COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 1, 2022

COMMUNITY WETLAND RESTORATION GRANT PROGRAM – 2022-2023

22-008-01
Project Manager: Kellan Warner

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to $250,000 to nonprofit organizations for three community-based restoration projects in coastal wetlands and along coastal stream corridors in the Southern California region; and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

LOCATION: Various locations in the South Coast region of California (see Exhibit 1)

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location Map

Exhibit 2: Carlsbad Hydrologic Unit Invasive Non-Native Plant Control and Revegetation Program Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND)

Exhibit 3: Carlsbad Hydrologic Unit Invasive Non-Native Plant Control and Revegetation Program Initial Study

Exhibit 4: Carlsbad Hydrologic Unit Invasive Non-Native Plant Control and Revegetation Program Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program

Exhibit 5: Project Letters

Exhibit 6: Project Photos

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code:

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes three grants of an amount not to exceed two hundred fifty thousand dollars ($250,000) in total to three nonprofit organizations for

community-based natural resource restoration and enhancement projects in Los Angeles and San Diego counties. The three grantees and projects are as follows:

- Outward Bound Adventures: Seventy-five thousand dollars ($75,000) to provide a hands-on paid conservation workforce training project to engage 25 underemployed adults from low-income communities in restoring four acres of riparian/coastal stream corridor in Malibu Creek State Park.
- WILDCOAST: One hundred thousand dollars ($100,000) to enhance habitat over a sixty acre project area of the Batiquitos Lagoon wetland and include youth volunteers from San Diego County Indigenous and park poor communities to participate in restoration events.
- Nature Collective: Seventy-five thousand dollars ($75,000) to provide historically marginalized volunteers with opportunities to participate in community-based efforts to restore four acres of coastal dune and tidal marsh habitats in Cardiff-by-the-Sea in San Diego County.

Prior to commencement of the project, each 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 and Proposition 68 as the source of that 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.

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 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding coastal resource enhancement projects.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The proposed nonprofit organizations are organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.
4. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the Carlsbad Hydrologic Unit Invasive Non-Native Plant Control and Revegetation Program Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) adopted by San Diego County on May 31, 2012 pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 2. The Conservancy finds that the proposed San Elijo Lagoon and Dune Habitat Restoration project to be conducted by Nature Collective and the

Batiquitos Lagoon Wetland Restoration project to be conducted by WILDCOAST fall within the MND and as designed and mitigated avoid, reduce, or mitigate the potentially significant environmental effects to a less-than-significant level, and that there is no substantial evidence based on the record as a whole that the projects may have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 Cal. Code Regulations Section 15382.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to $250,000 to three nonprofit organizations to implement three community-based resource restoration and enhancement projects of sixty-eight acres along the Southern California coast (Exhibit 1) as part of the 2022 Community Wetland Restoration Grant Program (CWRGP).

CWRGP is a Conservancy program to provide funding annually for community-based wetland and riparian enhancement and restoration projects in coastal wetlands and watersheds in the Southern California region. The purposes of CWRGP are to further the wetland recovery goals for Southern California as set forth in the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (WRP) Regional Strategy (2018); build local capacity to plan and implement wetland restoration projects; promote community involvement in wetland restoration activities; and foster education about wetland ecosystems. Projects funded through the program must include educational and community involvement elements as strong components of the project.

Since 2001, the CWRGP has funded over 170 projects in Southern California, distributing four million dollars for community-based project implementation. In 2021, Conservancy staff conducted an impact and progress evaluation of the CWRGP, revisioning the program and its priorities and incorporating the Conservancy's recently adopted Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion principles, finding ways to reach new community-based organizations rooted in underserved and/or frontline communities, and broadening the network of applicants. The CWRGP seeks to engage and benefit people and communities that include but are not limited to lower-income individuals and households, people with disabilities, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), immigrant communities, and other historically marginalized communities ("CWRGP Priority Communities").

