

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 23, 2021

SANTA ANA RIVER TRAIL ALCOA DIKE CONSTRUCTION

Project No. 11-023-06
Project Manager: Greg Gauthier

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorize disbursement of up to \$1,342,500 to the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District for construction of a segment of the Santa Ana River Trail as part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Prado Dam Alcoa Dike construction project, and adopt findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

LOCATION: Prado Dam region of the Santa Ana River, City of Corona, Riverside County.

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Project Location Detail Map](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
- Exhibit 4: [CEQA Documents](#)

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 three hundred forty-two thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,342,500) to the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District (“the grantee”) to construct a segment of the Santa Ana River Trail as part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Prado Dam Alcoa Dike construction project in the City of Corona, Riverside County.

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.
5. Evidence that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is obligated to construct the project and that the grantee will have authority to operate and maintain the project.

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.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed the Santa Ana River Mainstem Project: Alcoa Embankment – Phase II Supplemental Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Report Addendum prepared by the US Army Corp of Engineers on May 2021 and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 4. The Conservancy finds that the project has potentially significant effects in the areas of biological resources, water quality, and noise but that all these effects will be avoided or mitigated. There is no substantial evidence that the project may have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 Cal. Code Regulations Section 15382.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$1,342,500 grant to the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District (District) for construction of a 1.4-mile segment of the Santa Ana River Trail as part of the Prado Dam Alcoa Dike Construction Project in the City of Corona, Riverside County (Exhibit 1).

Orange County Flood Control District (OCFCD) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) are constructing flood control and protection improvements in and around the Prado Basin, commonly known as the Santa Ana River Mainstem Project ("SARMP"). SARMP is necessary to protect the safety, health and welfare of residents and properties in Riverside, Orange and San Bernardino County from the devastating effects of major storm events. OCFCD serves as the Local Sponsor and is responsible for performing necessary relocations and acquisitions of property rights for SARMP.

The Corps has determined the necessity to construct the Alcoa Dike, an earthen dike roughly 7,500 feet in length and more than 34 feet high, as a portion of the Santa Ana River Mainstem

Project to reduce flood risk and thereby protect the lives and the properties of both public and privately owned developments within Prado Basin, as shown in the attached project location detail map (Exhibit 2).

The District identified an opportunity to reduce costs and minimize environmental impacts of construction of a segment of the Santa Ana River Trail by requesting the approximately 1.4-mile trail construction be included as part of the Alcoa Dike construction project. The Corps agreed to construct the trail conditioned upon OCFCD providing the funding. The District will provide OCFCD the funds required by the Corps to construct the trail. The written agreement between the OCFCD and the Corps will be revised to include the Corps's commitment to construct the trail.

The Santa Ana River Trail will run along the toe of the dike embankment. Coordinating the dike and trail construction projects has required coordination by the District with OCFCD and the Corps to accomplish this multi-benefit project. The multi-use trail will accommodate non-motorized bicycle, equestrian, and pedestrian trail users as well as non-motorized commuter traffic. The bike path segment, varying from 10 to 16-foot-wide, will be immediately adjacent to the dike, while the equestrian trail will be offset but roughly parallel to that same alignment and will be approximately 10 feet wide and composed of decomposed granite. Operations and maintenance of the trail will be the responsibility of the District.

Site Description: The proposed project is located along the perimeter of the Prado Dam Basin in the City of Corona, Riverside County, adjacent to Temescal Creek and includes Rincon Street, Auburndale Street, and Butterfield Drive. Temescal Creek originates in Lake Elsinore (Riverside County) as the Elsinore Spillway Channel, flowing northwest for a length of 29 miles to its confluence with the Santa Ana River in Prado Reservoir within the city of Corona. It is the largest tributary to the Santa Ana River. The Santa Ana River watershed drains approximately 3,200 square miles, including portions of San Bernardino, Riverside and Orange counties.

The Alcoa Dike project area encompasses the Prado Dam flood control basin, the Corona Municipal Airport, Orange County Water District conservation lands, and the City of Corona, Riverside County. The Alcoa Dike project area is within the Open Space/General land use designation of the City's General Plan and within the Agricultural zone of the City of Corona's Zoning Ordinance. However, the Santa Ana River Trail construction project is located solely on U.S. Army Corps land and the City of Corona has a recreation lease over the land.

The proposed project area is vacant land that consists of non-native grasslands, non-native woodlands, and riparian scrub. The southwest end of the proposed project area would traverse Butterfield Park, which is 43.5 acres and consists of nine baseball fields, a soccer field, a jogging course, a picnic area, playground equipment, and restrooms. The Corona Municipal Airport is located immediately west of the proposed project area. Other existing land uses surrounding the proposed project area include light industrial development directly south, and single-family residential development.

