August 10, 2015

NOTICE OF INTENT
TO ADOPT A NEGATIVE DECLARATION

Project Title: Sustaining Healthy Tributaries to the Upper San Diego River

Project Location: El Capitan Watershed Management Area, Upper San Diego River.
14741 Boulder Creek Road, Descanso, CA 91916

Lead Agency: San Diego River Conservancy
1350 Front Street Suite 3024
San Diego, CA 92101

County: San Diego

Project Description: This project, conducted by the San Diego River Park Foundation, will enhance the upper San Diego River Watershed by expanding existing water monitoring systems, improving web-based applications and restoring riparian habitat. In partnership with San Diego State University, SDSU will install a real time monitoring station on land designated Rural Land Use (RL-80). Feasibility studies will determine actions for stream modifications to improve fish passage and sustain aquatic resources. Local/ tribal communities will develop management and field monitoring procedures, as well as utilize and update an online database for information storage and retrieval. Non-native trees and plants will be removed and up to 500 native trees and plants will be re-vegetated through maintenance of an onsite nursery as well as contractual work with a local nursery. Up to 4.4 acres of San Diego River tributaries in Boulder Creek Preserve will be restored.

This site is *not* identified on any of the lists pursuant to California Government Code §65962.5.

Environmental Review and Public Comment: After review of the Initial Study (IS) the lead agency hereby finds that this project *will not* have a significant impact to the environment; therefore, a Negative Declaration has been deemed appropriate for this project and this letter is intended to serve as the Negative Declaration. This proposed Negative Declaration is being circulated for public review and comment. Copies of the Initial Study and the proposed Negative Declaration may be obtained at the Lead Agency address listed above from 9am – 3pm Monday through Friday or found online at www.sdrc.ca.gov. We expect the State and public review period will extend from approximately August 12, 2015 through September 11, 2015.

Please address any additional questions or comments to the following:

Staff: Dustin Harrison, Environmental Scientist
San Diego River Conservancy
dharrison@sdrc.ca.gov
(619) 525-4094

INITIAL STUDY

Project Title: Sustaining Healthy Tributaries to the Upper San Diego River

Lead Agency: San Diego River Conservancy

1350 Front Street Suite 3024

San Diego, CA 92101

Contact Person and Phone Number: Dustin Harrison, Environmental Scientist (619) 525-4094

Project Location: El Capitan Watershed Management Area, Upper San Diego River. 14741 Boulder Creek Road, Descanso, CA 91916

Project Sponsor's Name and Address:
Ryane Moss, Project Manager
The San Diego River Park Foundation
4891 Pacific Highway, Suite 114
San Diego, CA 92110

General Plan Designation: Rural Land Use

Zoning: RL-80
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Description of Project:

The Upper San Diego River Watershed is the source waters for the City of San Diego's El Capitan Reservoir, currently the largest local water supply source in San Diego County. The streams and creeks that drain into the Reservoir are relatively healthy but they are under continued threat of degradation from natural and man-made sources. This project seeks to develop a means of engaging local community members in assessing and monitoring the health of this important watershed and using the information collected to identify emerging threats and changing conditions. The community will also be engaged in restoring approximately 4.4 acres of degraded riparian and associated buffer habitat on Boulder Creek through minor invasive non-native removal and revegetation. The project is largely funded through the State of California's Proposition 84, the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality, and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006.

The project consists of 9 main components:

1. Feasibility Studies for Removal of Two Hydromodifications

> This task will include hosting a workgroup of land owners public agencies and other interested parties to develop two feasibility studies for the removal or modification of two hydromodifications in the project area. The first study is projected to be the diverting dam along the main stem of the San Diego River to improve function for aquatic resources. While the second feasibility study within the project area is projected to be for modification of Boulder Creek Road crossing to improve habitat quality and fish passage.

2. Develop and Implement Field Monitoring Program

Organize interested agencies and others to develop a comprehensive stream monitoring program in the upper San Diego River Watershed. Data from bioassessments, volunteer-based monitoring, real-time monitoring, flow, as well as others will be combined for information sharing and collaboration.

