

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 14, 2023

COMMUNITY WETLAND RESTORATION GRANT PROGRAM – 2023-2024

22-008-01

Project Manager: Maravilla Clemens

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$308,200 to three non-profit organizations and the University of California, Santa Barbra (“UCSB”) for four community-based natural resource restoration and enhancement projects on up to a total of twenty-seven acres in coastal wetlands and along stream corridors in the Central and Southern California region as part of the 2023 Community Wetland Restoration Grant Program; and adopt findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

LOCATION: Various locations in the Central and South Coast region of California

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Community Habitat Stewardship Project Negative Determination No. ND-0028-21](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
- Exhibit 4: [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 four grants of an amount not to exceed three hundred eight thousand two hundred dollars (\$308,200) to three nonprofit organizations and the University of California, Santa Barbra (“UCSB”) for four community-based natural resource restoration and enhancement projects on a total of approximately 24 acres in coastal wetlands and along stream corridors in Santa Barbara, Orange, and San Diego Counties (the “projects”). The four grantees and projects are as follows:

- Audubon California: One hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to implement restoration activities at Buena Vista Lagoon that are informed by and include traditional ecological knowledge in collaboration with the San Luis Rey Band, 'ataaxum Pomkwaan, and Buena Vista Audubon Society.
- San Diego Audubon Society: Fifty thousand two hundred dollars (\$50,200) to San Diego Audubon Society to fund community habitat restoration events and work at three sites in south San Diego Bay and the Tijuana Slough.
- Laguna Canyon Foundation: Fifty-eight thousand nine hundred dollars (\$58,900) to Laguna Canyon Foundation to provide opportunities for students to assist with water quality testing and habitat enhancement in and around ongoing restoration projects along Aliso Creek.
- University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB): Ninety-nine thousand one hundred dollars (\$99,100) to engage UCSB students as well as local elementary schoolchildren and Tribal youth to restore degraded habitat in the Storke Wetlands at Goleta Slough while increasing UCSB's capacity to connect students of all ages to wetland species, ecosystem function, and restoration opportunities.

Prior to commencement of the projects, 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 through the Community Wetland Restoration Grant Program as well as Proposition 68 funding when applicable as a 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 projects are 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 Community Habitat Stewardship Project Negative Determination No. ND-0028-21 (“Negative Determination”) adopted by the California Coastal Commission on October 25, 2021 pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 2. The Conservancy finds that that there is no substantial evidence that the proposed South San Diego Bay Community Habitat Stewardship Project will have a significant effect on the environment.
-

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of \$308,200 to nonprofit organizations and the University of California for four community-based natural resource restoration and enhancement projects on up to a total of twenty-seven acres in coastal wetlands and along stream corridors in the Central and Southern California region as part of the 2023 Community Wetland Restoration Grant Program (CWRGP) (the “projects”). See Exhibit 1. The CWRGP is a Conservancy program that provides funding annually for community-based wetland and riparian enhancement and restoration projects in coastal wetlands and watersheds in the Southern and Central California regions. The purposes of the 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 and Central California, distributing four million dollars for community-based project implementation. In 2021, Conservancy staff conducted an impact and progress evaluation of the CWRGP, revising the program and its priorities by 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, public and nonprofit universities, tribes, local (City or County) agencies, and other public agencies. 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 CWRPG. Projects funded through the CWRGP are designed to be completed in one to two years.

The 2023 CWRGP round received 10 proposals, and project selection was completed in June 2023. The four projects recommended for funding this year are as follows:

San Diego County

AUDUBON CALIFORNIA

\$100,000

Restoring the Buena Vista Lagoon Ecological Reserve with Payómkawichum Ecological Knowledge (Buena Vista Lagoon project)

The proposed Buena Vista Lagoon project will restore 3.8 acres of wetland habitat at the Buena Vista Audubon Society's Wetland Reserve and 3.6 acres of wetland habitat at the adjacent Nature Center Preserve within the Buena Vista Lagoon Ecological Reserve. Restoration work will focus on removal of weeds and trash as well as planting of native plants to enrich critical wildlife habitat.

