

PRE-PROPOSAL PROJECT SUMMARY

1. Project Name: SAN DIEGO RIVER ESTUARY RESTORATION PROJECT

2. Type of Project _____ Acquisition _____ Planning Restoration/Enhancement

3. Project summary (1-2 sentences -- specify key action(s) to be undertaken):

Restore a degraded tidal wetlands area to functioning habitat. Approximately 3.5 acres of critical coastal wetlands habitat at the mouth of the San Diego River is currently buried under a shallow layer of dirt and rock fill. The fill material will be excavated, the natural elevation and grade restored, the area will be revegetated with native salt marsh species, and monitored and maintained for five years. An endowment will be established long-term maintenance.

4. Location: County: San Diego County
 Watershed: San Diego River Watershed (San Diego Hydrologic Unit, Lower San Diego Hydrologic Area)
 State Senate District (#): 39
 State Assembly District (#): 76

5. Acreage: Total acreage of project area: 3.5 acres
 Acres of existing (pre-project) wetland habitat: 0
 Acres of post-project wetland habitat: 3.5 acres
 Feet of stream corridor (if applicable):

6. Budget Summary: Total project cost: \$190,000
 Amount requested from WRP¹: \$ 95,000
 Anticipated Matching Funds: \$ 95,000

7. Contact Information: Name: Deborah Jayne, Executive Officer
 Organization: San Diego River Conservancy
 Address: 9174 Sky Park Court, Suite 100, San Diego, CA 92123
 Telephone: 858/467-2972
 Fax: 858/571-6972
 Email: djayne@waterboards.ca.gov

Project Description

Project funding will be used to restore a degraded tidal wetlands area to functioning habitat. Approximately 3.5 acres of critical coastal wetlands habitat at the mouth of the San Diego River is currently buried under a shallow layer of dirt and rock fill (below the I-5 bridge on the south side of the River). The area appears to have been used for equipment or vehicle staging and then abandoned. An access road connects the Ocean Beach Bike Path (above) to the River channel (below) where the fill creates a smooth driving surface (approximately .25 miles long).

The dirt and rock fill will be excavated and hauled off-site for recycling (approximately 80% is reusable) or disposal (Lakeside Land Co. accepts fill for approximately \$20 per pickup truck-sized load). The area will be graded to its original elevation to permit tidal flow and revegetated with native salt marsh species. The area is owned by the City of San Diego (City), but it is not known if it is currently used by the City (to access several River-channel manholes) or by Caltrans (for freeway maintenance). If it is currently used, the project will include a narrow right-of-way easement at the south edge of the staging area (at base of channel's side rip rap).

Project costs will be minimized due to easy site access, simple grading requirements, thrifty disposal of removed materials, minimal need for hydrological analysis, lack of tough mitigation requirements, and no need for site irrigation (in floodplain). Although the total cost estimate includes five years of site monitoring and maintenance,

it is anticipated that most maintenance will be jointly accomplished by volunteers from the Audubon Society (in the portion between Sunset Cliffs Blvd and I-5) and the San Diego River Park Foundation or Friends of the Mission Valley Preserve (in the portion east of I-5). After the initial five-year period, an endowment fund will provide income for long-term site maintenance. An endowment of approximately \$3,000 per acre will be established at project onset.

The purpose of the project is to re-establish the natural ecological processes of a coastal wetland (i.e., support of sensitive and important wetland-dependent specie, several of which are endangered; high biological productivity and diversity; removal of pollutants; erosion control; flood damage reduction; aesthetics; and recreational opportunities). The project will result in a 350% increase in wetlands habitat on the site and a direct physical and ecological connection to both coastal wetlands and near shore marine waters (on the west end) and transitional/upland areas (on the east end).

Important project features include the formation of partnerships and the significant leveraging of funds. Potential partners include the San Diego River Park Foundation, City of San Diego, Wildlife Conservation District, other state and federal entities, and the San Diego Foundation (for maintenance endowment). The Conservancy will seek a 50% total cumulative match from its combined partners and a firm commitment for long-term site monitoring and maintenance (endowment fund).

In addition to achieving (in part) the objectives of WRP Regional Strategy and Project Evaluation Criteria, this Acquisitions project directly implements (in part) the stated purposes of the San Diego River Conservancy Act and the Conservancy's upcoming Strategic Plan (which will be based on the Act). It is also consistent with relevant Multiple Species Conservation Plans/ Natural Communities Conservation Plans; San Diego's Integrated Regional Water Management Program (currently under development); and numerous existing state and local planning documents².

Project Evaluation Criteria: Check all that apply and provide a brief description.

Ecological Criteria

- Preserve and restore coastal wetland ecosystems
- Preserve and restore stream corridors and wetland ecosystems in coastal watersheds.
- Recover native habitat and species diversity.

Policy Criteria

- Prevent future degradation/loss of wetland resources
- Integrate wetlands recovery with other public objectives.
- Promote education and compatible access related to coastal wetlands and watersheds.
- Advance the science of wetlands restoration and management in Southern California.

The restoration of a degraded tidal wetlands area to functioning habitat protects the area from its two greatest threats, urban development runoff and hydromodification. If urban runoff and hydromodification are substantially reduced, the River's coastal wetlands ecosystem and riparian ecosystems will be preserved and restored, native habitat and species diversity will recover, and future degradation and loss of the wetlands areas will be prevented.

¹ When the San Diego River Conservancy Act was signed into law, it created a new State Agency and bestowed upon the San Diego River the special status of a public resource of "statewide significance". The function of a State Conservancy is to focus the authority, policy, and most importantly, the resources of the State of California on a highly valued local resource of statewide significance. Most state conservancies received a specific line item allocation in one or more of the State Bond Acts (Propositions 12, 13, 40, or 50). However the San Diego River Conservancy did not receive a line-item allocation since it was not in existence at the time. For this reason, the Restoration project is an excellent candidate for Wetlands Recovery Project funding (which is primarily state funding).

² The San Diego River Park Conceptual Plan, City of San Diego's Draft River Park Master Plan, County's Draft San Diego River Watershed Plan, SANDAG'S Regional Growth Management Plan (WQ Element); Regional Board's Basin Plan and Watershed Management Initiative Chapter, and California's Non-Point Source Plan. This project will also (in part) facilitate implementation of the San Diego Regional Board's "TMDLs for Bacteria Impaired Waters" and eventually result in the attainment of bacteria water quality standards in the lower reaches of the San Diego River and estuary.