

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 27, 2021

SANTA ANA RIVER TRAIL RINCON TO PRADO SPILLWAY DESIGN PROJECT

Project No. 11-023-05
Project Manager: Rodrigo Garcia

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,200,000 to Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District to prepare plans, designs, and environmental documentation for the 3.4-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail known as the Rincon to Prado Spillway segment in the County of Riverside.

LOCATION: City of Corona, along the Santa Ana River in Riverside County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed one million two hundred thousand dollars (\$1,200,000) to Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District (“the grantee”) to prepare plans, designs, and environmental documentation for the 3.4-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail known as the Rincon to Prado Spillway segment in the County of Riverside.

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.
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Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation 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 and funding for recreational opportunities and trails.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize up to \$1,200,000 to the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District to prepare plans, designs, and environmental documentation for the 3.4-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail known as the Rincon to Prado Spillway segment in the County of Riverside.

This project will facilitate the expansion of the existing Santa Ana River Trail network by planning and designing approximately 3.4-miles of trail referred to as Phases 2, 2A and 3A or collectively as “Santa Ana River Trail (SART) Rincon to Prado Spillway” (See Exhibit 1). The planning of this segment of the Santa Ana River Trail is particularly challenging due to its proximity to the Prado Dam and the need for collaboration between United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), who owns the land, and the grantee.

The Rincon to Prado Spillway trail segment (Phases 2, 2A and 3A) is in the City of Corona. It will begin near Rincon Road and Temescal Wash and terminate below the Prado Dam Spillway, an area identified as a disadvantaged community.

Phase 2 will begin near Rincon Street and Temescal Wash and terminate at Stagecoach Road. Phase 2A will run between Phase 2 and Phase 3A parallel to Butterfield Drive. Phase 3A will commence at Auto Center Drive and will end adjacent to the Prado Dam outlet channel. This project will prepare plans, designs, and environmental documentation for all three phases.

For more than fifty years, trail users and community leaders have sought to complete the Santa Ana River Trail from the San Bernardino Mountains to the coast. The proposed trail segment will close another gap in the trail, bringing the Santa Ana River Trail closer to completion. The Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway is of great importance to the region and California as it will be one of the longest urban recreation and river parkways in the United States extending about 100 miles connecting three counties and 14 cities. Once completed, it will connect inland communities to the California Coastal Trail and to the San Bernardino National Forest wilderness area.

The trail will connect more than 50 parks, historic sites, picnic areas, education facilities, forests, wilderness areas, hiking trails, campgrounds, nature preserves, and equestrian centers along the Santa Ana River. It is being designed to serve user groups with a wide range of

interests and abilities ranging from casual pedestrian and family audiences to racing cyclists, commuters, equestrians, and hikers.

The proposed project consists of the planning, design, and preparation of all the documentation needed for environmental review and analysis under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Site Description: The proposed project site is an industrial area in the northern part of the City of Corona. The area borders the City of Norco to the north, the City of Riverside to the east, and Chino Hills to the west. The site is currently owned by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

Designated a National Recreation Trail in 1977, the Santa Ana River Trail has been under development for more than fifty years. Once completed, the Trail will extend over 100 miles from the San Bernardino Mountains westward to the coast. It will be one of the longest urban recreation and river parkways in the United States, serving pedestrians, cyclists, commuters, and equestrians.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The proposed project will be undertaken by the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District, which was created by the electorate in November 1990 and formed on January 29, 1991. The District is an independent agency governed by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, which sits as the District's Board of Directors. The District manages more than 44,000 acres, including 40 parks, reserves, historic and archaeological sites, and 90 miles of regional trails. The District has also been a recipient of previous Conservancy grants for similar projects that have been managed successfully.

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:**

"Santa Ana River Parkway & Open Space Plan" (Coastal Conservancy, 2018): The proposed project supports Goals 2 through 7, and Goal 10, of the Education, Recreation and Access Goals of the plan regarding connections between the river corridor and surrounding communities, river-related outdoor activities, opportunities to experience and learn about the natural environment and the river's resources, open space access, safe access to the river, and protection of open space for future education, recreation and access opportunities. The proposed project further supports Goal 1 of the Implementation Goals of

the plan regarding collaborative design projects to provide multiple benefits that support the water, wildlife and habitat, and recreation, education and access goals for the Santa Ana River Parkway.