Over the past few decades, the Buena Vista Lagoon (Lagoon) has slowly been taken over by invasive cattails and has filled with sediment. The Lagoon has shifted from a lagoon influenced by tidal inflows into a freshwater lagoon after a weir was installed at its mouth several decades ago, preventing saltwater from entering the system. The remaining uplands areas surrounding, and connected to, the Lagoon are also impacted by trash, erosion, and invasive weeds that have severely reduced the ecological functioning of these uplands as well as the marsh. These impacts have degraded the function of the lagoon ecosystem, and while restoration efforts are currently underway, collaboration and partnerships with the original caretakers of the land, the Payómkawichum, must be made to ensure success for these critical restoration projects and support the continued connection of the Payómkawichum to their ancestral land.

The Buena Vista Lagoon project will focus on three goals: develop and implement Payómkawichum Ecological Knowledge curriculum, document Indigenous stories, and engage in hands-on restoration efforts with the Indigenous community. While California Audubon will be the grantee for this \$100,000 project, \$40,000 will be sub-awarded to the San Luis Rey Band, \$40,000 will be sub-awarded to 'ataaxum Pomkwaan (a Native and Indigenous led non-profit that is driven to provide community resources centered around healing and improved mental health for the continued survival of California's Native and Indigenous peoples), and \$10,000 will be sub-awarded to the Buena Vista Audubon. The Buena Vista Lagoon project will plan and implement restoration activities within the Buena Vista Lagoon Ecological Reserve that are directly informed by and include local Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Buena Vista Audubon, along with restoration ecologists and consultants, will provide guidance on the specific restoration activities recommended for the wetland reserve and surrounding area. The majority of restoration work will involve invasive plant removal and cleanups. Restoration work will also include the planting of native species. The San Luis Rey Band and 'ataaxum Pomkwaan will play a large role in restoration planning and implementation, and they will also lead the work in restoring relationships between the Indigenous people and the land. This will be facilitated through the development of the Payómkawichum Ecological Knowledge (PEK) 101 Program, which will be created by local Indigenous and Payómkawichum educators who have acquired this knowledge from their ancestors over thousands of years through direct contact with the

environment. The PEK 101 program will host 4 sessions, each identifying one major element of ecological restoration. Participants will visit sites throughout the watershed, interview restoration experts, and share Indigenous stories of the plants, birds, and people of the land. Experiences will include activities such as invasive plant removal, cleanups, trail maintenance, bird and plant monitoring, and documenting culturally significant connections to the plants, wildlife, land, and water. Access to and care of these lands by Payómkawichum will simultaneously help heal the land itself and the generational trauma undergone by the Payómkawichum participants who have suffered from colonization and theft of their lands. PEK 101 development will be an iterative process, allowing for it to influence the restoration work taking place at Buena Vista Lagoon while being updated as needed throughout the project so that it can be used to increase capacity of project partners to implement Payómkawichum Ecological Knowledge in future restoration projects in the region.

Site Description: There are two project sites encompassing a total of 7.4 acres of wetland habitat in and adjacent to the Buena Vista Lagoon Ecological Reserve, which lies in the traditional territory of the Payómkawichum. The larger of the two sites is 3.8 acres of wetland habitat at the Buena Vista Audubon Society’s Wetland Reserve, which is adjacent to the Buena Vista Lagoon Ecological Reserve and owned by the Buena Vista Audubon Society. The southern-most edge of this site is a small strip of freshwater vegetated marsh which transitions to a degraded uplands area, predominantly comprised of invasive species. A number of native plants are dispersed throughout the site that will be protected and enhanced through completion of this project. The second site is the Nature Center Preserve within the Buena Vista Lagoon Ecological Reserve, which contains 3.6 acres of wetland habitat. The site is owned by California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Buena Vista Audubon Society has an agreement with the agency to conduct on-going restoration activities. The preserve is a mix of habitats representing various native ecosystems in the coastal region; these habitats are connected by a 0.25-mile trail that begins at the nature center and loops through this area.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Audubon California has been granted multiple state grants over the past 15 years along California’s coastline. This includes grants from the Coastal Commission, Conservancy, and Ocean Protection Council to plan coastal wetland restoration projects, conduct research related to climate change impacts on habitats, engage local communities and advocate for coastal protection. Audubon California has also been a recipient of grants from the Wildlife Conservation Board and Department of Water Resources for work throughout California. In addition to serving as the project manager, they have a development and finance team that is seasoned in grant administration. Most of the funding Audubon California hopes to secure for this project would go towards its Indigenous partners. This grant will help ensure that Audubon California can adequately compensate its Indigenous partners, as Audubon California greatly values their knowledge and sees that it is critical that their expertise be implemented through this process.

