

EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
August 12, 2005

ITEM: **8**

SUBJECT: **PARTNERSHIP WITH SAN DIEGO STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Consideration and possible adoption of a resolution (*tentative Resolution 05-16*) authorizing the Executive Officer to explore a potential long-term partnership with San Diego State University. The purpose of the partnership is to further the missions of both the University and the Conservancy. (*Deborah Jayne*)

PURPOSE: Consideration and possible adoption of tentative Resolution 05-16.

DISCUSSION: **Adopt San Diego River as Fifth Research Field
Station/Preserve**

Tentative Resolution 05-16 authorizes the Executive Officer to propose a long-term alliance between the San Diego River Conservancy and San Diego State University. The San Diego River is an outstanding natural resource that represents a strong nexus between our two sister State organizations while providing endless (mostly untapped) opportunities for *furthering the organizational missions and visions of both*¹.

As a first step towards that end, the Conservancy may wish to recommend that the University formally “*Adopt the San Diego River*”² and/or consider establishing the entire 52-mile length of the River as the University’s fifth *Research Field Station/Preserve* (see section on Research Field Stations below)³.

Purpose of Proposed Partnership

Consistent with advancing the missions and visions of both the Conservancy and the University, the ten fundamental purposes of the proposed partnership would be to:

(1) *Protect, preserve, restore, and enhance the San Diego River* for the benefit of present and future generations;

(2) Strengthen and exemplify the University's commitment to academic excellence expressed through superior teaching, research, creative activity, and public service;

(3) Enhance the University's overall academic experience for students and faculty by "adopting" the entire San Diego River (from its headwaters near Julian to the Pacific Ocean⁴) as the University's year-round hands-on "***living outdoor laboratory***" and fifth official ***Field Research Station/Preserve***;

(4) Support and promote the University's research and understanding of the San Diego River, its tributaries, ecosystems, and watershed. Advance knowledge of southern California river systems;

(5) Solve problems. Provide the academic analysis, scientific findings, and practical knowledge needed to allow decision-makers to make truly ***informed land use policy decisions***;

(6) Commit to a strong River-related public education effort. Assume a leadership role in the protection and restoration of the San Diego River by providing an exemplary ***stewardship model*** for the community;

(7) Foster an ***Interdisciplinary River-Centered Academic Community*** by more fully integrating the San Diego River into University curriculum, culture, and landscape. Create a place where many disciplines of scientists, engineers, historians, archeologists, economists, computer experts, philosophers, and artists work with business people, architects, city planners, and public health professionals to study, share/integrate information, and celebrate all things river-related;

(8) Establish the University's San Diego River Research Reserve as an ***international resource*** for multidisciplinary research and education;

(9) Improve the ***quality of life*** for San Diegans. Join the Conservancy and its partners in designing and developing the fifty-two mile long San Diego River Park and trail, balancing the recreational needs of humans with the need to protect sensitive ecosystems.

(10) Make a lasting contribution to the preservation, protection, restoration, and sustainability of San Diego's natural, biological, historical, and cultural heritage.

Possible “Long-term” Partnership Vision:

Consistent with SDSU's stated goal to create a “global University”; use resources wisely; and prepare students to solve the complex global problems of the twenty-first century, the Conservancy may wish to challenge the University to:

(1) In the University's role as an urban developer (i.e., university-based property development), commit to *environmentally sustainable land use planning practices and policies*, especially for ongoing and future SDSU Campus Expansion Master Plan Revisions. Set an example for surrounding municipalities;

(2) Commit to and participate in local, national, and global environmental sustainability; and

(3) Create a world-class center for “*environmental sustainability*” to address the planet's most challenging environmental problems of the twenty-first century⁵.

Existing SDSU Research Field Stations

Currently, SDSU owns and/or manages four existing field stations including the Fortuna Mountain Research Reserve, Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve, Sky Oaks Field Station, and Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve. These off-campus natural areas serve as living laboratories and outdoor classrooms. Researchers at these field stations address global climate change, watershed studies, innovative education programs, and work towards contributing to new understandings of natural resource management. A Fact Sheet on each Research Reserves is provided in **Supporting Document 2**.

