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San Diego River Conservancy's Climate Change Policy

Introduction

The environmental and land use choices made in the near term, will have a profound impact on future conditions in California. Decisions about whether open space should be preserved or developed, or how urban infill interacts with the natural environment, will affect not only our lives, but future generations of Californians. Land use-related climate change policies have the potential to be among the most cost-effective and efficient ways of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and sequestering carbon. Recent reports such as the Fourth Climate Change Assessment (San Diego), Safeguarding California: Reducing Climate Risks, SafeGuarding California Plan: 2018 Update, the California Water Action Plan, and the Draft Natural Working Lands Implementation Plan identify various strategies that can reduce the State's short- and long-term risks. Resource protection is a critical component of the State's ability to adapt to climate change and growing population demands, as well as meet its short- and long-term greenhouse gas reduction goals as articulated in the Global Climate Change Solutions Act of 2006 (AB 32) and related legislation. It is therefore urgent that we act now to preserve open space, restore green spaces, clean and recharge our water supply, and protect, plant trees and restore key habitat and ecosystems.

The San Diego River Conservancy's Climate Change Program ("Program") seeks to support project planning and implementation that addresses the risks and impacts of climate change on resources in southern California communities. The policies and criteria outlined below are designed to produce projects that will yield maximum greenhouse gas reduction benefits, increase carbon sequestration and promote other associated co-benefits.

Facts

- A. The San Diego River Conservancy Act (Division 22.9 of the Public Resources Code §§ 32630 – 32659.9) established the Conservancy to protect and restore natural, cultural and historic resources, and to provide public access within the river's watershed.

- B. The Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB 32) declares that global warming poses a serious threat to the environment of California and requires California to reduce its total greenhouse gas (GHG) emission levels.
- C. AB 32 (Nuñez, 2006), the Governor’s Executive Orders S-3-05 (2005) and S-13-08 (2008), the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research Technical Advisory dated June 18, 2008, and Guidelines for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) require that agencies consider global warming with respect to their proposed actions.
- D. The mandates of SB 535 (DeLeon, 2011), require immediate investment in such areas to mitigate the disproportionate negative impacts of climate change felt in low income and highly polluted areas. Under the creation of the cap-and-trade system, companies must purchase extra credits when they exceed their allotted amount. Because of SB 535, 25% of the money generated from extra revenue fund is required to be spent on projects that benefit disadvantaged communities under CalEnviroScreen Version 2.0(EnviroScreen).
- E. Safeguarding California Plan: 2018 Update is the State’s road map for everything state agencies are doing and will do to protect communities, infrastructure, services and the natural environment from climate change impacts.
- F. The 2019 Draft California 2030 Natural and Working Lands Climate Change Implementation Plan sets a pathway for State-supported action on California lands (including forests, farmlands, rangelands, grasslands, wetlands and urban lands) that emphasizes the role of California in achieving GHG reduction goals with the objective to enhance the resiliency of lands while increasing their ability to sequester carbon and provide multiple other benefits. Land based strategies are a critical component of the State’s climate strategy.
- G. The Conservancy’s Strategic Plan Update 2018 – 2023 under Program 6, entitled Expand the Organization’s Capacity and Public Outreach, states in the pertinent part “to identify and pursue projects that address climate change and its impacts on the San Diego River watershed.” This includes supporting regional and local agencies and entities in order to improve our understanding of the effects of climate change, and to identify tools to mitigate and plan for a range of predicted changes.
- H. Southern California is experiencing documented adverse changes as a result of climate change. It is predicted that these changes will accelerate, including significant sea level rise and coastal erosion, salinity changes, higher air and water temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, more severe El Niño climate events, increased storm frequency and intensity, greater fire intensity and frequency, increased ocean acidification, loss of key habitat areas and biodiversity. These changes pose a threat to California’s resources, and more specifically, to habitats and wildlife corridors. Southern California’s natural resources have already been

significantly altered and reduced in size and will continue to be affected by climate change.

- I. Portions of San Diego are considered disadvantaged as designated by EnviroScreen or low-income communities pursuant to AB 32. People who live in disadvantaged and low-income communities face health disparities due to poor air quality, exposure to harmful pollution, and lack of public amenities and services.
- J. Riparian and wetland habitats, already significantly altered and reduced in size due to development and human impact are expected to be significantly affected by changes in climate-driven processes such as sea level rise, more extreme rain events, fresh water flows, sediment migration and drought.
- K. Many Conservancy projects result in the protection of open space, restoration of urban areas, and development of multi-purpose trails which will help support efforts reduce vehicle miles traveled and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.
- L. The protection, restoration, and enhancement of habitats, ecosystem processes, increased tree canopy with drought tolerant species and conservation of open space is essential to minimizing threats from climate change to California's biodiversity—an important part of the Conservancy's mission.
- M. Protection of inland habitat and adjacent wetlands are essential for offsetting some wetland losses due to sea level rise and changes in storm frequencies and intensities.
- N. Many habitat conservation and restoration projects sequester carbon, an important factor in reducing the concentration of greenhouse gas emissions and slowing the rate of global warming.
- O. The effects of climate change make adaptive management, coupled with monitoring of ecosystem processes, more important than ever to assure that non-climate related stressors are identified and addressed early on, to assure that management actions are effective or "do no harm," and to contribute toward the collective knowledge for use of scientists, managers, and the public.

