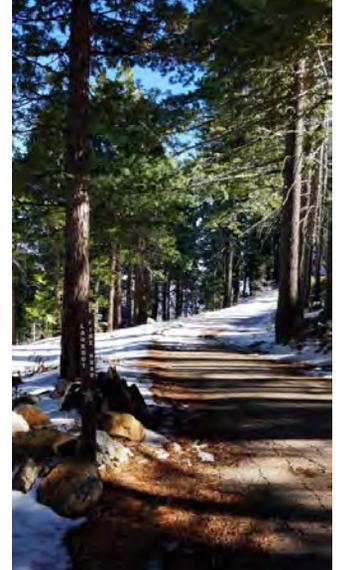


SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

Legislative Report 2017-2018

STATE OF CALIFORNIA NATURAL RESOURCES AGENCY
State of California, Gavin Newsom, Governor
The Natural Resources Agency, Wade Crowfoot, Secretary



The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of the State of California

Honorable Members of California State Legislature

Dear Governor Newsom and Members of the Legislature,

The San Diego River Conservancy is pleased to submit its second Legislative report to the Governor and Legislature outlining the Conservancy's activities over the past 2 years as required by AB 392 in 2015.

This report covers our activities from the mouth of the San Diego River, at the Pacific Ocean, to its headwaters in the mountains near Julian, California.

We salute and commend all of our partners in this mutual endeavor to acquire, protect, and manage public lands within the San Diego River watershed. The Conservancy provides recreational opportunities, access to open space, wildlife habitat and species restoration and protection, wetlands protection and restoration, along with protecting historical and cultural resources. We are also charged with the maintenance of the quality of the waters in the San Diego River and its watershed for beneficial uses.

Without the hard work of all the river volunteers, our member agencies, elected officials and the public, we would not have been able to accomplish our first steps towards meeting our objectives to enhance quality recreational opportunities along the San Diego River.

We thank all those who had the vision, foresight and fortitude to establish the San Diego River Conservancy to help protect this valuable resource.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the San Diego River Conservancy we submit this report for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ruth Hayward, Vice Chair
San Diego River Conservancy



Ben G. Clay, Chair
San Diego River Conservancy

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of the State of California

Honorable Members of California State Legislature

Dear Governor Newsom and Members of the Legislature,

On behalf of the San Diego River Conservancy, thank you for your continued interest and support of work by the Conservancy to protect and enhance the unique history, natural resources and cultural heritage within the San Diego River's watershed. Attached is an update on the Conservancy's progress for 2017 to 2018.

The San Diego River Conservancy was established in 2002 and became a permanent state agency through the passage of Assembly Bill 392 by then Assembly Member and current Senator Toni G. Atkins in October 2015.

In 2017, Senator Toni G. Atkins' Senate Bill 214 increased the Conservancy's voting Board Members from 11 to 15, adding one representative each from the Kumeyaay Diegueño Land Conservancy, the City of Santee, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Colorado Desert District of the Department of Parks and Recreation. SB 214 enabled the Conservancy to better function as a permanent state conservancy, added new stakeholders and helped address impacts of climate change and areas within the river's watershed impacted by environmental justice issues.

More recently in 2018, with passage of Senate President pro Tempore Atkins' Senate Bill 1367, the San Diego Rivers Watershed Consortium Program was established which authorizes the Conservancy to assist in restoring and enhancing 3 nearby river watersheds - the Sweetwater River, Otay River, and Tijuana River and convening an advisory panel for each river to work collaboratively with the Conservancy. These watersheds south of the San Diego River are extraordinary natural resources of statewide significance in need of conservation, restoration, protection of sensitive species and wildlife, improved water quality and overall health of the ecosystems. This Program will help develop strategic plans for each watershed and assist in identifying and pursuing grant funding to restore and enhance natural, historical, cultural, educational and recreational resources along the rivers and enhance public access in each watershed.