Each year, the Conservancy solicits CWRGP proposals from nonprofit organizations, universities, tribes, and agencies eligible to apply to the CWRGP. Proposals are reviewed by a committee that includes staff from the Conservancy, the Wildlife Conservation Board, the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, and other agencies that participate in the WRP. Projects funded through the CWRGP are designed to be completed in one to two years. The total amount recommended for this authorization is expected to fund one year of the grant cycle.

Project selection for the 2022 CWRGP was completed in July 2022. Of this year's projects, all three were proposed by nonprofit organizations. The three projects recommended for funding this year are as follows:

Los Angeles County

OUTWARD BOUND ADVENTURES, INC. $75,000

Malibu Creek Riparian Restoration

The Malibu Creek Riparian Restoration (MCRR) is a paid conservation workforce training project that will engage 25 underemployed adults from BIPOC communities in restoring four acres of riparian/coastal stream corridor. The MCRR is an expansion of OBA's larger Fire & Climate Resilience Restoration program—a federally-sanctioned apprenticeship certification program designed in compliance with the Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act—that provides career access opportunities and pathways to upward mobility and long-term sustainable employment through training to become a certificated workforce in conservation. These programs are dedicated to the development of an ethnically diverse and inclusive workforce from historically underserved communities and provide training on wildland and urban fringe fire resilience, climate change mitigation and restoration, and conservation. The project will help participants build the connection between the health of creeks, watersheds, wetlands, the ocean, and communities, and employment opportunities typically not considered within this demographic.

MCRR is a project-based, experiential education program that will improve participants' knowledge of Malibu Creek State Park and the value of wetlands ecosystems and riparian habitats. OBA provides all transportation to and from the project site. Participants will be trained by experts from Malibu Creek State Park on how to identify, survey, and flag threatened, endangered, rare, or sensitive plants and animals—and the importance of surveying and flagging cultural sites. Participants will learn how to identify and inventory invasive non-native plant species in and adjacent to the 4-acre riparian habitat and appropriate removal and eradication techniques. Park staff will provide experiential workshops to teach participants about plants native to the project site, seed collecting and storage, and techniques for propagating native plants from seeds and cuttings. Staff from State Parks will conduct hands-on, project site specific trainings on initial site preparation, strategic planting, and short- and long-term management strategies that will make this project site—and Malibu Creek State Park in general—more resilient to wildfires and climate change. Participants will also learn how to maintain, rehabilitate, and construct new trails in the riparian corridor.

Site Description: The project site is four acres of riparian corridor in Malibu Creek State Park containing few native plants and has been impacted by the four-year drought (2012-2016) followed by the Woolsey Fire (2018), followed by more drought years (2020-present). Currently, the riparian corridor is choked with invasive non-native grasses and mustard plants. The project site is upstream of a recently restored section of the creek, where a bridge was

removed to allow streamflow and fish to pass freely, the surrounding area was planted with native plants, and a trail delineated.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Outward Bound Adventures, Inc. (OBA) is dedicated to serving underserved, overlooked, and avoided BIPOC populations through meaningful and challenging nature-based experiences—and promoting greater diversity in those who visit and manage our natural landscapes. OBA creates systemic change in communities of color through programming that helps raise awareness of the nexus between racial equity, environmental justice, social justice, and climate change. OBA has received funding from the Board of State Community and Corrections, State Coastal Conservancy, California Natural Resources Agency, Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, and California Coastal Commission), among others. OBA is partnering with California State Parks, Angeles District, on planning and implementing the MCRR project.

San Diego County

WILDCOAST **$100,000**

Batiquitos Lagoon Wetland Restoration Project

The proposed project will restore habitat over a sixty acre project area of degraded wetland habitat surrounding Batiquitos Lagoon State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA), that makes up 326.4 acres of wetland ecosystems. This project will restore the integrity of this natural wetland ecosystem, improve the wetland's capacity to respond to climate change and maintain healthy functions, enhance the lagoon's resilience to anthropogenic disturbances over time, enhance critical habitat for a number of endemic, threatened, and endangered wildlife species, and engage a diverse audience as conservation stewards. The project will accomplish this by restoring California coastal sage scrub, riparian, and wetland habitats through eradication of invasive trees and plants and accumulated biomass, revegetation with native trees and plants, and trail maintenance.