3. Conduct Field Assessments of Tributaries

Three main tributaries of the upper San Diego River (Boulder Creek, Cedar Creek, and Conejos Creek) will be assessed using GPS units and cameras, field data will be collected to include, but not limited to, invasive plants, hydromodifications, erosion problems, invasive feral pigs, invasive aquatic mussels, trash, and cultural resources. As part of this task, community members will be trained to participate in the assessment. KDLC (Kumeyaay Diegueno Land Conservancy) will be contracted with to organize and host at least three training sessions for tribal members of Viejas, Cosmit, and Inaja Indian Reservations. KDLC will also assist with appropriate sensitivity to cultural resources identified on the assessments.

4. Establish One Real-Time Monitoring Station

In partnership with San Diego State University, a real-time monitoring station will be developed and installed. This station will become part of a network of similar monitoring stations in the lower part of the watershed. A contract with the SDSU Foundation will be developed for this work. The station will be monitored for two years after installation. In partnership with SDSU, volunteers will be trained to maintain the equipment. The station will be affixed to existing infrastructure with no habitat disturbance or may include one metal pole sunk 30" deep in concrete along a stream bank.

Figure 1 Example of monitoring station

5. Implement Web-based Data Management System

This task involves working with a contractor to enhance an existing web-based data management system so that the data collected in the monitoring and assessment programs of this project can be shared with the public. A scope of work will be developed as part of the Field Monitoring Program and a contractor selected to perform this work.

6. Restore 4.4 Acres of Riparian Habitat

This task involves the restoration of approximately 4.4 acres of riparian and buffer habitat along Boulder Creek. Invasive non-native plants including four palm trees, one eucalyptus and three tamarisk trees will be treated using drill and kill or cut stump techniques consistent with the San Diego River Conservancy Invasive Non-native Plant

Control and Restoration Program. The site will be prepared for planting of up to 500 native trees and plants. Seeds will be collected from the project site and erosion control measures will be installed as needed.

7. Maintain a Native Plant Nursery

A native plant nursery will be placed on the developed pad of the preserve with dimensions no larger than 15 feet by 15 feet. The nursery material will be chain link and four posts in holes 6" wide and 30" deep and secured with concrete.

Figure 2 Example of Nursery

Plants will be grown on site in the nursery with an additional contract for a local commercial native plant nursery to collect seed and grow plants to support the project. Year two and three will be to maintain these plants and plant understory plants, both container plants and seeds, remove invasive plants, and water as needed. Volunteers will be trained to do restoration activities and to care for the plants. Photo-documentation of the restoration site will be done on a quarterly basis to document success.

8. Establish Public Information Web Portal

This task involved improving an existing web site to provide information about the project, volunteering and the importance of the upper San Diego River and its tributaries.

9. Implement Education Plan

This task is to organize a working group of educators and naturalists to design methods to promote understanding of the data collected in this project as well as the value of maintaining good water quality in our local streams. A plan will be developed which incorporates information about local fish, including rainbow trout. Materials will be created to provide information at the restoration site as well as for display at other locations.

Surrounding Land Uses and Setting:

Boulder Creek Preserve is a 14-acre wildlife preserve located in the headwaters of the San Diego River Watershed 12 miles north of Descanso, CA in eastern San Diego County. Boulder Creek, a tributary to the San Diego River runs through the property. The property is bounded by Cleveland National Forest with a few private in holdings nearby, mainly along Boulder Creek Road. Habitats adjacent and on site include chamise chaparral, oak woodland, riparian oak woodland and non-native grassland.