Note that the Fortuna Mountain Research Reserve consists of 500 acres of undeveloped land located within the boundaries of Mission Trails Regional Park. Approximately three miles of the San Diego River flow through the park land. The proposed San Diego River Research Reserve would encompass the entire 52-mile length of the San Diego River from its headwaters near Julian to the Pacific Ocean.

Partnership Roles

San Diego State University: It is clear that the University will bring vast academic and technological resources to the proposed partnership. Furthermore, the University has enormous potential to restore and preserve the San Diego River in many different ways while achieving and enhancing its own mission, vision, stature, and reputation locally and abroad.

San Diego River Conservancy: The Conservancy will bring extensive professional water quality expertise coupled with a strong working knowledge of the San Diego River, its tributaries, wetlands, and watershed. In collaboration with our partners, the Conservancy can also provide expertise on the natural, archeological, historical, and cultural resources of the San Diego River; land use planning and policy; legal council; conservation techniques; and real estate transactions.

Perhaps most importantly, the Conservancy can also bring *fiscal resources* to the table. In fact that is one of Conservancy's most important roles. In the big picture, the unique function of a state-chartered conservancy is to focus the policy, authority, and *resources* of the State of California on the needs of a highly valued natural resource of statewide significance, in this case the San Diego River. As a state and local partnership, the Conservancy also enjoys strong support locally while at the same time carrying the political weight of a state agency.

Next Steps

I currently have an August 18 meeting scheduled with Ms. Sedra Shapiro, the Executive Director of the University's Research Field Station Program. The purpose of the meeting is to propose (1) a potential long-term partnership with the Conservancy; and (2) the University's formal establishment of the entire length of the San Diego River as a new fifth Field Research Station/Reserve.

Previously on July 14, 2005, I had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Tony Fulton (Director, Office of Facilities Planning and Management, SDSU). Although the main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposed Adobe Falls development (and the 2005 Campus Master Plan Revision), I introduced the concept of a potential long-term partnership with the Conservancy. Mr. Fulton was receptive.

With the Governing Board's concurrence and adoption of tentative Resolution 05-16, my next steps will be to complete a letter to President Stephen Weber requesting a personal meeting. The purpose of the meeting will be to propose a long-term partnership with the Conservancy and adoption of the San Diego River as described in this Executive Officer Summary Report. Assuming Mr. Weber is receptive, the Conservancy and University will probably wish to consider establishing an Interagency Agreement (i.e. contract between state agencies).

LEGAL CONCERNS: None.

FISCAL IMPACT: None.

SUPPORTING
DOCUMENTS:

1. Tentative Resolution 05-16
2. Fact Sheets for SDSU Field Stations
3. "A Quarrel Over Quarry". San Diego Union Tribune. March 26, 2005.

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt Resolution 05-16.

¹ **SDSU Mission Statement:** The mission of San Diego State University shall be to provide well-balanced, high quality education for undergraduate and graduate students and to contribute to knowledge and the solution of problems through excellence and distinction in teaching, research, and service.

SDSU Vision Statement: San Diego State is a community of learners committed to academic excellence, dedicated to educating our students for positions of responsibility and leadership in the twenty-first century, focused on addressing the challenges and opportunities of San Diego and California, confident that, if we will provide service to this fast-changing region and its people, we will emerge as a national and international leader in higher education. (One stated SDSU goal is to "create a genuinely global university").

² The idea of "adopting" the San Diego River was original proposed to University President Stephen Weber by Senator Christine Kehoe Kehoe's suggestion.

³ The University may even wish to consider adopting the entire 440 square feet San Diego River watershed.

⁴ The San Diego River includes a very diverse range of habitats (upland, wetland, riverine, estuarine, etc); native, non-native invasive, and endangered species of flora and fauna; hydromodifications; and urban influences making it an exceptional research opportunity for an wide range of topics (including fire recovery and ecology).

⁵ Similar to a proposal recently announced by University of California, San Diego.