The project's outreach and educational aspects will provide on-site interpretation through signage, educational materials, and stewardship opportunities for students from indigenous and park poor communities. The proposed project will engage volunteers from CWRGP Priority Communities in restoration opportunities. Adult and student volunteers come from low-income and underrepresented communities in San Diego County including Rincon Indian Reservation, City Heights, Imperial Beach, Chula Vista, and the City of San Diego. The project will also engage at least 15 students from WILDCOAST's Coastal Leaders Internship for Indigenous Youth. Coastal Leaders is a school-year-long conservation-focused internship for students ages 13 through 16 representing the San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians, the Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians, the Pauma Band of Luiseño Indians, the Pala Band of Mission Indians, the La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians, and the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians.

Project partner Nature Collective will carry out invasive species removal of large plant species including palm trees and eucalyptus, and any removal that requires use of herbicides.

Volunteers will remove small weedy non-natives and plant native species such as cottonwoods, sycamores, California buckwheat, coast live oak, white sage, and black sage, as well as maintain trails. The project will also include the annual Batiquitos Lagoon Kayak Cleanup Days, a stewardship event that allows volunteers access to the lagoon via kayak and includes kayak-based survivorship studies and maintenance of previously restored sites. A major focus of the event is the participation of students from underserved communities in south San Diego County, El Cajon, and Valley Center. Since 2017, approximately 80 students from these communities have participated in the event.

Site Description: The 326.4-acre Batiquitos Lagoon State Marine Conservation Area (SMCA), located within San Diego County, is surrounded by residential and commercial developments, and is vulnerable to environmental stressors such as sea-level rise and climate change. The lagoon has been dramatically reduced from its historic extent. To increase the region's natural defenses against predicted sea-level rise and further ecological decline, there is a need to systematically restore open spaces and unrestored habitats around the lagoon. Batiquitos Lagoon SMCA has a recent history of restoration yet needs further habitat enhancement.

WILDCOAST, Batiquitos Lagoon Foundation (BLF), and Nature Collective have identified a need for additional restoration within the sixty acres proposed in this project. The project site is located between the Batiquitos Lagoon Nature Center on the west and the "Rookery" (near the east side of the Aviara Golf Course) on the east. It borders the Batiquitos Lagoon Interpretive Trail on the north and Batiquitos Lagoon State Marine Conservation Area on the south. Partial restoration is underway on the east side of the Rookery to remove eucalyptus trees and install native plants such as California buckwheat, white sage, black sage, and coast live oak. This project will extend the restoration area to include key habitat within the sixty acres of defined project area.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: WILDCOAST has a full-time staff of ten in the United States that includes conservation staff dedicated to the execution of the project as well as finance, human resource, and executive level management. WILDCOAST has experience coordinating restoration projects since 2000 in the Tijuana River Valley and more recent projects, including the restoration of 42 acres of wetland ecosystems in Batiquitos and San Dieguito Lagoon SMCAs. These projects strengthen wetland management in California and engage youth from Indigenous and park-poor communities in coast and ocean stewardship. WILDCOAST will coordinate invoicing, reporting, youth engagement, evaluation, and general project management aspects of the project. Project partners include BLF, an organization which has successfully administered city, state, and federal grants involving consultants, subcontractors, and the purchase of materials, and has all equipment needed for restoration activities in the lagoon. BLF has an active Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with California Department of Fish and Wildlife. WILDCOAST will also partner with the Nature Collective, a team of scientists and nature enthusiasts helping to preserve San Diegan lands. Through their efforts over 40 miles of streams in the San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve, throughout the Carlsbad Hydrologic Unit, and beyond have been restored. Nature Collective is currently working to restore 42 acres of habitat at Batiquitos Lagoon and has agreed to lead restoration efforts of the additional acres through this project.