Under Proposition 1, The Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014, the Conservancy was allocated \$17 million. For this reporting period, the Governing Board approved 2 projects; both non-native invasive removal and restoration projects located in the City of San Diego. The Conservancy is currently in its 4th round of solicitation. To date the Governing Board approved 14 projects for funds totaling approximately \$7,050,000. Under Proposition 1 there are 3 projects which directly

benefit disadvantaged communities and 3 other projects are within three miles from disadvantaged communities. The Conservancy expects to provide funding for additional grant rounds on a 2-year cycle until monies are expended.

Under Proposition 68, The California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018, the Conservancy was allocated \$12 million in funding. The Conservancy posted draft guidelines for public input and comment to its Grant Program and will conduct public workshops in February 2019. The Guidelines will be presented to the Governing Board for approval in March 2019. This Grant program's project categories include land conservation, resource protection and restoration, vegetation management and fire safety, recreation and trails, water quality and supply, community access, and planning and design. The Conservancy's allocation for fiscal year 2019/2020 is \$2 million. Of that amount, \$1 million is available for competitive grants and the remainder for directed grants to eligible entities. The Conservancy expects to provide funding for additional grant rounds on a 2-year cycle until monies are expended.

The Conservancy has served as a catalyst for improvements along the San Diego River by working with local jurisdictions, government agencies, academic institutions, nonprofits, and coalitions that share an appreciation and vision for the river. The Conservancy prides itself on being a steward of the environment which fosters relationships with organizations that have the commitment and capacity to restore and improve the river by protecting its resources. The Conservancy leverages local, state, federal, and other funding sources through innovative partnerships to yield projects with multiple benefits.

There are so many people to thank for the improvements to public access, protection of resources, trails, water quality and supply along the San Diego River. I would personally like to thank members of the Conservancy's Governing Board, local, state and federal agencies, the Kumeyaay Nation, stakeholders, non-profits, community-based partners, our staff and the many dedicated volunteers who make the river a better place for us all to enjoy today and in the future. We greatly appreciate the continued confidence and support the Legislature has placed in the San Diego River Conservancy Board and its staff.

Sincerely,



Julia L. Richards
Executive Officer
San Diego River Conservancy

Executive Summary

The San Diego River Conservancy's statutory duty is to protect and preserve the natural, cultural, and historic resources of San Diego River's watershed. The pressure from a growing population and increased development takes away wildlife habitat and potentially destroys cultural artifacts. The history of people living along the river extends beyond 11,000 years ago when the San Diego River Watershed was part of the Kumeyaay Indians' territory. Rich cultural resources, including sacred Native American sites and artifacts are still held in the riverbanks. Additionally, native plants and animals were used by the Kumeyaay as food, medicine and for other purposes. As the mission of the Conservancy is to balance conservation and habitat protection with recreational opportunities for public use and enjoyment, there remain challenges to protecting headwaters from development and working with land managers to ensure long term restoration and a healthy watershed.

To fulfill its mission, the Conservancy works with many partners including local, state, federal and tribal governments, special districts, non-profit organizations, private property owners and local stakeholders. These partners work hard and dedicate resources to implement a variety of projects related to conserving and restoring rivers, forests, woodlands, meadows, and the urban-rural interface. Land acquisition, securing easements, building trail amenities, monitoring water quality and educational public outreach are examples of projects that balance the demands of growth with sustainable development.

In the past few years, the Conservancy reached out to stakeholders not previously directly involved with the river and its watershed, and new relationships were forged with tribal groups, disadvantaged communities and underrepresented stakeholders within the San Diego River watershed. Disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities are the ones historically impacted by lack of funding for parks, open space, trails, water quality improvements and efforts to reduce pollution. Reaching a diverse audience assists with smart growth and environmental justice.