Figure 3 Area Map

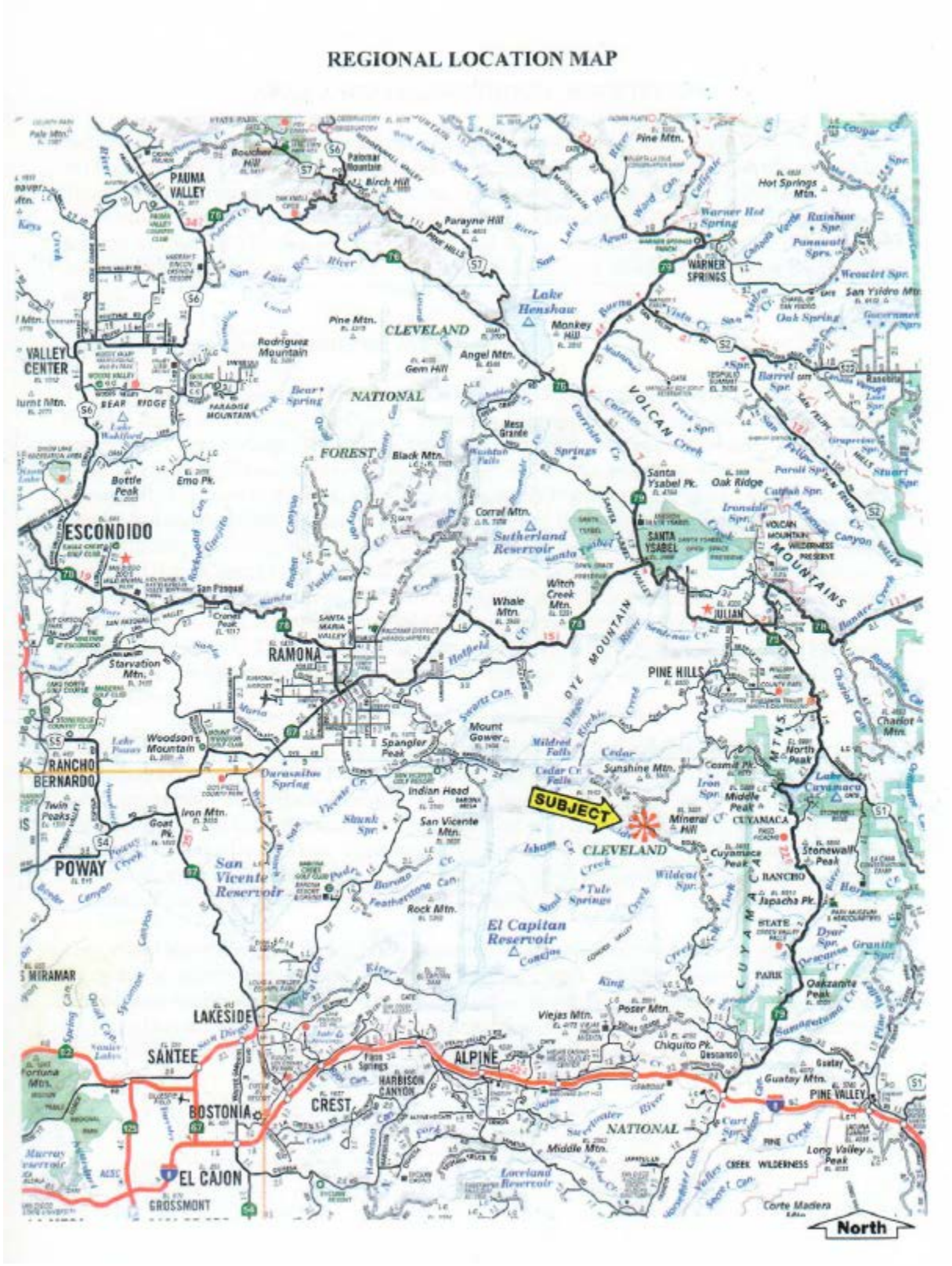