NATURE COLLECTIVE **$75,000**

San Elijo Lagoon and Dune Habitat Restoration

The project area is within the San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve and the Cardiff Living Shoreline in Encinitas, and includes the restoration of four acres within two critical coastal habitats: coastal dune and tidal marsh. Nature Collective has been restoring San Elijo Lagoon and its adjacent habitats for over a decade. However, pocket areas need restoration and provide ideal opportunities for community engagement and participation. In addition, both habitat types have non-native and invasive species that require control and management, native plant species planting, including rare and sensitive species, and subsequent monitoring. The restoration efforts will focus on restoring pocket areas of disturbed habitat dominated by non-native or invasive species and areas with low vegetation cover. In some areas, such as those under the influence of tidal flow, allowing for natural colonization is often the best way to restore habitat. Volunteers installed nearly one hundred percent of the dune area plants under the guidance of Nature Collective staff, and their efforts have been very successful. With this proposed grant, Nature Collective plans to remove non-native plant species that continue to colonize this habitat and plant additional native species to provide better habitat for target wildlife species.

Nature Collective will perform some of the project work directly, but will also complete some of the project work by engaging over 200 volunteers in nine hands-on community restoration experiences during the project timeline. Volunteer restoration activities will include removing invasive species, providing water to growing plants, monitoring flora and fauna, and planting seeds in a native plant nursery. Nature Collective will also provide transportation to students and families from 17 schools in Escondido to attend three of the community volunteer events. Of these schools, 13 are Title 1 schools, defined as a school where at least 40% of the students are from low-income families, although many schools far exceed that threshold.

Site Description: The project area includes a total of four acres in two habitats: salt marsh and adjacent dunes within the West Basin of San Elijo Lagoon and the Cardiff Living Shoreline dune complex just west of Highway 101 in Encinitas, CA. The West Basin tidal prism has significantly improved, which has led to restoring the physical and biological functions of this and other areas of the lagoon. The Cardiff Living Shoreline site is now one of the most significant coastal dune habitats in San Diego, with about 50 percent covered by native dune species. Cardiff Living Shoreline is located on Cardiff State Beach, which California State Parks owns. Nature Collective has an existing agreement with them for habitat restoration and maintenance of the dunes. Unfortunately, non-native and invasive plant species invade both areas, threatening these habitats' ecological integrity. Because of the lagoon being encroached by urbanization and the disturbance that comes with it, it is expected that these valuable habitats will need continual management, restoration, and monitoring.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Nature Collective has successfully managed more than $16 million in funding for invasive species control, environmental monitoring, habitat restoration, environmental education, and numerous site-specific projects, including construction. Nature

Collective just completed guiding the San Elijo Lagoon Restoration, a large-scale project aimed at improving tidal circulation, restoring habitat diversity, and providing climate change resiliency for the mudflats and saltmarsh adjacent to the upland sites. Nature Collective has successfully performed on over thirty restoration projects since 2004. They have robust experience with GIS, facilitating reporting, communicating with vendors, and preparing daily work plans. They have an extensive Community Habitat Restoration program that attracts over 1,000 volunteers per year, who assist in all aspects of their restoration and conservation efforts. Nature Collective's team is an experienced and dedicated group of individuals and contractors with a proven record of success in large restoration programs.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, 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.**

All proposed projects contribute to protecting wetland or stream and adjacent habitats in Southern California. These areas are under intense stress from urbanization and face impacts from historical and ongoing stressors, and must be bolstered for predicted future stressors, like climate change. Wetlands are bountiful in ecosystem services that benefit all Californians, including carbon sequestration, reducing flooding, improving water quality, and more.

Each project will have long-lasting restoration impacts and sites will continue to be maintained after the projects are completed:

- For the Batiquitos Lagoon Wetland Restoration Project (WILDCOAST), project partners BLF and Nature Collective are dedicated to the restoration and management of Batiquitos Lagoon SMCA and have funding and capacity to continue management and monitoring into the future. As the state agency tasked with MPA management, California Department of Fish and Wildlife will continue to monitor and carry out essential management functions in the lagoon.
- California State Parks will implement the long-term plan to protect the Malibu Creek Riparian Restoration Project (Outward Bound Adventures, Inc.) project site, which includes routine watering during the first two to three years to improve overall quality and quantity of plant survival rate, along with routine maintenance of trails. OBA is working with Park staff to find funding to continue ecological restoration work upstream of this project site.

