

Potential FY 2006 Appropriations Project Request
SAN DIEGO RIVER ACQUISITIONS
A State and Federal Partnership

1. **Lead Grant Recipient:** San Diego River Conservancy (*State of California*)
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2. **Brief Description of Project:**

Project and Purpose

The purpose of this project is to partner with the Cleveland National Forest (USDA Forest Service) to acquire one or more strategically located parcels (or easements) from willing sellers for conservation purposes. Specific parcels have been targeted for acquisition because they (1) are located within (adjacent to, or near) the jurisdictions of both the federal Cleveland National Forest and the state San Diego River Conservancy; and (2) meet important common conservation objectives of both agencies including:

- A) Acquisition and management of public lands / protection from urban development;
- B) Protection and management of natural resources and ecosystems (including habitats and species); and
- C) Provision of public access and recreational opportunities including hiking trails.

A more complete description of each agency's mission and goals is provided in **Attachment 1**, including the Conservancy's plans to develop a 52-mile long San Diego River Park and River Park Trail, from the River's headwaters in the Cleveland National Forest to the Pacific Ocean. Note in particular that both agencies emphasize conservation and stewardship of natural resources for the purpose of providing "*multiple uses and benefits*" to "*current and future generations*". The provision of multiple uses often requires balancing competing interests e.g., protecting environmental quality while providing public access and recreation (or conserving forests while promoting sustainable timber harvesting, etc).

Parcel Descriptions – Cleveland National Forest "In-Holdings"

The partners have identified approximately five to ten private "in-holdings" for potential acquisition in the Cleveland National Forest (i.e., headwaters of the San Diego River including El Capitan Dam). These parcels all meet the location and agency mission criteria, have willing sellers, and are considered "priority to high priority" acquisitions for one or both agencies. See **Attachment 2** for a summary description and current status of the properties.

Justification of Need

Need for these specific parcels:

This project is needed and considered *urgent* because there is an imminent threat of development on several of the parcels, especially those in El Capitan Heights.

Each parcel is considered “high to very high priority” by either the Forest Service or the San Diego River Conservancy or both. These parcels are wanted by the Forest Service because they are *in-holdings* within otherwise all Forest Service lands. In particular, the Forest Service has wanted to conserve the three El Capitan Heights parcels for some time as they are within the Congressional Boundary of the Forest and are therefore high priority.

Acquisition of these parcels is important for the Conservancy for many reasons (see section on “Multiple Benefits” below), but especially because they all drain directly to the San Diego River. Furthermore, these parcels are critical habitat for Threatened and Endangered Species, as well as for other important, sensitive species. These properties are also needed in order to fulfill the long-term vision of the San Diego River Park and River Park Trail.

The three El Capitan Heights parcels are also on the City of San Diego’s priority list for acquisition and therefore the City of San Diego is a potential partner on this project. The properties are located directly above the El Capitan drinking water reservoir. Thus, the City of San Diego’s Water Department has expressed interest in conserving these properties in order to enhance their Watershed / Source Water Protection Program.

In addition, the San Diego River Park Foundation (another potential project partner) considers the Wynola Estates and Eagle Peak Road area parcels to be priority acquisitions.

General need for project:

Both agencies are obligated to carry out their statutory mandates. This project will achieve (in part) each of the three important mandates shared by the two agencies (see important objectives list, section 2, Project and Purpose). As an example of how this project will achieve statutory mandates, consider that every parcel of land that is conserved and not developed, is land on which both agencies will carry out protection and management of natural resources and ecosystems (Objective B); and may make available for public access and recreation (Objective C). The acquisition itself (the project activity) directly fulfills Objective A (acquire and manage public lands and protect from urban development).