SAN DIEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY

\$50,200

South San Diego Bay Community Habitat Stewardship Project (San Diego project)

The proposed San Diego project will engage community members of all ages in the restoration and enhancement of 10.4 acres of coastal sage scrub, coastal dune, and coastal tidal wetland

habitats. 5.1 acres involve an ongoing habitat enhancement project, and the other 5.3 will be new enhancement projects. The San Diego project objectives include conducting habitat enhancement activities at three habitat preserves along the shores of south San Diego Bay and the Tijuana Slough, fostering long-term engagement by local community members to provide informed stewardship of native habitats in their local habitat preserves, and improving San Diego Audubon Society's staff capacity to engage communities in wetland and wetland-adjacent restoration projects. To do this, San Diego Audubon Society will continue existing partnerships with the Port of San Diego, the Silver Strand Beautification Project, San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Coastal Program to provide community habitat stewardship opportunities during calendar years 2024 – 2026.

The San Diego project activities include removing non-native vegetation, specifically focusing on invasive sea lavender in the wetland habitat, removing trash, planting coastal sage scrub and coastal dune plants, conducting maintenance activities (such as watering and weeding), and monitoring. These activities will occur during community restoration events providing opportunities for residents to be active stewards of their local preserves, with a goal of hosting 10-12 community events that cumulatively engage at least 200 people. Outreach and existing long-term partnerships will focus on inviting volunteers from the adjacent disadvantaged Imperial Beach community to these events. Existing signage and outreach materials from the Reserves are primarily in English, creating a barrier for some community members to enjoy and enhance their local natural areas. San Diego Audubon Society has previously worked on developing Spanish language bird and plant guides, among other conservation-related materials that will be available at restoration events and will utilize bilingual outreach materials in advertising these restoration events to the public. In addition, Bayside and Silver Strand Elementary schools will be a focus of outreach for the community restoration events. Kumeyaay tribal cultural monitors from Loveless-Linton, Inc. will be present at each Tijuana Slough and Emory Cove planting event to monitor and share the importance of the area and the connection to the coast for Kumeyaay communities.

Site Description: The sites for the restoration work will be Grand Caribe Shoreline Park, Emory Cove wetland area, and the Tijuana Slough National Wildlife Refuge. The Port of San Diego owns and manages Grand Caribe Shoreline Park and Emory Cove wetland areas, and the Tijuana Slough National Wildlife Refuge and California State Parks jointly own and manage the Tijuana Slough project area. Grand Caribe Shoreline Park is a small but well-trafficked community park where San Diego Audubon Society has been planting and maintaining native species since 2018, funded by the Port of San Diego and by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Emory Cove is a habitat area that has invasive species and impacts from recreation. Emory Cove has coastal sage scrub habitat where San Diego Audubon Society has been working since 2020, and tidal wetland habitat that this grant would help to enhance and monitor. The cornerstone area of the Tijuana Slough Refuge is a well-used access point to the refuge where San Diego Audubon Society has been removing invasive plants and planting native species since 2022.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The San Diego Audubon Society has been a local chapter since 1948 and is well established in the community. It has received multiple grants from the

Conservancy that have been successfully completed. San Diego Audubon Society has been working on community engagement in habitat enhancement projects at these three locations and with the landowners for 3-5 years. It also has community ties from past restoration events as well as connections with local schools to build on when engaging the local communities from around south San Diego Bay. San Diego Audubon Society will continue productive partnerships with the Port of San Diego, the Tijuana Slough National Wildlife Refuge, and California State Parks through this project.

Orange County

LAGUNA CANYON FOUNDATION

\$58,900

Aliso Creek Community Habitat Restoration (Aliso Creek project)

The Aliso Creek project will engage students who live in the vicinity of Aliso Creek to enhance habitat over a 4-acre project area along the stream corridor. Laguna Canyon Foundation has been working to restore habitat along Aliso Creek for over a decade and will use the funding from this grant to consider how to best manage invasive species along the Aliso Creek Hiking and Biking Trail now that new County regulations prohibit the application of herbicide near trails. This work will happen in conjunction with efforts to engage surrounding communities in restoration efforts. Laguna Canyon Foundation has struggled to create programs that incorporate meaningful local community engagement for restoration projects along the Aliso Creek stream corridor and in Aliso & Woods Canyon Wilderness Park due to lack of organizational capacity and funding. The Aliso Creek project will help the Laguna Canyon Foundation increase capacity and create a meaningful program that will ideally be leveraged for future restoration projects in this region.