- Beyond the proposed completion date, Nature Collective will maintain and monitor the San Elijo Lagoon and Dune Habitat Restoration project site, according to the Monitoring, Reporting, and Long-term Management Plan for the San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve.

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.

Staff sent letters to all tribes in San Diego and Los Angeles Counties following the Conservancy's tribal consultation guidelines on these projects in August 2022 with follow-up from six contacted Tribes for two meetings.

The Batiquitos Lagoon Wetland Restoration Project (WILDCOAST) will engage at least 15 students from WILDCOAST's Coastal Leaders Internship for Indigenous Youth. Coastal Leaders is a school-year-long conservation-focused internship for students ages 13 through 16 representing the San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians, the Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians, the Pauma Band of Luiseño Indians, the Pala Band of Mission Indians, the La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians, and the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians.

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

The proposed wetland restoration projects increase natural defenses against predicted sea-level rise and ecological decline by improving the capacity of the habitats to respond to climate change and maintain healthy functions. Wetlands and riparian habitats provide a bevy of ecosystem surfaces, including carbon sequestration, buffering against sea level rise and storm surge, and the filtration of sediments and pollutants. All proposed projects include components of removing non-native species and reinstating native species, which will bolster the long-term wildfire resistance of project sites.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

Each proposed project was selected for both the restoration component of the project as well as significant community engagement. Through work to restore the wetland habitats, community members will actively participate in the project and will learn more about the importance of wetland ecosystems.

Additionally, the proposed projects were selected for their work to engage and benefit CWRGP Priority Communities, which include but are not limited to lower-income individuals and households, people with disabilities, BIPOC, immigrant communities, and other historically marginalized communities.

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

Through different mechanisms, the three proposed CWRGP projects engage meaningfully within their respective community contexts. One of the main purposes of the CWRGP is to build local capacity to plan and implement wetland restoration projects and to promote community involvement in wetland restoration. Projects funded through the program must include educational and community involvement elements as strong components of the project.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	**$175,000**
Wildlife Conservation Board (via grant to the Conservancy)	$75,000
Project Total	**$250,000**

The CWRGP 2022-2027 is partially funded by a grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board for $500,000 to fund the CWRGP for five years. The San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) also granted $300,000 to fund the 2022-2027 CWRGP. RMC's funding will be used for projects in future grant years and will not contribute to any 2022 CWRGP projects, as their funding is contingent on geographic constraints and can only be used towards projects within the Lower Los Angeles River and San Gabriel River watersheds. The Conservancy anticipates providing $300,000 of match funding over 5 years for a program total of $1.1 million.

The Wildlife Conservation Board funding will contribute $75,000 for one of the selected 2022 - 2023 CWRGP projects. The Conservancy will contribute the remaining $175,000. The expected source of Conservancy funds for the Malibu Creek Riparian Restoration and San Elijo Dune and Lagoon Habitat Restoration projects is the FY 2020/21 appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access For All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68, Public Resources Code Sections 80000- 80173). Chapter 9 of Proposition 68 allocates funds to the Conservancy for protection of beaches, bays, wetlands, and coastal watershed resources. (Public Resources Code Section 80120 (c)). Conservancy funding for the Batiquitos Lagoon Wetland Restoration Project is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of coastal resilience. (Budget Act 2022, SB 154) The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it will increase natural defenses against predicted sea-level rise and ecological decline by improving the capacity of the habitats to respond to climate change and maintain healthy functions. All three projects recommended for funding will enhance and protect wetland and coastal watershed resources.

Unless specifically identified as "Required Match," the other sources of funding and in-kind contributions described above are estimates. The Conservancy does not typically require matching funds or in-kind services, nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders or of in-kind services. Typical grant conditions require grantees to provide any funds needed to complete a project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21, Sections 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code, regarding Resource Enhancement Projects.

Chapter 6: Coastal Resource Enhancement Projects
Section 31251 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations "for the purpose of enhancement of coastal resources that, because of indiscriminate dredging or filling, improper location of improvements, natural or human-induced events, or incompatible land

uses, have suffered loss of natural and scenic values." Grants shall be used for, among other things, corrective measures that will enhance the natural and scenic character of the areas. All proposed projects will enhance or restore natural resources that have been degraded by human activities.

