

## PRE-PROPOSAL PROJECT SUMMARY

### 1. Project Name: SAN DIEGO RIVER ACQUISITIONS PROJECT

2. Type of Project     Acquisition     Planning     Restoration/ Enhancement

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

Acquire (from willing sellers) critical properties or conservation easements necessary for the protection and long-term increase in the quantity and quality of the San Diego River wetlands. The project will focus on acquisitions of large wetland, riparian, or floodplain habitats along the entire length of the river or lands that are contiguous to existing river preserves. Each acquisition opportunity will be evaluated against the "WRP Regional Strategy and Project Evaluation Criteria" and the San Diego River Conservancy's "Prioritization Ranking Criteria".

4. Location:

County:	San Diego County
Watershed:	San Diego River
State Senate District (#):	36, 39
State Assembly District (#):	66, 76, 77, 78

5. Acreage:

Total acreage of project area:	unknown
Acres of existing (pre-project) wetland habitat:	unknown
Acres of post-project wetland habitat:	unknown
Feet of stream corridor (if applicable):	unknown

6. Budget Summary:

Total project cost:	\$50,000,000
Amount requested from WRP <sup>1</sup> :	\$25,000,000
Anticipated Matching Funds:	\$25,000,000

7. Contact Information:

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### Project Description

Project funding will be used to acquire specific properties or conservation easements (from willing sellers) deemed essential for the protection and long-term increase in the quantity and quality of the San Diego River wetlands. Although some desired acquisitions have been identified, many are currently unknown or unavailable. The purpose of this project is to provide the flexibility to take advantage of "windows of opportunity" for key acquisitions as they arise, in addition to the acquisition of known priority parcels currently on the market.

The project will include two sets of criteria against which each acquisition opportunity will be evaluated, the "WRP Regional Strategy and Project Evaluation Criteria" and the San Diego River Conservancy's "Prioritization Ranking Criteria" (soon to be established). These criteria will ensure that acquisitions of large privately held properties that contain wetland, riparian, or floodplain habitats that are not degraded or have strong restoration potential, face imminent threat of development, and/or are contiguous to existing preserves, and implement relevant planning documents are acquired as soon as the Conservancy becomes aware of their availability. Strong priority will be given to acquisitions that provide, protect, or restore the natural functioning of coastal wetland and riparian ecosystems; water quality; native habitat and species diversity; habitat linkages and wildlife corridors; natural flood conveyance; open space; and recreational, educational, and scientific opportunities in the San Diego River and adjacent lands. Additional benefits include the promotion of attainment of water quality standards in an impaired waterbody and the protection of municipal drinking water supplies.

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, City of Santee, County of San Diego, Helix Water District, US Forest Service, Wildlife Conservation Board, 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 to be funded by an endowment of approximately \$3000 per acre (endowment already included in total project cost).

In addition to achieving 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 documents.<sup>2</sup>

**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 acquisition of strategic properties and conservation easements will protect the San Diego River from its two greatest threats, urban development and hydromodification. If development and hydromodification are prevented (or substantially reduced), the River's coastal wetland ecosystems and riparian ecosystems will be preserved and restored, native habitat and species diversity will recover, and future degradation and loss of wetlands will be prevented. The two sets of selection criteria will also ensure that project partners acquire the (available) lands with the greatest potential for promoting education, science, recreation, access, and other public objectives (e.g. protection of municipal water supplies, groundwater recharge, assimilation of pollutants, and flood management etc.).

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<sup>1</sup> 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. Accordingly, most state conservancies received a specific line item allocation in one or more of the recent State Bond Acts (Propositions 12, 13, 40 or 50). However, since the San Diego River Conservancy was not in existence at the time, it did not receive a line item allocation. For this reason, the Acquisitions project is an excellent candidate for Wetlands Recovery Project funding (which is primarily state funding).

<sup>2</sup> 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, Santee's River Park 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, estuary, and one tributary.