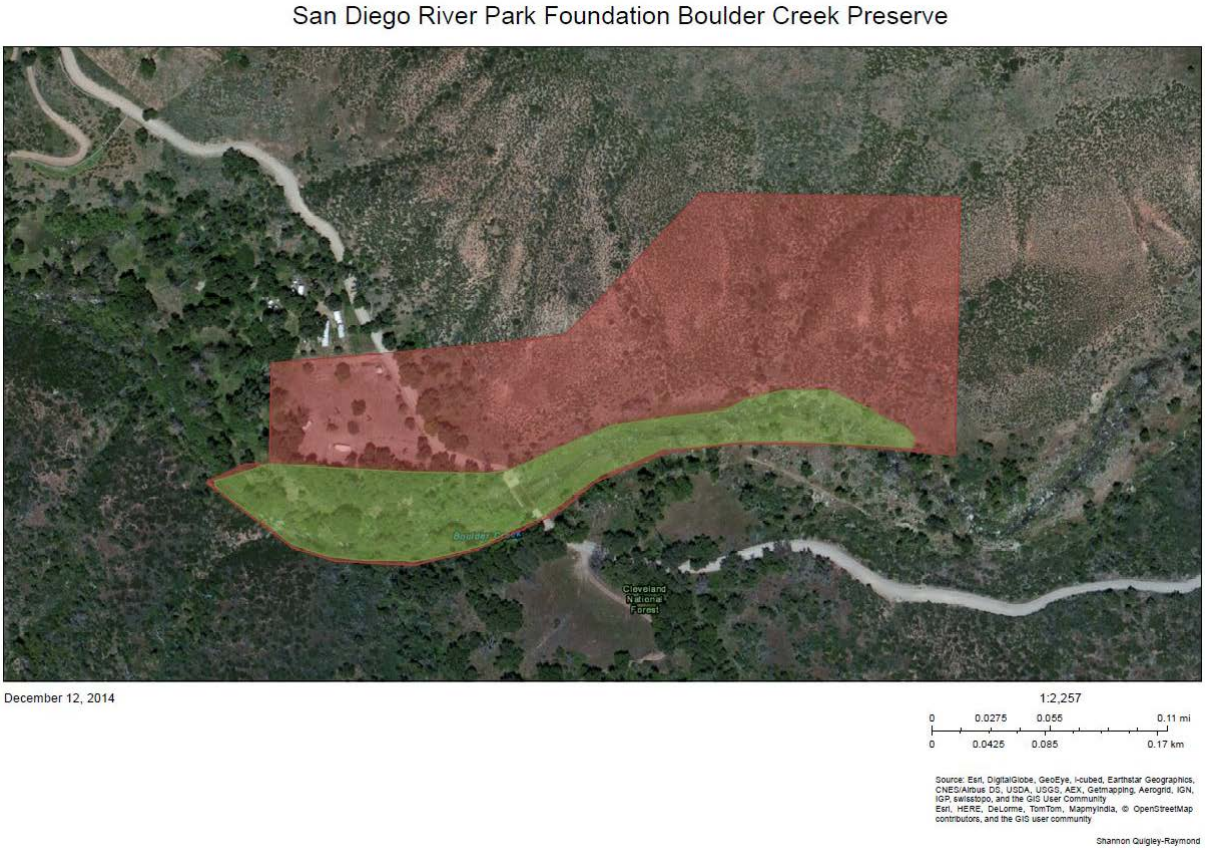