Section 31252 requires that all areas proposed for resource enhancement by a state agency, local public agency, or nonprofit organization shall be identified in a certified local coastal plan or program as requiring public action to resolve existing or potential resource protection problems or shall be so identified in other local plans which the commission determines to be consistent with the policies and objectives of Division 20 (commencing with Section 30000).

The San Elijo Lagoon Project (Nature Collective) is consistent with Section 31252 because the City of Encinitas' current Local Coastal Program (LCP) resolves to preserve the integrity, function, productivity, and long term viability of environmentally sensitive habitats throughout the City, including lagoons and their uplands (LCP Policy 10 on Preservation of Environmentally Sensitive Habitats).

Consistent with Section 31252, the Batiquitos Lagoon Wetland Restoration Project (WILDCOAST) is located within an area identified in the City of Carlsbad LCP as requiring public action to resolve resource protection problems. The LCP identifies restoration of Batiquitos Lagoon as a priority and this project is consistent with the Batiquitos Lagoon Enhancement Plan (see LCP Chapter II-3, page 108).

The Malibu Creek Riparian Restoration Project (Outward Bound Adventures, Inc.) is consistent with Section 31252, by restoring coastal waters, streams, wetlands, and estuaries with the maintenance of natural vegetation buffer areas that protect riparian habitats, and minimizing the alteration of natural streams, as identified in the Santa Monica Mountains LCP Section 30231. This project is in the coastal zone portion of the Santa Monica Mountain Zone, and the Santa Monica Mountain Conservancy has approved the project consistent with section 31117.

Consistent with Section 31253, the recommended amount of funding is determined by evaluating the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal resource enhancement projects, the fiscal resources of each applicant, the urgency of these CWRGP projects relative to other similar projects, and the application of other factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority. For each of the proposed projects, the Conservancy's funding was deemed appropriate through a competitive grant process that included selection because each of the projects' benefits to coastal habitat is significant. The use of community volunteers in two of the proposed projects provides added cost savings. Each proposed project includes an important public education component, and one focuses on providing workforce development opportunities for underserved communities.

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

Consistent with **Goal 4, Objective A**, the proposed projects provide educational programs and interpretive events that improve public understanding and promote stewardship of coastal resources.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective B**, the three proposed projects will restore or enhance coastal habitats, including coastal wetlands and intertidal areas, stream corridors, and dunes.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective D**, the three proposed projects will implement projects that preserve and enhance coastal watersheds and floodplains.

Consistent with **Goal 16, Objective A**, the three proposed projects are located in disadvantaged communities or directly benefit disadvantaged communities.

Consistent with **Goal 16, Objective C**, all proposed projects will increase coastal access for all Californians, by supporting organizations that provide coastal experiences to underserved populations.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The Malibu Creek Riparian Restoration Project (Outward Bound Adventures, Inc.) is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304, minor alterations to the land, water and/or vegetation.

Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the proposed project above.

The San Elijo Lagoon Restoration project and the Batiquitos Lagoon Wetland Restoration project are covered by the Carlsbad Hydrologic Unit Invasive Non-Native Plant Control and Revegetation Program Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) adopted by the County of San Diego on May 31, 2012. The restoration activities of the proposed project are within the scope of the MND and all project activities will be carried out in accordance with the mitigation measures established therein. The MND indicates that there is a potential for significant environmental effects from the project in the areas of biological resources, geology and soils, and hydrology/water quality. However, proposed mitigation measures will avoid or reduce the possible effects to a less than significant level. The mitigation measures are summarized below and in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (Exhibit 4).

Biological Resources

Project activities will avoid and minimize potential impacts to sensitive habitats, and plant and wildlife species to the maximum extent practicable.