This report highlights accomplishments by the Conservancy in 2017 and 2018:

- **Conserve Land Within the San Diego River Watershed** Provided funding to help the City of San Diego and the County of San Diego acquire approximately 50 acres in El Monte Valley in the community of Lakeside.
- **Support and Encourage Recreation and Education** Worked with partners to complete approximately 2.3-mile gap on the San Diego River Trail which includes information kiosks, interpretive signs, and other trail amenities.
- **Preserve and Restore Natural Resources** Awarded 11 invasive removal projects to restore native habitats (127 acres), through Proposition 1. The Conservancy continues to offer partnership agreements for small projects to continue implementation of the watershed wide invasive removal program.

- **Protect and Preserve Cultural and Historical Resources** In partnership with the State Coastal Conservancy, the Conservancy provided a grant to the San Diego History Center for multimedia exhibits centered around the history of the river at the Serra Museum in consultation with representatives from the Kumeyaay Nation.
- **Enhance Water Quality and Natural Flood Conveyance** Provided grants for trash insert devices, a dissolved oxygen project, Mast Park drainage enhancements, and Increasing Preparedness in the San Diego River Watershed for Potential Contamination Events.
- **Expand the Organization's Capacity and Public Outreach** The San Diego Rivers Watershed Consortium Program was formed that allows Conservancy Board members and staff to assist 3 southern watersheds to write and adopt strategic plans to enable the pursuit of grants: The Sweetwater River, the Otay River and the Tijuana River. (See Map 1) The Sweetwater, Otay and Tijuana Rivers watersheds are comprised of diverse habitats that deserve attention and respect for the enjoyment of all. The San Diego Rivers Watershed Consortium Program provides the opportunity for the Conservancy to help protect these cherished resources by working collaboratively with local, state, federal, stakeholders and non-profit partners while sharing information and resources that benefit communities within these watersheds for today and into the future.

Ongoing Project

In 2010, the Conservancy conducted a Gaps Analysis for the San Diego River Trail and identified current and potential trail alignments. Currently the Conservancy is working to update the San Diego River Trail Gaps Analysis and has requested local, state and federal agencies, and other stakeholders to identify their trail priorities and assess other relevant route and alignment information. In 2019, the Conservancy will work to identify a sustainable trail alignment in the San Diego River headwaters with consultation from California State Parks, the U.S. Forest Service, Bands of the Kumeyaay Nation and other stakeholders.

Over its 16-year history, the Conservancy has overseen restoration of more than 375 acres native wildlife habitat, assisted in the planning and development of more than 15 miles of public trails, and contributed to or funded the acquisition and conservation of over 200 acres of land in the San Diego River watershed.

Increasing Preparedness in the San Diego River Watershed for Potential Contamination Events

In 2016, 30 million people visited beaches in San Diego. The San Diego River is an urban river that flows into the Pacific Ocean at Ocean Beach and Dog Beach and is in close proximity to Mission Bay. These coastal areas are highly frequented destinations yet, both upper and lower reaches of the San Diego River do not meet water quality

standards even after discharges of wastes from point sources have been treated by the minimum required levels of pollution control technology. Therefore, some locations exceed the Water Quality Control Plan for the San Diego Basin objectives and are considered Impaired Water Bodies. Storm events exacerbate the problem resulting in beach closures and lost revenue from coastal tourism.

From 2016-2018 San Diego faced an outbreak of Hepatitis A that claimed the lives of 20 people, a majority of whom were identified as homeless. Officials declared it an "unprecedented" health crisis, and it became one of the largest Hepatitis A outbreaks in the history of San Diego County, with 592 cases identified countywide. The outbreak began in November 2016 and spread to Santa Cruz, Los Angeles, and Monterey counties. Following efforts by local health departments and their clinical and community partners, including vaccination campaigns targeting the at-risk population, community education, obtaining and managing vaccines, and many other interventions, the number of reported outbreak-associated cases has substantially decreased in California.