Laguna Canyon Foundation will partner with Orange County Parks, Earthroots Field School, and Soka University to engage six primary schools in the vicinity of Aliso Creek in the restoration work. Laguna Canyon Foundation anticipates three of these schools will be Title 1 schools, and aims to provide programming to over 600 students, primarily from 5th and 6th grade. Prior to field days that bring students to the restoration site, Laguna Canyon Foundation will offer each school an assembly presentation with the goal of increasing community awareness, understanding, and appreciation of riparian ecology and habitat restoration in Aliso Creek. Students from these schools will then participate in field trips that include restoration and enhancement work at the site as well as water-quality experiments along Aliso Creek. Restoration and enhancement work will include removing problematic weed species by hand and with simple tools, as well as sowing locally-gathered seed of native plants, with the goal of creating additional high-quality wildlife habitat and providing a buffer for existing restoration areas. Water quality experiments will serve the dual purpose of increasing community awareness and understanding of the importance of water quality and its impact on wildlife in the area, while also collecting data that will inform future restoration and land management activities in this reach of Aliso Creek.

Site Description: The Aliso Creek project area is located in a portion of Aliso & Wood Canyons Wilderness Park (Orange County Parks) that forms a corridor around Aliso Creek and buffers it from the surrounding highly urbanized communities. It comprises areas of restored Coastal

Sage Scrub, Southern Willow Scrub, and Mulefat Scrub habitats as well as adjacent upland areas degraded by the invasion of problematic weed species including Black Mustard, Fennel, Artichoke Thistle, Malta Star Thistle, and Perennial Pepperweed. The Aliso Creek stream corridor serves as a critical connection between the coastal San Joaquin Hills and the Interior Santa Ana Mountains. While the Aliso Creek Riding and Hiking Trail provides an important recreation and transportation resource for local communities, it also serves as a vector for novel invasive species to be introduced and establish a foothold, making weed monitoring and management along its length critical for the success of adjacent habitat restoration efforts.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Laguna Canyon Foundation has been engaged in habitat restoration, mitigation, enhancement, targeted invasive control, fuel modification, and other conservation projects in the Laguna Canyon Creek and Aliso Creek Watersheds for over a decade. It has successfully received and completed several grants from the Conservancy. It has also successfully completed over a half-dozen additional restoration projects, and is currently working on over 25 conservation projects involving hundreds of acres. In relation to educational projects, Laguna Canyon Foundation has been running field-based nature education programs for Title 1 schools for over a decade. These programs focus on meeting the Next Generation Science Standards and fostering a sense of connection and belonging in the participants.

Santa Barbara County

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

\$99,100

Storke Wetlands Enhancement and Engagement (Storke Wetlands project)

The Storke Wetlands project will restore 2.6 acres of degraded habitat from two fragments of Goleta Slough. This project would build on past work to enhance the function and educational potential of these habitats and increase UCSB’s capacity to connect students of all ages to wetland species, ecosystem function, and restoration opportunities in East and West Storke Wetland.

The Storke Wetlands project aims to integrate diverse communities from multiple age groups more explicitly in the restoration work at the Storke Wetlands project site. In addition, the Storke Wetlands projects will set the stage for a much larger vision for Storke Wetlands related to re-introducing tidal connection to the salt marsh portions of the site. Storke Wetlands project goals include restoring 0.5 acres of salt marsh habitat, as well as enhancing and restoring two acres of freshwater seep and riparian woodland understory. Invasive species will be addressed through persistent hand weeding and solarization. Native plant communities to be planted include high salt marsh, seep, saltmarsh edge, oak woodland, riparian, and coastal bluff edge, with planted species including unique brackish marsh species. The bulk of the restoration work will be done by six UCSB interns along with restoration-focused UCSB students who will be hired to complete a cumulative 300 hours of hands-on restoration. Additional restoration work will be completed over six field trips to bring an anticipated 180 - 360 4th-6th grade students from six Title 1 schools to the site. The UCSB student interns will assist Cheadle Center staff in running these field trips so that they may also gain experience in environmental education. Signs on well-used walking/biking paths will be revised and refurbished as needed. The Storke Wetlands project aims to build on collaboration with the Santa Ynez Band of

Chumash Indians and coastal bands of Chumash that is developing in association with an ongoing Explore the Coast Grant to provide opportunities to work with youth in these indigenous communities and cultural leaders to identify native plants, as well as manage and use native plant materials to construct tools in areas of Goleta Slough known to have been important to the Chumash. This project would increase the Cheadle Center’s capacity to work with diverse members of local Tribes and build on relationships that have been developed over the past 5+ years to work more formally with families and youth.