The proposed project area is also within the boundaries of *Western Riverside County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP)*. The MSHCP is a comprehensive, multi-jurisdictional plan focusing on conservation of species and their associated habitats in the

western portion of Riverside County. The MSHCP is one of several large, multi-jurisdictional habitat-planning efforts in Southern California with the overall goal of maintaining biological and ecological diversity within a rapidly urbanizing region and is intended to allow the County and its cities to better control local land-use decisions and maintain a strong economic climate in the region while addressing the requirements of the state and federal Endangered Species Acts.

Alcoa Dike is one of several perimeter dikes or embankments that are being constructed around the Prado Basin as part of the Santa Ana River Mainstem Project. The feature was originally named for the Alcoa aluminum plant that at one time was in this area of the basin. While that plant no longer exists in this location, the flood risk reduction that would be provided by this feature is still needed for other developments and private property in the area.

The Santa Ana River watershed supports hundreds of species of birds, fish, and amphibians, including more than a dozen protected rare or endangered species such as least Bell's vireo, the Santa Ana Sucker, San Bernardino kangaroo rat, and the Santa Ana River woollystar. The upper portion of the watershed is in the San Bernardino National Forest, and the middle section crosses the Inland Empire, through the urbanized areas of San Bernardino and Riverside counties. Throughout this region, the Santa Ana River is a wide, braided channel with flood control levees protecting the urban development. In some places, the river is a mile wide.

Near the western boundary of San Bernardino and Riverside counties, the river flows into the Prado Basin where the proposed project is located. The Prado Basin is a flood control basin, habitat area and a water treatment wetland. The Orange County Water District owns 2,150 acres in the basin, which is in Riverside County. It operates a treatment wetland to reduce nitrogen levels in the river water prior to using that water for groundwater recharge downstream. Prado Dam was built at a narrow point along the river, where the river flows between the Chino Hills and the Santa Ana Mountains. Below Prado Dam, through the Santa Ana Canyon, there is a short section of relatively natural riparian corridor, with natural channel bottom and riparian vegetation. Below this section, through most of Orange County, the Santa Ana River is a concrete-encased flood control channel that leads to the coast. The mouth of the Santa Ana River is between Huntington Beach and Newport Beach and is part of the 1,000-acre Orange Coast River Park.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The Riverside County Park and Open Space District 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 has extensive experience with project planning and implementation, as it manages more than 44,000 acres, including 40 parks, reserves, historic and archeological sites, and 90 miles of regional trails.

The District has managed more than \$6,000,000 in previous grant funds from the Conservancy for design and construction of the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway.

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 supports and is consistent with the "Santa Ana River Parkway & Open Space Plan" (Coastal Conservancy, May 2018). The project supports Goals 1 through 7 of the Education, Recreation and Access Goals of the Plan regarding creating a continuous shared-use trail system along the length of the river, 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, and access for park-deficient and disadvantaged communities along the river corridor. Finally, the project is listed as a priority project within the Plan.
4. **Support of the public:** This project is supported by the 25 nongovernmental organizations and agencies that participated in the development of the Santa Ana River Parkway and Open Space Plan. See Project Letters (Exhibit 3).
5. **Location:** See the "Project Summary".
6. **Need:** Construction of this segment of the Santa Ana River Trail in association with the Alcoa Dike construction project, will not occur without Conservancy funding.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway is a local, regional, and state resource. The proposed project will complete a 1.4-mile segment of the trail that will serve as an attraction for trail and parkway visitors. The trail along the rest of the Alcoa Dike is under design and will be constructed soon. In the meantime, the trail will connect to a compacted dirt trail at one end and be routed along city streets on the other end,
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed project is located inland, beyond projected sea-level rise scenarios for the years 2050 and 2100 as determined by the Ocean Protection Council's Sea-Level Rise Guidance.

Additional Criteria

9. **Urgency:** The Alcoa Dike construction project design and engineering are complete and required permits have been secured. Construction is ready to proceed so grant funds for the trail are urgently needed now.