The San Diego River faces continued poor water quality from contaminants and the potential linkage to riparian zone sources of pollution necessitated a comprehensive study of contamination sources in soils and waters. In a project funded by the Conservancy in response to the Hepatitis A outbreak, Professors at San Diego State University are conducting a study to identify anthropogenic contamination and abate human pathogens in the San Diego River watershed.

El Monte Sand Mining Project Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report Special Meeting

On August 30, 2018, the Conservancy received notice that the County of San Diego circulated for public review a draft Subsequent Environmental Impact Report in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act about a potential 500-acre sand mining project. The proposed project location is below a dam on the San Diego River, near the community of Lakeside which is a low-income community, per AB 1550. The lead agency for this project, the County of San Diego, held a scoping meeting which was attended by over 200 people.

The proposed project is within the jurisdiction of the San Diego River Conservancy. A special meeting was held by the Conservancy during which over 20 individuals including Kumeyaay tribal members expressed concerns about potential impacts from the project related to health, air quality, water quality, water supply, resource protection, operational hours exceeding 50 hours per week and other impacts to their rural way of life. The Conservancy Board deliberated and voted to approve submitting a comment letter by the Executive Officer on behalf of the entire Board.

Summaries of Conservancy Projects

Serra Museum Interpretive Plan Phase 2 In partnership with Kumeyaay Diegueño Land Conservancy and San Diego History Center, the Conservancy seeks to provide a better understanding of how humans have used the river to sustain life.

Project name:	Serra Museum Interpretive Plan Phase 2
Project Description:	Update interior and exterior exhibits using multimedia devices describing historical development and activities centered along the San Diego River.
Grantee:	San Diego History Center
Performance period:	June 2018 – February 2020
Funding source:	Proposition 84 (State Coastal Conservancy)
Grant amount:	\$789,845.00
Leverages funds:	Yes
Project status:	In progress
Acres/miles:	N/A
Disadvantaged community:	Yes

Post Wildfire Restoration An urban brush fire burned 38 acres at the Del Cerro stretch of Alvarado Creek, just below Adobe Falls and over 100 charred palm trees remain. Arundo, an invasive non-native plant was first to re-sprout in 10 days post fire.

Project name:	Restoration of Del Cerro Stretch of Alvarado Creek
Project Description:	This area provides an opportunity to investigate post wildfire restoration in an urban creek through invasive non-native removal and native re-vegetation.
Grantee:	San Diego State University Research Foundation
Performance period:	January 2019 – January 2021
Funding:	Proposition 1 (San Diego River Conservancy)
Grant Amount:	\$946,127.00
Leverages funds:	Yes
Project status:	Grant Agreement in process
Acres/miles:	3.1 acres
Disadvantaged community:	No

Shepherd Canyon Restoration San Diego Canyonlands is restoring open space in the community of Tierrasanta within the City of San Diego by removing invasive plants and unauthorized user trails as they degrade habitat.

Project name:	Shepherd Canyon Wetlands Restoration Phases I-VII
Project Description:	With the help of volunteers, invasive removal, native re-vegetation, and closing unauthorized trails reduces erosion.
Grantee:	San Diego Canyonlands
Performance period:	September 2013 – March 2019
Funding:	Direct Grant (San Diego River Conservancy)
Grant amount:	\$17,000.00
Leverage funds:	Yes
Project status:	In progress
Acres/miles:	24 acres
Disadvantaged community:	No

Rueda Canyon Phases 1 & 2 San Diego Canyonlands, Friends of the Canyon and ECOLife are working to restore Rueda Canyon and improve water quality in a tributary canyon. This partnership demonstrates water saving measures to grow native vegetation.

Project name:	Rueda Canyon Restoration and Water Conservation Strategy – Phase 1 & 2
Project Description:	Invasive removal and control in the Tierrasanta community utilizing aquaponics to propagate native vegetation for restoration of the canyon.
Grantee:	San Diego Canyonlands
Performance period:	September 2016 – March 2020
Funding:	Proposition 1 (San Diego River Conservancy)
Grant amount:	\$462,753.00
Leverage funds:	Yes
Project status:	In progress
Acres/miles:	5.75 acres (1.62 miles)
Disadvantaged community:	No

Chaparral Canyon Restoration Invasive removal and restoration Chaparral Canyon, a tributary canyon of Alvarado Creek below Lake Murray Reservoir Dam in the San Diego River watershed.

