California Department of Parks and Recreation: *Increase park access for Californians including residents in underserved communities, by creating and expanding programs that transport urban residents to larger regional, State, and Federal parks to experience California's incredible natural and historic legacy.* Consistent with these recommended actions, the project will provide a program to bring urban youth and their families to parks in their vicinity for outdoor recreation experiences.

The project will implement one of the overarching strategies of the 2015 **Blueprint for Environmental Literacy** prepared by the State Superintendent of Education: Strengthen collaboration across the state between key stakeholders, including formal and informal educators, state agencies, and divisions of the California Department of Education. The project will implement this strategy by fostering collaboration on an environmental education effort between informal educators at the IERCD, Micah House, CDFW, CSUSB, and the USFS.

4. **Support of the public:** This project is supported by elected officials, numerous community and nonprofit organizations, and local agencies (See Exhibit 3).
5. **Location:** See the “Site Description”.
6. **Need:** Without Conservancy funding, the proposed project will either not proceed or will need to be scaled back.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The project will provide outdoor experiences for low-income students in a vital Southern California coastal watershed. The proposed projects will serve more than local needs through watershed education. Students will learn about outdoor etiquettes such as leave no trace, and the human impacts on watersheds. Participants can transfer this knowledge to any recreational spaces they visit and share their experience with other outdoor users they encounter throughout their life. This will be beneficial for everyone because students will be inspired to be environmentally conscious.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** This project does not entail physical improvements that could be vulnerable to sea-level rise impacts.

Additional Criteria

9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section below.
10. **Readiness:** The grantee has coordinated with project partners and is ready to begin the camp program in Summer 2021, if public health considerations allow.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$30,000
Inland Empire Resource Conservation District	\$4,500
Project Total	\$34,500

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project is an appropriation from the California Environmental License Plate Fund, derived from sales and renewal of personalized license plates. Funds in the California Environmental License Plate Fund are available upon appropriation for purposes outlined in Public Resources Code Section 21190. These purposes include funding environmental education projects.

The proposed project was selected through a competitive grant process under the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program, Coastal Conservancy Explore the River Grants. The Explore the River grant program seeks to provide experiences for people and communities who face challenges or barriers to accessing or enjoying the River (“ETR Priority Communities”). The ETR grant program will focus on the River and its tributaries excluding the coastal areas. ETR Priority

Communities may include but are not limited to lower-income individuals and households, people with disabilities, people of color, immigrant communities, foster youth, and others

IERCD is providing a match of \$4,500 to help with program logistics. The grantee's project partners, Micah House, Home Depot, and CDFW, will provide \$10,000 of in-kind services and supplies. Micah House will provide staff to help coordinate and facilitate the project. Home Depot staff will provide time and materials to teach participants to build birdhouses. CDFW will provide staff time to teach students fly fishing along with river safety precautions.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The project will provide recreational and educational experiences for youth and families on the Santa Ana River. The project is consistent with the provisions of Chapter 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31170 et seq. regarding the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program and funding for recreational opportunities and trails. Section 31173 states that the Conservancy may undertake projects and award grants to public agencies to help achieve the goals of the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program, including "[public access to, enjoyment of, and enhancement of recreational and educational experience on, program lands in a manner consistent with the protection of land and natural resources and economic resources in the area." (Section 31173(b)). Program lands include the Santa Ana River Parkway, Parkway Study Area, and the Santa Ana River and its tributaries. This project will help achieve the goal of providing public access to, and enjoyment of program lands by taking youth and their parents to multiple locations along the Santa River for educational and recreational experiences that will foster stewardship ethics through active learning.

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

Consistent with **Goal 9, Objective E**: The proposed project improves public understanding and promotes stewardship of coastal watershed resources within the Santa Ana River Parkway by providing valuable recreational and environmental learning experiences to youth and their parents.

Consistent with **Goal 16, Objective A**: The project directly benefits low income and historically excluded communities.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is categorically exempt under Title 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15301 (Existing Facilities) because it involves regular operation of U.S. Forest Service land with no expansion of use.