

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
December 2, 2021

**BATIQUITOS LAGOON ECOLOGICAL RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROJECT**

Project No. 19-014-01  
Project Manager: Katie Nichols

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$66,000 to Nature Collective to remove invasive plant species on 14.5 acres of coastal wetlands at the Batiquitos Lagoon Ecological Reserve in San Diego County.

**LOCATION:** Batiquitos Lagoon Ecological Reserve, Carlsbad, County of San Diego

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
  - Exhibit 2: [Project Site Maps](#)
  - Exhibit 3: [Project Photos](#)
  - Exhibit 4: [Letter from the Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians; Oct. 6, 2021](#)
  - Exhibit 5: [Project Letters](#)
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**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 sixty-six thousand dollars (\$66,000) to Nature Collective (“the grantee”) to remove invasive plant species on 14.5 acres of coastal wetlands at the Batiquitos Lagoon Ecological Reserve in San Diego 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.
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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 grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement, operate, and maintain the project.
6. The grantee shall comply with the project measures identified by the Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians in their letter dated October 6, 2021, regarding monitoring for cultural resources and actions to be taken if cultural resources are discovered in the project site.

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 corrective measures to enhance coastal resources.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. Nature Collective is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

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## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a grant of up to \$66,000 to Nature Collective to remove invasive plant species on 14.5 acres of coastal wetlands within the Batiquitos Lagoon Ecological Reserve in San Diego County.

The Batiquitos Lagoon Ecological Reserve (Batiquitos Lagoon) is a 544-acre coastal wetland in North San Diego County. The Conservancy has been involved in the restoration and public enjoyment of Batiquitos Lagoon since 1997 through multiple planning, acquisition, and restoration projects. The proposed project sites are estuarine and wetland-upland transitional habitats that are home to over 19 special-status species and provide important wetland functions within the Lagoon. The lagoon suffers from invasion by multiple invasive plant species and these invasive plants have degraded the habitat of the lagoon. Due to the history of multiple changing land uses and the high level of human activity and development in northern San Diego County, the natural habitats in this area face an ongoing risk of degradation from exotic plant invasion. Left uncontrolled, invasive vegetation will further encroach on the limited and fragmented natural habitats that exist at the lagoon.

The project consists of treatment of invasive plant species followed by offsite disposal. The treatment consists of destroying the vegetation by either mechanical removal, hand removal, and/or application of chemicals and periodic re-treatments until invasive species control is

established. Based on regional priorities and mapping, the species targeted for control at the lagoon are Algerian sea lavender (*Limonium ramosissimum*), Pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*), Horticultural Iris (*Iris pseudocorus*), Perennial pepperweed (*Lepidium latifolium*), Tamarisk (*Tamarix ramosissima*), Giant reed (*Arundo donax*), Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus spp.*), Iceplant (*Carpobrotus spp.*), Canary Island palm (*Phoenix canariensis*) and Fan palm (*Washingtonia robusta*) (see Project Photos Exhibit 3). Each species requires a specific method of control and a specific season for optimal removal. Nature Collective will optimize treatments based upon method of control and schedule. Avian monitoring will be conducted prior to activities and avian monitors will identify and flag any bird nests found within the project site prior to treatment and schedule work in consideration of bird breeding seasons.

The proposed project will build upon previous invasive plant species management work funded by the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB). Continuation of invasive species control will provide the most cost-effective method of habitat enhancement. Effective management of invasive species will allow native species to recolonize as native seed banks germinate in the absence of competition by invasives. The invasive species that will be treated (palms, pampas grass, tamarisk), usually have high efficacy, and the project includes planned retreatments.

**Site Description:** The proposed project is in the Batiqitos Lagoon Ecological Reserve, a State reserve managed by the Department of Fish and Wildlife in the Carlsbad Hydrologic Unit (CHU) in northern San Diego County (see Project Location Map Exhibit 1). The CHU is a management unit comprised of seven watersheds covering a 210 square mile area in northern San Diego County. Nature Collective has identified a target area for invasive species control in the upper eastern corner of the lagoon (see Project Site Maps Exhibit 2).

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** Nature Collective, formerly known as the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, has been engaged in the conservation and restoration of coastal resources in the region for over 30 years. This history has included numerous successful projects wholly or partly funded by the Coastal Conservancy. The proposed project builds upon previous invasive plant species management work funded by WCB, which ended in Fall of 2019. Through this funding, Nature Collective plans to continue implementing invasive species control across coastal wetlands in the CHU and manage invasive species in the long term in this area.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

**Selection Criteria**

**1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.**

See the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Strategic Plan” section below.

**2. Project is a good investment of state resources.**

This project provides benefits to Californians by restoring coastal wetland habitat by removing invasive species, which will improve habitat quality and improve resilience of a degraded lagoon. The budget is reasonable, and Nature Collective is well qualified to conduct the work.