10. **Resolution of more than one issue:** Construction of the Alcoa Dike and associated Santa Ana River Trail segment will provide necessary flood protection and provide a safe trail for pedestrians, equestrians, and bicyclists.
11. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section below.
12. **Readiness:** Project design, engineering, and environmental review and permitting are complete. The project is ready to commence upon funding.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See Project Summary.
14. **Cooperation:** The project demonstrates an innovative and cooperative approach through multi-agency coordination of projects to minimize project financial and environmental impacts.
15. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The proposed project would have less than significant impacts on GHG emissions, either directly or indirectly on the environment.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$1,342,500
Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District	\$50,000
Project Total	\$1,392,500

Staff expects to use funds appropriated to the Conservancy in fiscal years 2018-2019 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, *et seq.*). Chapter 5 of Proposition 84 provides funding for the protection and restoration of rivers, their watersheds, and associated land, water, and other natural resources, and specifically allocates funds to the Coastal Conservancy for projects that “expand and improve” the Santa Ana River Parkway and that have been developed “in consultation with local government agencies participating in the development of the Santa Ana River Parkway.” (Public Resources Code section 75050(i)). The proposed project will expand the Santa Ana River Parkway, and was developed in partnership with the local governments developing the Parkway. Proposition 84 requires that at least \$10 million of the Parkway funds be spent in each of three counties (San Bernardino, Riverside, and Orange counties), and this project takes place in Riverside County.

The other anticipated source of funding for this project is the fiscal year 2020-2021 appropriation from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68, Public Resources Code section 80000-80173). The purposes of Proposition 68 include creating parks, enhancing river parkways, and protecting coastal forests and wetlands. Proposition 68 also provides funding for outdoor access, lower cost coastal accommodations and climate adaptation.

Chapter 7 of Proposition 68 (Public Resources Code sections 80100-80101) provides funding for projects consistent with the Conservancy’s Santa Ana River Conservancy Program at Chapter

4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The Conservancy must “to the extent possible” distribute funds “equitably geographically” along the river (PRC section 80100(a)(2)). The proposed project is consistent with the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program as described below. The Conservancy is tracking Proposition 68 expenditures to enable equitable geographic distribution. Future projects will account for equitable distribution to the extent possible also based on need, project readiness, meeting the goals of the Santa Ana River Parkway and Open Space Plan and location within a disadvantaged community or providing access to a DAC.

The Conservancy adopted the State Coastal Conservancy Proposition 68 Guidelines on December 6, 2018. The proposed project has been selected for funding consistent with these guidelines.

Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District funding listed above is provided as an estimate. The Coastal Conservancy does not typically require matching funds, nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders. Typical grant conditions require grantees to provide any funds needed to complete the project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31170-31180 regarding the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program and funding for recreational opportunities and trails within the Santa Ana River region.

The Santa Ana River region includes lands within one-half-mile on either side of the Santa Ana River or its tributaries (Section 31172(c)). The proposed project is located on the Santa Ana River in the City of Corona.

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 recreational opportunities and trails (Section 31173(a)).

It further states that the Conservancy may undertake projects for public access to, enjoyment of, and enhancement of the 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)). The project is consistent with these requirements in that it will construct a section of trail that will provide public access and recreational and educational opportunities.

Section 31174(b) requires the Conservancy to prepare the Santa Ana River Parkway and Open Space Plan (Plan), which was approved by the Conservancy in May 2018. The Plan is required to identify and prioritize low-impact recreational and open-space needs, including additional or upgraded facilities and parks within the Santa Ana River watershed. This project is identified as a priority project in the Plan. Further, the project is consistent with the Plan, as discussed above in the Consistency with Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines section.

The proposed project will help achieve the goals of the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program by awarding a grant to the Riverside County Park and Open Space District to provide recreational opportunities on the Santa Ana River Trail. The project is a priority because it will expand opportunities for recreation along the Santa Ana River without infringing on water quality, water supply and necessary flood control.

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

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

Consistent with **Goal 16, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will benefit disadvantaged communities by providing recreational and educational opportunities for disadvantaged community members visiting the Santa Ana River Trail in the City of Corona.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

To review the proposed project in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers prepared the Santa Ana River Mainstem Project: Alcoa Dike – Phase II, Final Supplemental Assessment and Environmental Impact Report Addendum, May 2021 (Phase II SEA/EIR Addendum)(Exhibit 4).

The Phase II SEA/EIR Addendum addresses modifications and refinements to the dike design along with associated road and utility modifications, and addresses inclusion of the proposed segment of Santa Ana River Trail regional bicycle and equestrian trail as a project betterment. The trail is the proposed project of this staff recommendation. The Santa Ana River Trail is not substantially discussed in the 2018 Alcoa Dike Phase I - Final Supplemental Assessment and Environmental Impact Report Addendum, nor the 2001 Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental Impact Report Addendum; the trail's impacts are encapsulated in the Phase II SEA/EIR Addendum. A contract for Phase II construction is anticipated to be awarded in 2021.