Project name:	Chaparral Canyon Habitat Restoration and Vegetation Management
Project Description:	The 10-acre site lies directly downstream of Murray Reservoir, drains to a disadvantaged community and will enhance 2,729 linear feet riparian habitat through weed management. The project will improve the habitat's ability to bio-remediate non-point source runoff as well as discouraging anthropogenic impacts related to unauthorized access.
Grantee:	City of San Diego, Public Utilities Department
Performance period:	January 2019 – January 2021
Funding:	Proposition 1 (San Diego River Conservancy)
Grant amount:	\$382,513.00
Leverages funds:	Yes
Project status:	Grant Agreement in process
Acres/miles:	10 acres
Disadvantaged community:	Yes

Aeration Device in Mission Valley Solar-powered aerator system installed to improve water quality, and support a healthier riparian ecosystem in the urban environment of Mission Valley, a community in the City of San Diego.

Project name:	Aeration Device in Mission Valley
Project Description:	Deployment of aerator to increase dissolved oxygen in lower San Diego River, in partnership with the United States Bureau of Reclamation and San Diego State University.
Grantee:	The San Diego River Park Foundation
Performance period:	June 2017 – June 2019
Funding:	Proposition 1 (San Diego River Conservancy)
Contract amount:	\$131,904.00
Leverages Funds:	Yes
Project status:	In progress
Disadvantaged community:	No

Mission Valley Invasive Plant removal Ongoing restoration through invasive plant removal and control results in increased biodiversity in the Mission Valley Preserve along San Diego River. Efforts will help restore natural ecosystem functions that support two federally listed bird species: least Bell's vireo and southwestern willow flycatcher.

Project name:	Mission Valley Preserve Restoration
Project Description:	Continuing efforts for identifying and remove target invasive species reduce potential risk of fire and floods.
Grantee:	The San Diego River Park Foundation
Performance period:	July 2017 – September 2020
Funding:	Proposition 1 (San Diego River Conservancy)
Grant amount:	\$271,762.96
Leverages funds:	Yes
Project status:	In progress
Acres/miles:	6 acres
Disadvantaged community:	No

Potts Parcel – Historic Flume Trail (Gaps) This land represents an essential link to the San Diego River Trail that connects existing segments from El Monte County Park to the Flume Trail Extension near Lake Jennings. The Western Flume was identified as Gap #60 Conservancy's Gaps Analysis.

Project name:	Potts Parcel Acquisition
Project Description:	County of San Diego will enter into purchase and sale agreement with the landowner for fair market value of \$60,000. The Conservancy will provide \$30,000 grant towards purchase price.
Performance period:	September 2018 – February 2019
Funding:	Direct Grant (San Diego River Conservancy)
Grant amount:	\$30,000.00
Grantee:	County of San Diego
Leverages funds:	Yes
Project status:	In progress
Acres/miles:	13.64 acres (2.3 miles)
Disadvantaged community:	No

Upper and Lower Sycamore Creek Ongoing restoration through vegetation management resulted in increased biodiversity along Sycamore Creek a tributary to the San Diego River. In the past major flooding has occurred however after the removal of invasives the risk of floods and fires has been reduced. Other benefits include increased observations of native plant canopy and wildlife such as a snowy egret (*Egretta thula*) foraging in the area.