The proposed project is also consistent with the Conservancy funded Batiquitos Lagoon Enhancement Plan (1987) and is named on the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project's 2019 work plan. Additionally, the Carlsbad Water Quality Improvement Plan (WQIP) includes provisions to reduce degradation and fragmentation of riparian habitat corridors and to restore the value of critical ecosystem services previously offered by the natural channel and wetland. The goal of the WQIP is to protect, preserve, enhance, and restore water quality of receiving water bodies and this project aligns with that plan.

**3. Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area.**

Following Conservancy tribal consultation on this project in September 2019, the Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians (tribe) requested a cultural resources survey be conducted at the project site. The results of this survey were shared with the tribe and based on the survey Nature Collective has refined the project to avoid disturbance to known cultural resources. To further ensure that the project will not impact cultural resources, Nature Collective has agreed to comply with the project measures identified by the Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians in their letter dated October 6, 2021, regarding monitoring for cultural resources and actions to be taken if cultural resources are discovered in the project site (see Exhibit 4). Nature Collective is working to develop further relationships with tribes in the region and has engaged, communicated, and solicited feedback on this project and will do so on their future projects.

**4. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.**

Located in a coastal lagoon, the proposed project is vulnerable to sea level rise. The invasive species targeted for removal by this project are known to contribute to flood damage, increase the risks associated with fire, and result in excessive uptake of water availability and degradation of native habitat. The control of these invasive species in the Batiquitos Lagoon will create a more functional natural system that will be more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

**5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.**

The proposed project is on a protected State Ecological Reserve with over 19 special-status species documented to occur on or within a mile of the project site. The project will provide benefits to those species through habitat enhancement. Additionally, Nature Collective's multi-watershed invasive species control program will promote habitat connectivity via corridors. Nature Collective considers corridor and edge-effects in the design of their restoration plans and is working with land managers to protect potential wildlife corridors by maximizing native species cover on adjacent properties.

**6. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.**

The proposed project is supported by the City of Carlsbad, the California State Assembly member for the 76<sup>th</sup> district, and the Center for Natural Lands Management (see Exhibit 5 for project support letters). Nature Collective also has ongoing cooperation with the Carlsbad Watershed Network and is performing outreach to neighboring landowners.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$66,000</b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$66,000</b>

The funding source for the Conservancy grant is expected to be the Carlsbad Agricultural Mitigation Fee Statutory Program Account within the State Coastal Conservancy Fund. This account was established pursuant to the Coastal Act, Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 30171.5. The account is composed of fees paid by developers to mitigate the impacts of converting Carlsbad’s agricultural lands to other uses and may be spent for projects or activities that are consistent with the priority list of allowed fund uses contained in Section 30171.5(b). The highest priority use on this list is restoration of natural resources and wildlife habitat in Batiquitos Lagoon. By removing invasive plants, the proposed project will restore Batiquitos Lagoon vegetation, which is a natural resource that provides wildlife habitat and promotes the ecological integrity of the lagoon.

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

The proposed Project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 6 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Public Resource Code Sections 31251-31263.5 as follows:

Pursuant to Section 31251, the Conservancy may award grants to nonprofit organizations for the purpose of enhancement of coastal resources, which, because of human-induced events or incompatible land uses, have suffered loss of natural and scenic values. This project will remove invasive plants at Batiquitos Lagoon thereby enhancing habitat at Batiquitos Lagoon, which is a coastal resource.

Consistent with Section 31252, the proposed project is located within an area identified in the City of Carlsbad Local Coastal Program (LCP) as requiring public action to resolve resource protection problems. The LCP identifies restoration of Batiquitos Lagoon as the priority for the expenditure of agricultural conversion mitigation funds and this project is consistent with the Batiquitos Lagoon Enhancement Plan (see LCP Chapter II-3, page 108).

Pursuant to Section 31253, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of any coastal resource enhancement project, taking into the consideration the total cost of the project, the fiscal resources of the grantee, the urgency of the project and other factors as determined by

the Conservancy. Consistent with this section, the proposed Conservancy contribution and source of funding is both urgent and appropriately directed.

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

**GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective B** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will enhance coastal wetlands by implementing an invasive species control project.

Consistent with **Goal 8, Objective C** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will increase resilience to sea level rise by implementing an invasive species control project that will enhance native upland habitat adjacent to a coastal lagoon.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed project is categorically exempt under CEQA Guidelines at California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15304, which exempts minor alterations in the condition of land and/or vegetation that do not involve removal of mature, healthy trees. The examples in Section 15304 include minor alterations in land and vegetation in officially designated wildlife management areas that will improve habitat for fish and wildlife resources (14 CCR Section 15304(d)). The proposed project will not remove any trees and will improve wildlife habitat in an officially designated wildlife management area (i.e., a CDFW ecological reserve) by removing invasive plant species that have a deleterious effect on native habitat.

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