4. **Support of the public:** The project is supported by California State Senator (31st District) Richard Roth, the Rivers and Lands Conservancy, the City of Corona, the City of Riverside, the Riverside Bicycle Club, and the Inland Empire Biking Alliance. See Project Letters in Exhibit 3.
5. **Location:** The proposed project is located along the Santa Ana River and will help complete a 100-mile trail that connects the California Coastal Trail to the San Bernardino Mountains.
6. **Need:** There has been a vision of completing the Santa Ana River Parkway for more than 50 years. During the last decade, significant political support and regional coordination was established with the goal of completing parkway and trail design and construction. Funding to support completion of the Santa Ana River Parkway was appropriated to the Conservancy and the proposed project will not happen without Conservancy support.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** Portions of the Santa Ana River Trail were designated a National Recreation Trail in November 1976. The National Park Service has indicated its interest in designating the entire trail, once completed, as a National Recreation Trail. When complete, it will be one of the longest urban recreation river trails and parkways in the United States. Just under one-fifth of all the people in the state (approximately 7.7 million people) live in the three counties served by this parkway and trail.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project area is not vulnerable to sea level rise due to the project area's distance from the coast.

Additional Criteria

9. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The Parkway will provide recreational, transportation and health benefits to the residents of Riverside County. The trail will provide urban populations with access to natural areas along the river, to the Coast and National Forests, and to many cultural and historic sites adjacent to the river. The trail's development will be balanced with natural resource protection and flood management along the river.
10. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section below.
11. **Readiness:** Upon Conservancy authorization, the grantee is ready to proceed immediately with the proposed project.
12. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** In 2014, through Senate Bill 1390, the California State Legislature created the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program within the Coastal Conservancy. The program addresses the resource and recreational goals for the Santa Ana River region including open space, trails, wildlife habitat, agricultural land protection, water quality protection, educational use, and public access. Completion of the Santa Ana River Trail remains the top priority for the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program.

13. **Cooperation:** The Santa Ana River Policy Advisory Group (PAG) was created in 2006 in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding for Coordinated Parkway Planning among Counties along the Santa Ana River Corridor. The PAG was established for the purposes of discussing and monitoring progress of the Parkway and coordinating decision-making across jurisdictional boundaries to ensure expeditious completion of the Parkway. The PAG includes members from both the public and private sectors and has effectively coordinated decision-making across jurisdictional boundaries.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$1,200,000
Project Total	\$1,200,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project is the FY 2020/2021 appropriation from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68, Public Resources Code (PRC) Sections 80000-80173). Chapter 7 of Proposition 68 authorizes grants for projects consistent with the Conservancy’s Santa Ana River Conservancy Program (PRC Section 80100(a)(2)). This project is consistent with the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program (Division 21, Chapter 4.6) as described in the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section below. Pursuant to Chapter 7, the Conservancy must “to the extent possible” distribute funds “equitably geographically” along the river. The Conservancy is tracking Proposition 68 expenditures to enable equitable geographic distribution.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will help implement the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway, which will become a major inland trail connecting to the California Coastal Trail. The proposed 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 recreational opportunities and trails. It further states that the Conservancy may undertake projects for “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.” This project will complete design of a portion of the Santa Ana River Trail for the purpose of public access and recreation.

Section 31174(c) states that the Conservancy shall “Give priority to river-related projects that create expanded opportunities for recreation...” Completion of the Santa Ana River Trail will expand opportunities for recreation.

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

Consistent with **Goal 9, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will design a 3.4-mile new section of the Santa Ana River Trail.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project involves preparation of plans, designs, and environmental review documents, and is therefore statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under Title 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Sections 15262 in that it involves planning and feasibility studies for a project that has not yet been approved or funded, and categorically exempt from CEQA under 14 CCR Section 15306 in that it involves data collection and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.