Based on the analyses in the Phase II SEA/EIR Addendum, implementation of the proposed project would result in short term and long-term, insignificant impacts to environmental resources including, biological resources, water resources and hydrology, noise, and air quality, as well as insignificant impacts to cultural resources. All applicable laws, executive orders, regulations, were considered in evaluation of alternatives. Based on reviews by other federal, state and local agencies, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers determined that the proposed project would not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment; therefore, preparation of a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report is not required.

Avoidance and minimization measures to be implemented as part of the proposed project are identified in the Phase II SEA/EIR Addendum.

Biological Resources:

The proposed trail will not result in additional effects to federally listed species that occur in the vicinity, including but not limited to endangered least bell's vireo, California gnatcatcher, and yellow-billed cuckoo or their designated critical habitats. Effects from the overall Alcoa Dike project were assessed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Service concurred that no additional consultation was required for the Phase II modifications.

Santa Ana River Trail construction will temporarily impact 1.5 acres and permanently impact .02 acres of native vegetation. To address these impacts, the proposed project includes restoration of the 1.5 acres of temporary impacts and improving .02 acres of unrestored mitigation area to offset the permanent impacts, removing non-native vegetation and planting native habitat within and immediately adjacent to the work site. The restoration will be based upon a plan that identifies a planting palette, location, methodologies, irrigation and maintenance plans and success criteria for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' review and approval, prior to construction of trail features. The restoration will be monitored during and after construction and maintained through weeding, irrigation, and re-planting if necessary for plant establishment, for a minimum of 5 years, or until success criteria are met.

The Santa Ana River Trail may impact wildlife movement during the daytime when the trail is in use, but this is not expected to be significantly different than existing disturbance from vehicle and pedestrian traffic in the area. At night, when most wildlife movement occurs, the trail would not be used as frequently and is not expected to impact wildlife movement. Therefore, the trail's impacts on wildlife movement is less than significant.

Water Resources and Hydrology:

A Construction Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan will be developed for the project by the construction contractor and filed with the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board prior to construction. A project-specific hazardous materials management and hazardous waste management plan also will be implemented. Prior to engaging in any soil-disturbing activities, the construction contractor will document compliance with the Clean Water Act Section 401 and Section 402 NPDES General Permit for Storm Water Discharges associated with construction activities, and will also obtain any necessary permits for dewatering activities.

Cultural Resources:

The proposed project is consistent with the overall project's existing programmatic agreement prepared under the National Historic Preservation Act pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. A programmatic agreement was executed for the Santa Ana River Mainstem Project in 1993 by the Corps, State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The agreement details the procedures to be followed for each feature of the project. No additional consultation is required for the proposed project. One cultural resource was identified within the dike construction footprint (CA-RIV-5521) and seven cultural resources were identified within the borrow area, (CA-RIV-4727, CA-RIV-4728, CA-RIV-5253, CA-RIV-7136, CA-RIV-5573, CA-RIV-7676, and CA-RIV-7679). All eight cultural resources have been determined to be not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places through a consensus determination with the State Historic Preservation Officer. The proposed

project will not affect any significant cultural resources. The Corps also found that the creation of this section of the Santa Ana River Trail would result in no adverse effect to historic properties and the State Historic Preservation Officer concurred via letter dated July 26, 2017.

The Corps will ensure that ground disturbing activities that have the potential to impact historic properties is monitored by archaeologists meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Any finds will be documented in accordance with the Programmatic Agreement.

If previously unknown cultural resources are found during construction of any feature of the Santa Ana River Project, construction will cease until the requirements in 36 CFR 800.13, are met. This would include coordination with the California State Historic Preservation Officer, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and appropriate Native American groups and/or other interested parties. It may require additional measures such as test and data recovery excavations, archival research, and avoidance measures.

Noise:

As long as construction activities occur during 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday and occasionally Saturday, which are the exempted time periods per County of Riverside Municipal Code and City of Corona Municipal Code, no additional environmental commitments are required. Noise associated with the recreational use of the SART would not rise above ambient levels and therefore will be less than significant.

Air Quality:

No new environmental commitments were deemed necessary for impacts to air quality as a result of the proposed project.

Cumulative Impacts:

Regarding cumulative impacts of the project as a whole and the trail in particular, the trail would improve and increase recreational opportunities in the Alcoa Dike Project area. No contribution to cumulative impacts in the region would occur.

Conclusion:

Staff has independently evaluated the Supplemental Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Report Addendum, May 2021 for the Alcoa Dike Phase II portion of the Santa Ana River Mainstem Flood Control Project.

Staff concurs that there is no substantial evidence that the proposed project will have a significant effect on the environment. Staff therefore recommends that the Conservancy find that the project as mitigated avoids, reduces, or mitigates the possible significant environmental effects to a level of less-than-significant and that there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment as that term is defined by 14 Cal. Code Regs. §15382.

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