Site Description: The Storke Wetlands project site is on UCSB property on the degraded southwestern edges of the Goleta Slough ecosystem that have been separated from tidal flow for 80 years. These natural areas have also been subject to abuses associated with sewer construction, road construction, filling, dumping, grazing, and development. In West Storke wetland there are habitat-altering weeds such as bristly oxtongue thistle and annual grasses. The East Storke portion of the project is impacted by a persistent and challenging population of invasive bridal creeper, rabbitsfoot grass, iceplant, prickly ox-tongue, and harding grass. The Storke Wetland project area is known to be used by bobcat, coyote, long-tailed weasel, Baja chorus frogs, gopher and kingsnakes, alligator and western fence lizards, as well as diverse raptors and song birds.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Over the past 15 years, UCSB’s Cheadle Center staff have been awarded at least three CWRGP grants for work along the degraded edges of various urban wetlands in this area. This project builds on and expands that work in West Storke wetland and expands it to East Storke Wetland. Tribal engagement for this project will build from ongoing relationships supported by a Conservancy Explore the Coast Grant. The Cheadle Center has more than 15 years of experience leading and running K-12 environmental education programs and has well developed relationships with schools from more disadvantaged areas within the coastal Santa Barbara and Ventura areas. In addition, the Cheadle Center manages more than 300+ acres of land and has experience conducting restoration projects on very small and large scales.

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.

Each project contributes to protecting wetland or stream and adjacent habitats in Central and 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, reduced flooding, improved 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 Restoring the Buena Vista Lagoon Ecological Reserve with Payómkawichum Ecological Knowledge project (Audubon California), the Buena Vista Audubon Society will be responsible for funding and implementing ongoing management and monitoring. Both the Wetlands Reserve and Nature Center Reserve project sites will be protected in perpetuity. The grant funding the acquisition of the Wetlands Reserve stipulates the land is protected for wildlife uses. Regarding the Nature Center Preserve, it is within the BVLER, a state-owned and protected reserve for wildlife.
- For the South San Diego Bay Community Habitat Stewardship Project (San Diego Audubon Society), beyond the scope of project funding, the landowners (Port of San Diego and Tijuana Slough NWR/California State Parks) will be responsible for long-term management and monitoring of their reserves. The Tijuana Slough site is already part of a National Wildlife Reserve, and thus protected at the federal level. Grand Caribe and Emory Cove are managed by the Port of San Diego and its Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan and Environmental Advisory Committee.
- For the Aliso Creek Community Habitat Restoration project (Laguna Canyon Foundation), Laguna Canyon Foundation plans to continue to restore and enhance the habitat in and around these areas in the coming decades. The project is included within the Aliso & Wood Canyon Wilderness Park, which is owned and managed by Orange County Parks. While this portion of the park is not included in the Coastal Natural Communities Conservation Plan, Orange County Parks manages the entire Park area as if it were.
- For the Storke Wetlands Enhancement and Engagement project (University of California, Santa Barbara), the site is managed by the UCSB Cheadle Center for Biodiversity & Ecological Restoration and will be protected as Open Space in perpetuity.

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.

The Buena Vista Lagoon project leads plan to invite other Tribes who historically shared the space with their Payómkawichum neighbors to participate in the project.

The San Diego project will have Kumeyaay tribal cultural monitors from Loveless-Linton, Inc. (a Native American owned Cultural Resource Management Firm) present at each Tijuana Slough and Emory Cove planting event to monitor and share the importance of the area and the connection to the coast for Kumeyaay communities.

The Aliso Creek project plans to engage with the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation, whose homelands include the Aliso Creek project area, to provide stipends to Tribal

representatives to attend school assemblies and share stories about connections to native plants and the Creek.

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 each 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.