In light of the Pertinent Facts, above, the Conservancy adopts the following climate change policies:

- 1. The Governing Board directs the Executive Officer to consider climate change in evaluating which projects to fund and the manner in which projects are selected, in order to reduce vulnerabilities from climate change while continuing to support all the resources (natural, cultural, historical, recreational and other) the Conservancy is charged with protecting.

2. Sea Level Rise. The Conservancy will consider flooding and erosion due to sea level rise, and extreme events such as storms and tsunamis in assessing project vulnerability and, to the extent feasible, reduce expected risks and increase adaptive capacity using current scientific information and state guidance documents.
3. Collaboration to Support Adaptation Strategies. The Conservancy will collaborate with other agencies and entities to develop, support, and implement climate change adaptation plans, strategies and projects that minimize or offset impacts to natural and cultural resources, public access, and other matters specified in the Conservancy's enabling legislation.
4. Adaptation Strategies. The Conservancy encourages applications for climate-sensitive projects that include robust adaptation measures and strategies, including pilot or demonstration projects that are consistent with its enabling legislation, strategic plan, and available funding. These may employ innovative strategies for adaptation and mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions to minimize effects of climate change on natural resources and public access. Applications are encouraged for, but not limited to the following types of projects or project elements:
 - **Innovative Designs** that incorporate features that are resilient to climate change impacts and can serve as demonstration projects;
 - **Protection of Land** for supporting native species in response to climate change;
 - **Protection of Open Space** to protect existing and future habitat for species impacted by climate change and to support transit-oriented, high-density development in urban areas that minimizes impacts to habitats and that helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation;
 - **Conservation, Restoration and Enhancement of Habitats that Sequester Carbon**, including forests, tidal wetlands, and estuarine scrub/shrub habitats;
 - **Development of Multi-use Trails** that connect communities, provide access to and along the coast, and help reduce vehicle miles travelled;
 - **Management of Invasive Species**, especially projects which prevent introduction or spread of invasive species, in order to reduce the impacts of this major stressor on biodiversity;
 - **Riparian Protection, Enhancement, and Restoration Projects** that allow for wider riparian corridors to accommodate increased flooding, or provide other benefits such as increased shading to moderate water temperature increases;
 - **Acquisition Planning Projects** that apply the latest information on climate change impacts and recommendations on reserve design, to identify wildlife migration corridors and natural lands that have a diversity of topography, soils and microclimates, to maximize the survival of native species and biodiversity and preserve ecosystem processes; and

- ***Adaptive Management and Monitoring*** of ecosystem and physical processes to support implementation of management actions to achieve project objectives under rapidly changing climatic conditions.
5. Climate Change Research. When appropriate and consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation and available funding sources, the Conservancy will support priority research projects that are targeted to increase understanding of climate change impacts to riparian and wetland resources, support vulnerability assessments, quantify carbon sequestration benefits of habitat enhancement and restoration projects, and that demonstrate the effectiveness of applied management strategies.
 6. Education, Outreach and Guidance. To the extent feasible with staffing and funding limitations, the Conservancy will collaborate with others to provide current information and guidance to grantees on the latest relevant climate change information and best management practices.
 7. Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Conservancy staff will work with applicants to identify, evaluate, and incorporate reasonable measures to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of Conservancy-funded projects. The Conservancy will encourage use of best management practices and innovative designs that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and, as possible, will support the development of such practices and designs through funding and other actions.

Proposed Project Criteria

Broadly, the program will support projects that:

- Acquire, preserve, or restore natural areas or ecological reserves at risk due to development patterns in order to improve the long-term health of the region and avoid emissions associated with development;
- Develop parks and greenways in urban areas to mitigate climate change effects and promote public health and recreation;
- Acquire and maintain wildlife corridors and linkages to provide connections between areas of undeveloped lands, particularly significant public lands and key habitat ecosystems;
- Develop or maintain multi-use trails that connect communities, provide access to public resources and help reduce vehicle miles traveled;
- Protect, enhance, or restore water resources including wetlands and urban riparian areas;
- Implement water saving technologies and techniques to yield quantifiable water and energy savings. Such techniques may include the use of drought-efficient landscaping, stormwater filtration, permeable surfaces, green roofs and other forms of water capture and storage;

- Provide climate-related mitigation or improvements within disadvantaged communities;
- Preserve, restore, or enhance habitats that sequester carbon;
- Recognize that wildland fires may be a major contributor to atmospheric carbon dioxide, and implement fire safety mitigation projects where appropriate;
- Demonstrate a reduction in baseline greenhouse gas emissions through other innovative techniques or project designs, such as diverting organic material from landfills;
- Leverage partnerships and resources with local communities, including government entities and non-profits;
- Include non-climate related co-benefits, such as public access, education, job creation, youth employment and job training, recreation, and public health benefits;
- Engage local communities through outreach, education, and interpretation, particularly as it relates to long-term stewardship and climate change awareness.

Final Policy Approved by San Diego River Conservancy's Governing Board Members on March 14, 2019