

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 30, 2023

**SANTA ANA RIVER TRAIL
GREEN RIVER GOLF COURSE SEGMENT**

Project No. 11-023-03
Project Manager: Rodrigo Garcia

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,300,000 to augment the Conservancy's existing grant of \$2,300,000 to the Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District for preparation of design, engineering, and other documentation needed for environmental review for a 1.5-mile Santa Ana River Trail segment that is adjacent to the Green River Golf Course and connects to the Orange County line in the County of Riverside.

LOCATION: Santa Ana River Parkway, along the Santa Ana River, Riverside County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [September 28, 2017 Conservancy Authorization](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed one million three hundred thousand dollars (\$1,300,000) to augment the Conservancy's existing grant of two million three hundred thousand (\$2,300,000) to the Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District for preparation of design, engineering, and other documentation needed for environmental review for a 1.5-mile Santa Ana River Trail segment that is adjacent to the Green River Golf Course and connects to the Orange County line in the County of Riverside. This authorization remains subject to the same conditions contained in the Conservancy's September 28, 2017 authorization.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 4.6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Santa Ana River Conservancy Program and funding for recreational opportunities and trails.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
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STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$1,300,000 grant to augment the Conservancy grant of \$2,300,000, previously authorized to the Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District (the District) for preparation of design, engineering, and other documentation needed for environmental review for a 1.5-mile Santa Ana River Trail segment that is adjacent to the Green River Golf Course and connects to the Orange County line in the County of Riverside.

The Green River Golf Course segment will begin where the Orange County portion of the Santa Ana River Trail ends and will continue east, adjacent to the Green River Golf Course to the Prado Dam. Near the Prado Dam, the trail will cross under Highway 71 and continue around the edge of the Prado Basin. Planning for this section will be coordinated with the US Army Corps of Engineers, which is currently working on a project to increase flood storage in the Prado Basin by raising the face of the dam and constructing a series of supporting dikes. The trail will continue through the cities of Corona and Norco. Above the Prado Basin, the Santa Ana River is a wide braided channel that migrates across an active floodplain. Planning for the trail in this section is complicated because it must be balanced with natural resources protection and flood management.

Recent developments through the planning for the trail have led to the need for additional design and environmental work that was not originally budgeted for in the 2017 authorization. Specifically, the District will use the additional funds for costs related to a revision of approximately 1,000 feet of trail realignment, pedestrian/bicycle bridge realignment subsequent to the trail realignment, and improvements to the connection between the Santa Ana River Trail and the Lower Aliso Canyon Trail.

Site Description: The Santa Ana River watershed drains approximately 3,200 square miles, including proportions of San Bernardino, Riverside, and Orange counties. According to 2020 census data the population of Orange County, Riverside County, and San Bernardino County combined is approximately 7.8 million. Currently the state's population is estimated to be 39.5 million; thus, just less than 20 percent of all the people in the state live in these three counties.

The Santa Ana River watershed supports hundreds of species of birds, fish, and amphibians, including more than a dozen protected rare or endangered species such as least Bell's vireo, the Santa Ana sucker, San Bernardino kangaroo rat, and the Santa Ana River woollystar.

The upper portion of the watershed is in the San Bernardino National Forest. The middle section crosses the Inland Empire, through the urbanized areas of San Bernardino and Riverside

counties. Throughout this region, the Santa Ana River is a wide, braided channel with flood control levees protecting urban development. In some places, the river is a mile wide.

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

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District was created by the electorate in November 1990 and formed on January 29, 1991. The District is an independent agency governed by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, which sits as the District's Board of Directors. The District has extensive experience with project planning and implementation, as it manages more than 44,000 acres, including 40 parks, reserves, historic and archaeological sites, and 90 miles of regional trails.

The District has successfully managed several previous grant funds from the Conservancy for design and construction of the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

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.

The proposed project is consistent with the 2018 *Santa Ana River Parkway and Open Space Plan* prepared by the Conservancy. The project supports Goals 1 through 7 of the Education, Recreation and Access goals of the Plan regarding creating a continuous shared-use trail system along the length of the river, connections between the river corridor and surrounding communities, river-related outdoor activities, opportunities to experience and learn about the natural environment and the river's resources, open space access, and access for park-deficient and disadvantaged communities along the river corridor. The project is also listed as a priority project within the Plan.

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

Portions of the Santa Ana River Trail Parkway were designated a National Recreation Trail in November 1976 linking the San Bernardino Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. The National Park Service has indicated its interest in designating the entire trail, once completed, as a National Recreation Trail. When complete, it will be one of the longest urban recreation river parkways in the United States providing recreational opportunities to residents and visitors of the area.

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The proposed project, when implemented, will bring the Santa Ana River Trail closer to completion providing the surrounding communities with access to the outdoors. The trail will increase urban greening, carbon sequestration through tree planting, and provide equitable public access and recreation.

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

As part of the planning phase, the District conducted a formal written comment/review period. This outreach was intended to provide local communities, residents, stakeholders, affected agencies, and any other interested parties with an opportunity to comment on the project.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$1,300,000
Coastal Conservancy (September 28, 2017, authorization)	\$2,300,000
Project Total	\$3,600,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project augmentation is a Fiscal Year 2016/2017 and Fiscal Year 2018/2019 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). Chapter 5 of Proposition 84 provides funding for the protection and restoration of rivers, their watersheds, and associated land, water and other natural resources. Chapter 5 specifically allocates funds to the Coastal Conservancy for projects that “expand and improve” the Santa Ana River Parkway and that have been developed “in consultation with local government agencies participating in the development of the Santa Ana River Parkway.” Proposition 84 further specified that at least \$10 million of the Parkway funds would be spent in each of the three counties. This funding would come from the funds set aside for the region in which this project is located. Consistent with Proposition 84, the recommended action provides a planning grant to the District for a project, which will assist in providing access to and enjoyment of the coastal draining watershed of the Santa Ana River and, in conjunction with the larger Trail project, will eventually tie to an inland system of trails connecting with the Coastal Trail. This project was developed in partnership with the local governments participating in the development of the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's September 28, 2017 authorization with respect to the Conservancy's enabling legislation (see Exhibit 2).

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

Consistent with **Goal 2.4, Build Trails**, the proposed project will plan 1.5 miles of the Santa Ana River Trail.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's September 28, 2017 findings and authorization with respect to the CEQA compliance (see Exhibit 2). The project has not changed and there are no changed circumstances or information that would trigger the need for additional CEQA documentation.