Figure 4- 4.4 Acre Restoration Area Shown Below in Green



Other Public Agencies Whose Approval is Required (e.g., permits, financing approval, or participation agreement.)

San Diego River Conservancy, partnership agreement for invasive plant removal.

Contact:
Shannon Quigley-Raymond
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San Diego River Park Foundation
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Boulder Creek Preserve Habitat Restoration and Enhancement 2015-2017

Project overview: The Upper San Diego River Watershed encompasses the source waters for the City of San Diego's El Capitan Reservoir, currently the largest local water supply source in San Diego County. The streams and creeks that drain into the Reservoir are relatively healthy but they are under continued threat of degradation from natural and man-made sources. This project seeks to develop a means of engaging local community members in assessing and monitoring the health of this important watershed and using the information collected to identify emerging threats and changing conditions. The community will also be engaged in restoring 4.4 acres of degraded riparian and associated buffer habitat on Boulder Creek Preserve to improve habitat quality, removing non-native plants and re-establishing canopy species and expanding the buffer that has been destroyed by fires (including most recently the 2003 Cedar Fire). The project is largely funded through the State of California's Proposition 84, the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality, and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006.

Area overview: Boulder Creek Preserve is a 14-acre wildlife preserve located in the headwaters of the San Diego River watershed 12 miles north of Descanso, CA in eastern San Diego County. Boulder Creek, a tributary to the San Diego River runs through the property. The property is bounded by Cleveland National Forest with a few private in holdings nearby, mainly along Boulder Creek Road. Habitats adjacent and on site include chamise chaparral, oak woodland, riparian oak woodland, riparian scrub and non-native grassland.

Invasive removal work plan: Small numbers of perennial invasive non-native plants exist on the preserve and will be eradicated through this project. Invasive non-native plants including two mature Mexican fan palm, (*Washingtonia robusta*) along with dozens of seedlings; one eucalyptus tree (*Eucalyptus globulus*) and three tamarisk (*Tamarix ramosissima*) trees will be treated using drill and kill or cut stump techniques. One 40m^2 stand of Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*) will be treated using Cal-IPC cut stem recommended methodology. Annual non-natives including grasses and tocolate (C*entauria melitensis*) will be controlled through herbicide application in disturbed areas to facilitate and promote revegetation with site appropriate native species including coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), mule fat (*Baccharis salcifolia*), willow species and California wild rose (*Rosa californica*).

All herbicide application will be performed by qualified applicators. Retreatment will be scheduled as needed based on monitoring. Existing access routes that avoid impacts to native species will be used. Volunteer work crews will be paired with trained team leaders and crew size (including leaders) will not exceed six individuals. Tools used by professional volunteers outside of nesting season may include chainsaws and electric drills. Best Management Practices will be followed for herbicide application, invasive removal and follow-up. Juvenile perennial non-native plants are to be removed with their roots where feasible before herbicide use. No stockpiles of debris are allowed to accumulate during this project.

Plants for restoration planting will be grown from seeds collected within the preserve and grown both in an on site nursery as well as in a local commercial native plant nursery which is contracted to collect seed and grow plants in support the project. Year two and three will be to maintain these plants, plant understory plants, both container plants and seeds, remove invasive plants, and water as needed. Volunteers will be trained to perform restoration activities and to care for plants. Photo-documentation of the restoration site will be done on a quarterly basis to record success.

Monitoring: This project includes an adopted Project Monitoring and Assessment Plan. Project monitoring will include several methods conducted by both project staff and volunteers. Monitoring types will include photographic monitoring, plant survival and invasive non-native plant occurrence using the San Diego River Park Foundation's RiverBlitz invasive plant protocol. Monitoring will occur monthly for native plant survival and quarterly for invasive non-native plant treatment and erosion control. Table 1 on the following page includes a summary of the monitoring program including monitoring metrics, methodology and frequency.

Contact:
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Table 1 Monitoring Program

Monitoring Type	Monitoring Metrics	Monitoring Frequency and Duration	Monitoring Tools and Methods	Performance Measures
Threats Assessment	Erosion into creek	Quarterly through project end	RiverBlitz Site Condition Assessment GPS, Cameras, Field Forms, Field ID Sheets	60% of erosional threats identified addressed
Revegetation Success	Plant survival	Monthly through project end	Species inventory	80% survival of container plants over 2 years from installation
Invasive-Non Native Plant Surveys	Invasive plant removal	Quarterly through project end date	RiverBlitz Invasive Plant Visual Rapid Assessment (IVPRA) GPS, Cameras, Field Forms, Field ID Sheets	100% of targeted invasive non-native plant species removed
Photographic Record	Erosion into creek Plant establishment	Quarterly through project end date	Monitoring Habitat Restoration Projects: U.S.FWS Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) 3	Reduced sediment from road in stream Reduction of invasive grassland and increase in riparian habitat