The project will also accomplish numerous other related mandates for both agencies in addition to the three important shared mandates. For example, the project will reduce the risk of each of the US Forest Services’ four identified greatest threats to the forest, namely fire, invasive species, loss of open space, and unmanaged recreation. Every acquired parcel represents additional land on which the Forest Service can more effectively manage fire, endangered species, and off-road vehicle damage. The project itself directly fulfills the need to prevent loss of open space. In addition, the El Capitan Heights acquisitions will also

strengthen relationships between the Forest Service and specific land owners in the community who want to sell their current parcels (with poor road access) in order to purchase and build homes on similar parcels in the vicinity (with good road access).

The project will also significantly contribute to the Conservancy's many additional statutory mandates. As an example of how the project will achieve Conservancy mandates, consider that every parcel of land in the headwaters that is acquired for conservation, is one less property that will be developed. If we can prevent a parcel from being developed we (1) reduce the pollutant loading and the volume and velocity of runoff to the River (i.e., improve water quality); (2) provide open space, (3) protect important habitat and species, (4) indirectly provide for the natural flood conveyance (by reducing runoff volume and velocity); (5) provide an opportunity for education and research on a multiple of topics (including fire ecology), (6) increase restoration of the River's natural functions (e.g., groundwater recharge, natural flood conveyance, assimilation of pollutants); and (7) preserve upland and wetland habitat linkages and wildlife corridors; among other benefits.

Having suffered significant insults as a result of massive urban development and hydromodification, the San Diego River is currently designated by the State and federal government as an "impaired waterbody" due to elevated concentrations of several pollutants. The strategic acquisition of sensitive areas along its length will protect the River from further degradation and allow restoration of the natural wetland and riparian ecosystems and associated beneficial functions.

Statewide, National, and Global Significance

The San Diego River Conservancy Act recognizes the San Diego River area as a valuable public asset of both statewide and national significance. This is due in large part to its rich historical and cultural resources. The area also has global significance due to its extraordinary biodiversity. A brief discussion of the River's statewide, national, and global significance is provided as **Attachment #3**.

Multiple Benefits of Project / Expected Results

This project has a significant number of primary and secondary benefits which are derived from the accomplishing of the major objectives. For example, if land is acquired (and development prevented), then water quality is protected for all beneficial uses (including municipal drinking water supply, recreation, habitats and species) and recreation trails become more likely and fire ecology research can be conducted at these sites. If natural resources and ecosystems are protected, then habitats and species are protected.

3. Potential Project Partners and Sources of Support Letters

Primary Partners:

Cleveland National Forest /USDA Forest Service: federal funds, in-kind match, potential long-term parcel maintenance

San Diego River Conservancy: state funds, interim holder of title
Resources Agency (unconfirmed, state funds)

Other Potential Partners or Letters of Support

City of San Diego (in-kind match) (unconfirmed)
San Diego River Park Foundation (unconfirmed)
San Diego River Coalition (unconfirmed)
Helix Water District (unconfirmed)

Additional Letters of Support

Lakeside's River Park Conservancy (confirmed)
California Regional Water Quality Control Board, San Diego Region (confirmed)
Endangered Habitat League (unconfirmed)
SANDAG (unconfirmed)
County of San Diego (unconfirmed)
Members of San Diego state and federal Delegation (one or more members; unconfirmed)

4. *Federal Funding Requested:*

\$500,000.

5. *Total Project Cost:*

\$1,000,000.

6. *Amount and Sources of Non-federal match in project (funding or in kind, if any):*

\$500,000 (100% match). Anticipated source of match is State of California Proposition 40 funds earmarked for San Diego River (line-item in Resources Agency, River Parkways Fund). Additionally, in-kind matches are expected.

7. *Other federal funds received for this project in the past (if any):*

None

8. *Whether the project will be completed with funding and/or future federal funding will be sought for the same purpose:*

This project will be completed with federal appropriation and state match.

9. *Congressional districts (s) where the project is located and /or serves:*

Potential Parcels located in Congressional District 52 (Duncan Hunter):

El Capitan Estates (3 parcels)
Cedar Creek Falls (0 -1 parcel)

Potential Parcels located in Congressional District 49 (Darrell Issa):

Wynola Estates (1-2 parcels)
Eagle Peak Ranch property (4 parcels)