To avoid and minimize biological resource impacts prior to, and during, treatment of invasive plants, a number of avoidance and minimization measures will be implemented, including the following:

Herbicide application measures: Only herbicides currently approved by the U.S Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for use in wetlands will be used. No herbicide will be applied to native vegetation. This includes any surfactants that are used during application. Herbicides will only be applied by licensed applicators using backpack sprayers. To reduce the chance and impact of spillage, work crews will only mix herbicide, load mixed chemicals into ATVs (for refilling backpack sprayers), and refuel ATVs in staging areas. Staging areas are disturbed sites such as

roads, permanent trails, shoulders, graded areas, or sites with compacted soil that support no vegetation or weedy vegetation.

***Avoidance measures for bird species impacts**:* Work will generally be conducted between September 15th and March 15th, but work may be initiated after August 15th if avian surveys determine that nesting has been completed for the season. Whenever invasives removal is conducted (a) in San Elijo Lagoon/Escondido Creek; or (b) in upland areas during the nesting/breeding season, a qualified biologist will conduct three surveys (one week before treatment, one day before treatment, and the morning of treatment) for light-footed clapper rails (in San Elijo Lagoon/Escondido Creek), gnatcatchers (in upland areas), and other bird species (all locations) in treatment areas. Any bird nests that are identified during these surveys will be flagged, avoided during project-related work, and revisited when nests are no longer active. If any light-footed clapper rail, gnatcatchers and/or their nests, or other nesting birds, are detected in an area to be treated, the biologist will stop all treatment activities within 50 feet of the detected species and/or nests until avoidance measures developed after consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are implemented.

Native vegetation avoidance measures: Prior to treatment of target non-native plants, native vegetation will be demarcated through separation or buffer creation to minimize the chance of non-target herbicide application.

Geology and soils: The project will not result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil for the following reasons:

- The project will not result in unprotected erodible soils, will not alter existing drainage patterns, and will not develop steep slopes.
- The project will include Best Management Practices (BMPs) to ensure sediment does not erode from the proposed project site.
- The project does not involve grading.

Additionally, the project will not alter the land in any way as to create unstable conditions as the project does not propose landform alteration. The project is for habitat restoration. The project does not propose any septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems since no wastewater will be generated. No grading or soil movement will occur to establish staging areas, access points and access routes.

Water quality: The project proposes habitat restoration (invasive, non-native plant control and revegetation of native species). The project does not involve grading or alteration of landform and will not affect water quality. The project will not use any groundwater for any purpose, including irrigation, domestic or commercial demands. In addition, the project does not involve operations that would interfere substantially with groundwater recharge including, but not limited to the following: the project does not involve regional diversion of water to another groundwater basin; or diversion or channelization of a stream course or waterway with impervious layers, such as concrete lining or culverts, for substantial distances (e.g., ¼ mile). Therefore, the project will not impact groundwater resources.

Restoration activities will not impact channel areas with water flow or result in the discharge of any contaminants. Aquatic approved herbicides will be used for treatments of non-native plants. These herbicides are approved for use by open water by the EPA. No direct applications of herbicide to water will occur.

Other biological avoidance and minimization measures: No more than three crews will be active on the watershed at one time and only one crew will operate at a given site at a time. ATVs will not drive in channel areas and will operate only in open areas, woody-vegetation will no be cleared or drive upon. Crews will avoid wading through streams whenever possible and cut non-native plants will be stacked and dried away from streams or wet areas to prevent re-infestation.

Cultural Resources

The following measures will be implemented to protect cultural resources: Any invasive non-native plant control or restoration work using mechanical equipment near or within registered sites will be reviewed by a certified archaeologist, and if deemed necessary, a cultural and/or Native American monitor will be on site during work to assure that no impacts to historic or cultural resources occur.

Staff has independently evaluated the MND and its associated Initial Study and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program and concurs that the there is no substantial evidence that the proposed projects will have a significant effect on the environment. Staff therefore recommends that the Conservancy find that the projects as mitigated avoid, reduce, or mitigate the possible significant environmental effects to a level of less-than-significant and that there is no substantial evidence that the projects will have a significant effect on the environment as that term is defined by 14 Cal. Code Regs. §15382. Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination for the San Elijo Lagoon and Dune Habitat Restoration Project and the Batiquitos Lagoon Wetland Restoration Project.