Project name:	Sycamore Creek Restoration Phase 1 & 2
Project Description:	Arundo, pepper trees and other invasive plants are controlled through removal and herbicide treatment.
Grantee/ Vendor:	Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County, Lakeside's River Park Conservancy and ACS Habitat Management
Performance period:	August 2014 – April 2019
Funding:	California Natural Resources Agency, Padre Dam Municipal Water District and the San Diego River Conservancy
Contract amount:	\$893,637.00
Leveraged funds:	Yes
Project status:	In progress
Acres/miles:	27 acres (2.6 miles)
Disadvantaged community:	No

Mast Park Infrastructure Improvements Two projects will improve public access and insufficient drainage at a city park in Santee.

Project name:	Mast Park Infrastructure Improvements
Project Description:	The City of Santee in one project will install a stormwater interceptor hydrodynamic separator to prevent trash from entering the river. The second project improves natural drainage and filtration in the park and relocates the trail away from the San Diego River to increase the riparian buffer.
Grantee:	City of Santee
Performance period:	January 2017 – December 2019
Funding:	Proposition 1 (San Diego River Conservancy)
Grant amount:	\$1,919,000.00
Leveraged funds:	Yes
Project status:	In progress
Acres/miles:	30 acres (476-acre catchment)
Disadvantaged community:	No

Walker Preserve The City of Santee with its partners purchased, restored and developed a segment of the San Diego River Trail. This multiuse trail provides drinking fountains, interpretive signs, and amenities for equestrians and bicyclists.

Project name:	Walker Preserve Restoration
Project Description:	Invasive removal will enhance restoration, reduce erosion and deter unauthorized user trails along the San Diego River.
Grantee:	City of Santee
Performance period:	June 2017 – June 2020
Funding:	Proposition 1 (San Diego River Conservancy)
Grant cost:	\$256,665.60
Leveraged/matching funds:	Yes
Project status:	In progress
Acres/miles:	Approximately 107 acres
Disadvantaged community:	No

San Diego County Trash Inserts The County of San Diego will determine which practices are most cost efficient for reducing trash input to streams and rivers.

Project name:	San Diego County Trash Reduction
Project Description:	Installation of storm drain trash inserts, trash receptacles and educational materials dispersed through disadvantaged communities to reduce trash inputs to the San Diego River watershed.
Grantee:	County of San Diego, Watershed Enhancement Program
Performance period:	April 2017 – August 2019
Funding:	Proposition 1 (San Diego River Conservancy)
Grant amount:	\$197,400.00
Leveraged/matching funds:	Yes
Project status:	In progress
Acres/miles:	170.6-acre catchment
Disadvantaged community:	Yes

El Monte Valley Land Conservation 37-acre land acquisition adjacent to the restored Hanson El Monte Pond (143.5 acres) and along part of the San Diego River Trail in the community of Lakeside (Low-income community, per AB 1550).

Project name:	El Monte Valley – Land Acquisition
Project Description:	Land conservation of 3 parcels in lakeside, within the San Diego River Watershed below El Capitan reservoir.
Grantee:	City of San Diego, Public Utilities Department
Performance period:	December 2017 – December 2018
Funding:	Proposition 1 (San Diego River Conservancy)
Grant amount:	\$975,000.00
Leveraged/matching funds:	Yes
Project status:	Completed
Acres/miles:	Approximately 37 acres
Disadvantaged community:	No

San Diego River Contamination Study A study conducted by San Diego State University to investigate water quality and identify contaminants. Funded in part by State Water Board, San Diego River Conservancy, San Diego State University, San Diego State University Research Foundation, City of San Diego Council member Scott Sherman, and former City of San Diego Council member Lorie Zapf.

Project name:	Increasing Preparedness in the San Diego River Watershed for Potential Contamination Events
Project Description:	Water quality research examining anthropogenic contamination along the San Diego River and its tributaries.
Grantee:	San Diego State University
Performance period:	November 2017 – March 2021
Funding:	Direct Grant (San Diego River Conservancy)
Grant cost:	\$70,000.00
Leveraged/matching funds:	Yes
Project status:	In progress
Acres/miles:	N/A
Disadvantaged community:	Yes