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

Through different mechanisms, the four 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 | \$58,900 |
| Wildlife Conservation Board (<i>via</i> a grant to the Conservancy) | \$249,300 |
| Project Total | \$308,200 |

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 2023 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 \$249,300 for the selected 2023-2024 CWRGP projects. The Conservancy will contribute the remaining \$58,900. The expected source of the Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from the FY 2022/2023 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 habitats to respond to climate change and maintain healthy functions. All four 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 authorization for the Buena Vista Lagoon project, San Diego project, Aliso Creek project, and Storke Wetlands project are consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21, Sections 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code, regarding Resource Enhancement Projects.

Section 31251 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies and 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 Buena Vista Lagoon project (Audubon California) is consistent with Section 31252 because the City of Oceanside’s current Local Coastal Program (LCP) Section V.C. Objective 1 states that the city will work with other local state and federal agencies to protect the sensitive biological habitats and water quality of Buena Vista Lagoon.

The San Diego project (San Diego Audubon Society) has sites in Coronado and Imperial Beach. Consistent with Section 31252, the San Diego project meets the City of Coronado LCP as it aims to restore the biological productivity of coastal waters and wetlands and maintains natural vegetation buffer areas that protect riparian habitats (Section D.6, page 17). It also meets the City of Imperial Beach LCP as it aims to restore wetlands, which is consistent with Policy 4.4.3 (see LCP Chapter 4.4, page CE-16).

The Storke Wetlands project (University of California, Santa Barbara) is consistent with Section 31252, because it will restore coastal waters, streams, wetlands, and estuaries and maintain a natural vegetation buffer area that protects riparian habitat, and it will minimize the alteration of natural streams, as identified in the County of Santa Barbara LCP Section, which identifies adherence to Coastal Act Policy 30231.

The Aliso Creek project (Laguna Canyon Foundation) is consistent with Section 31252 because it will restore and retain Aliso Creek in a natural state as identified in the Laguna beach LCP, Open Space/Conservation Policy 9-U. The Aliso Creek project is also consistent with Section 31251.2(a) because it is a watershed resource located partly outside the Laguna Beach coastal zone that directly impacts resources in the coastal zone. Here, the proposed project will restore Aliso Creek to more natural conditions, serving to protect fish and wildlife habitat within coastal watersheds and coastal waters.

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. Each proposed project includes an important public education component.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#):

Consistent with **Goal 1.1 Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, all four of the proposed projects aim to engage and include participation with people from systemically excluded communities.

Consistent with **Goal 1.2 Return Power to Tribes**, the Buena Vista Lagoon project returns power to tribes by co-visioning of the project with the San Luis Rey Band and 'ataaxum Pomkwaan, who will also be sub-awarded the majority of the grant. The Buena Vista Lagoon project aims to support continued connection of Payómkawichum to their ancestral lands. Capacity building support will be achieved through creation of Payómkawichum Ecological Knowledge 101 curriculum and internships.

Consistent with **Goal 3.2 Restore or Enhance Habitats**, the four proposed projects will restore or enhance coastal habitats, including coastal wetlands and riparian areas. Across all four projects, approximately 24 acres of habitat will be restored or enhanced.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN/STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN:

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

For the San Diego project, staff has independently reviewed and considered the Community Habitat Stewardship Project Negative Determination No. ND-0028-21 ("Negative Determination") adopted by the California Coastal Commission on October 25, 2021 pursuant

to the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 2, and concurs that there is no substantial evidence that the proposed project will have a significant effect on the environment. The Negative Determination made by the California Coastal Commission is informed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Evaluation of the project sites. The Negative Determination states that upland coastal habitat restoration will have no adverse effect on coastal zone resources. Upon approval of the San Diego project, staff will file a Notice of Determination.

The Buena Vista Lagoon project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304, which applies to minor alterations to land. The project is exempt under 15304 because it will not have a direct or indirect negative effect on the environment since it is comprised of passive surveying and education outreach, hand-pulling weeds, removing trash, and planting native plants. Upon approval of the Buena Vista Lagoon project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption (NOE).

The Aliso Creek project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15304, which applies to minor alterations to land. The project is exempt under 15304 because it will not have a direct or indirect negative effect on the environment as it is primarily comprised of passive surveying, education outreach, and habitat restoration and enhancement work that is considered a normal part of Park operations. Upon approval of the Aliso Creek project, staff will file a NOE.

The Storke Wetlands project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15333, which applies to small habitat restoration projects. This project is exempt under 15333 as it is a habitat restoration and enhancement project that is less than five acres in size. Upon approval of the Storke Wetlands project, staff will file a NOE.