

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
February 3, 2022

River KATS

Project No. 21-067-01
Project Manager: Rodrigo Garcia

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$35,000 to Inland Empire Waterkeeper to provide approximately 350 students a free week-long educational and recreational outdoor summer camp at Martha McLean-Anza Narrows Park and Hidden Valley Nature Center and Wildlife Area in Riverside County.

LOCATION: City of Riverside, Riverside County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

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 thirty-five thousand dollars (\$35,000) to Inland Empire Waterkeeper (“the grantee”) to provide approximately 350 students a free week-long educational and recreational outdoor summer camp at Martha McLean-Anza Narrows Park and Hidden Valley Nature Center and Wildlife Area in 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. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
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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.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
 3. The Inland Empire Waterkeeper 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 \$35,000 grant to Inland Empire Waterkeeper (IEWK) to provide approximately 350 students a free week-long educational and recreational outdoor summer day camp at Martha McLean-Anza Narrows Park and Hidden Valley Nature Center and Wildlife Area in Riverside County. The proposed project was selected through the Explore the River grant program through the Santa Ana River Conservancy program.

Developed in 2006, IEWK's River Kids Activism Through Science (River KATS) program has engaged students with safe outdoor river recreation, environmental education, and long-term preservation of the Santa Ana River and its tributaries. There is a particular need for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs for underserved groups such as low-income and minority students. All of the participants in IEWK's programs are low-income with Latinx making up 70-90% of the student population. These same communities also face many barriers when it comes to accessing and enjoying the river – primarily economic. Alleviating these barriers can help develop a sense of stewardship for the river.

The proposed project will provide approximately 350 students with participation in the River KATS program, a week-long educational and recreational outdoor summer day camp at no cost to the participants. IEWK will conduct seven weeks of summer camp with approximately 50 students per week and will include meals and transportation. To recruit participants, IEWK will focus its outreach efforts on populations in the Inland Empire. It will work with school districts in Riverside and San Bernardino County, water districts, and local parks and recreation departments to ensure participants of varied demographics are reached.

The River KATS program will take place at two outdoor locations:

- **Martha McLean-Anza Narrows Park.** A 40-acre regional park located along the Santa Ana River. This section of the river has the right conditions for swimming and other activities.
- **Hidden Valley Nature Center and Wildlife Area.** Set on 1,500 acres along the Santa Ana River, this area offers 25 miles of hiking where visitors can enjoy views of the river.

Through the program, students will participate in guided nature hikes where they will learn basic animal tracking skills and learn about animals native to the Santa Ana River. Participants will also learn about the local indigenous people and how they use the resources of their environment including the Santa Ana River to meet their needs for shelter, food, and medicine. The program will teach participants about river safety and the “Leave No Trace Behind” principle when enjoying the outdoors. The camps will culminate with a day for all participants and their families to enjoy water games and explore the river. All participants will receive a brochure with resources to recreational sites and information on vouchers, passes and free or discounted activities provided by the United States Forest Service and local communities. This brochure will provide families an opportunity to reconnect to the river on their own and promote environmental stewardship.

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 Riverside. 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 the residents of Riverside.

Participants in the River KATS program will be visiting two locations along the Santa Ana River, Martha McLean-Anza Narrows Park and Hidden Valley Nature Center and Wildlife Area.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The Inland Empire Waterkeeper was established by the Orange County Coastkeeper in 2005 and for over fifteen years has carried out its mission to protect and enhance the water quality of the Upper Santa Ana River Watershed through programs of advocacy, education, research, restoration, and enforcement. IEWK has successfully hosted the River KATS program since 2006 in addition to many other projects that provide safe outdoor recreation, hands-on environmental education, public engagement, and long-term preservation of the Santa Ana River and its tributaries.

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.

The proposed project reflects a good investment of state resources as it will provide a lifelong benefit of promoting stewardship for the Santa Ana River and its tributaries to approximately 350 individuals through educational and recreational activities at no cost to participants.

The proposed 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 proposed project will foster a connection between program participants and their communities with recreational areas along the river corridor.
- Goal 5 – Provide a diversity of opportunities for people to learn about the river corridor and its resources. The proposed project will provide educational and recreational opportunities for participants to experience nature.

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.

In November 2021, the Conservancy sent letters to tribes within Riverside County informing them about the Conservancy’s involvement with the proposed project and inquiring if they would like to initiate tribal consultation. Many tribes responded to thank the Conservancy for the notice but did not wish to initiate a tribal consultation at this point.

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

The proposed project will promote stewardship for the Santa Ana River and its tributaries to approximately 350 individuals who can later share their experience and lessons learned with friends and family who can continue to care for and enjoy the river.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The proposed project will be free to participants, alleviating one of the biggest obstacles low-income families face when they wish to participate in similar programs. The River KATS program will deliver participants an array of educational and recreational activities that meet State science standards and will promote stewardship for the river and its tributaries.

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

IEWK distributes bilingual outreach material describing the nature of the program at various areas in Riverside. IEWK also uses its existing contacts at Title 1 schools to reach out to new schools and attend school board meetings to announce their programs and invite teachers to participate.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$35,000
Project Total	\$35,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for the proposed project is a fiscal year 2021-2022 appropriation to the Conservancy from the General Fund for the “Explore the Coast Program.”

The proposed project was selected through a competitive grant process under the Santa Ana River Conservancy program, 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 include but are not limited to lower-income individuals and households, people with disabilities, people of color, immigrant communities, foster youth, and others.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The project is consistent with the provisions of Chapter 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Section 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 nonprofit organizations to help achieve the goals of the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program, including “Recreational opportunities [...] in the Santa Ana River for all beneficial uses, [and] related educational use.” (Section 31173(a)). The proposed project will help achieve this goal by taking youth and their parents to multiple locations along the Santa Ana River for recreational and educational experiences.

The proposed project also achieves the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program goal of “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.” (Section 31173(b)). The proposed project will provide the public with access to the Santa Ana River, provides a recreational and educational experience on program lands, and will foster a sense of environmental stewardship in participants.

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

Consistent with **Goal 9, Objective E** of the Conservancy’s 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, 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** of the Conservancy’s 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project directly benefits low-income and historically excluded communities.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is categorically exempt under Title 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15301 (Existing Facilities), which exempts the operation of existing facilities or topographical features involving negligible or no expansion of existing use. The proposed project consists of the regular operation of existing facilities and topographical features that will be visited with no expansion of existing use.