



## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY WORK PLAN 2023**

The San Diego River Conservancy (Conservancy) continues to work with and expand partnerships to implement projects in support of the Conservancy's mission and statute. The Conservancy's mission is to protect natural, historical, cultural and tribal resources, open space, native habitat, improve water quality, support natural flood conveyance and provide for public access to public lands for the enjoyment of nature and outdoor recreational opportunities. The Conservancy consists of 3 fulltime staff and 18 Governing Board members.

### **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN: PROGRAM SUMMARY**

#### **Program 1: Conserve Land within the San Diego River Watershed**

The Conservancy approved a \$2 million grant to the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation to help acquire approximately 83 acres of in-holdings within the City of San Diego's Mission Trails Regional Park. The Mission Trails Regional Park Master Plan, adopted in 2019, reflected a vision for the park's future and outlined priorities for acquiring over 700 acres of private property in the East Elliott Community Planning Area.

#### **Program 2: Support and Encourage Recreation and Education**

The Conservancy's mission includes providing recreational opportunities for the public. The Conservancy and its partners developed the San Diego River Recreational Trail Plan to achieve its long-term vision of a trail spanning from the ocean to the headwaters. Recreational facilities along the San Diego River Trail include parks and open space, beaches, sports fields, equestrian and polo fields, mountain biking areas, a bicycle motocross track, a disc golf course, campgrounds, the 8,000-acre Mission Trails Regional Park, the three-acre Santee Lakes Recreation Preserve, the 24,677-acre Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, and the 460,000-acre Cleveland National Forest. Additionally, some of the five reservoirs within the watershed offer fishing, boating, and jet skiing opportunities.

#### **Lakeside's River Park Conservancy**

The San Diego River Science Field Station will provide an indoor space to promote environmental science and stewardship of the San Diego River. This living laboratory will be open to the public and will benefit students, teachers, and scientists of all ages. In addition, the facility will provide direct access to Lakeside's River Park Conservancy's riparian habitat to engage people in tactile learning experiences. Existing programs focus on 6<sup>th</sup> graders, but will expand to reach all skill and knowledge levels. Two collaborating school districts serve children from disadvantaged/severely disadvantaged neighborhoods with a large immigrant population. When completed, the Science Field Station will provide a community meeting space with access to the San Diego River Trail. The grant amount of \$1,200,000 was provided by the Conservancy's General Fund allocation.



## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY WORK PLAN 2023**

---

### **Program 3: Preserve and Restore Natural Resources, and the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Program**

#### **Cuyamaca Rancho State Park Reforestation Project**

The 2003 Cedar Fire burned 273,246 acres constituting over 13% of San Diego County in total, destroying 2,820 buildings, killing 15 people, and decimating approximately 75% of the 209,118-acre San Diego River watershed. In addition, conifer mortality in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park was high due to the fire severity and extremely high temperatures, which resulted in very low seed cone survival; as a result, State Park established a reforestation program in 2009. Subsequently, the Conservancy's Governing Board invested \$1 million in State Parks' reforestation efforts in the San Diego River's upper watershed for treatment on approximately 622 acres. This reforestation project provides multi-benefits, including improved forest health, restoration of sensitive wildlife habitats and corridors, carbon sequestration, increased resiliency to future fires, reduced run-off, and increased water infiltration in the upper San Diego River watershed.

#### **Invasive Non-native Plant Removal and Restoration Program**

Conservancy partners are currently implementing fuel reduction projects through weed abatement, brush management, and actively supporting healthy ecosystems. One of the co-benefits is that the Conservancy and its partners have been reducing flammable biomass in the San Diego River watershed for over 14 years. Removing invasive plants along the river decreases the risk of fire and flood and can act as a fire break along trails and property lines.

In addition, the Conservancy oversees removal restoration projects, gathers information on locations, and submits annual reports to the Army Corps of Engineers and other regulatory agencies to document past and future work. Annually, the Conservancy issues multiple partnership agreements to allow other organizations to use its permits for invasive non-native plant removal within the San Diego River watershed. These agreements are available to public agencies, non-profits, and other stakeholders at no cost through an established partnership agreement to implement projects with specific deliverables that must be met.



## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY WORK PLAN 2023

In 2023, the Conservancy continues to work with its grantees and partners to remove invasive plant species and conduct restoration in the San Diego River Watershed.

Grantee	Project	Acres
San Diego Canyonlands	Ruffin and Sandrock Canyon removal and restoration Phase 2	11
San Diego State University Research Foundation and the Soil Ecology Restoration Group	San Diego State University's Adobe Falls, Phase 5	13
San Diego Canyonlands	Navajo Canyon palm removal, restoration and trails improvement project, Phase 1 (250+ palms)	7
Back Country Land Trust	Healthy Headwaters Initiative for the Alpine/ El Capitan Basin	1.5
The Nature Collective	San Diego River Arundo removal project	15.3
San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS)	Arundo Removal at Alvarado Creek near MTS Grantville station	0.5
City of San Diego, Public Utilities Department	San Diego River healthy headwaters restoration project at El Capitan Reservoir	2.5

### Wildfire and Forest Resilience

The Governing Board of the Conservancy approved approximately \$19 million for projects to help reduce the risk and intensity of wildfires in San Diego County, in addition to the Conservancy's Invasive Non-native Plant Removal and Restoration program.

The table below lists wildfire and forest reliance projects approved by the Conservancy Board and will continue to be implemented in 2023.

Grantee	Project Description
County of San Diego, Department of Parks and Recreation	Fuel reduction and weed abatement throughout 10,000 acres of parks and open space owned and managed by County Parks.
United States Forest Service – Cleveland National Forest	Reduce fuel loads across approximately 1,855 acres, clear brush from 100 miles of roads, and hire additional employees for two years to protect sensitive resources. In addition, installation of a helicopter landing zone and three 10,000-gallon underground water tanks.



## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY WORK PLAN 2023

Grantee	Project Description
Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians	Purchase of Type 3 fire engine with a minimum 500-gallon water tank.
Kumeyaay Diegueño Land Conservancy	Procure fire-related equipment, such as a skid steer with masticator and vehicles to use during wildland fire events.
Barona Band of Mission Indians	Purchase a new brush rig, with chassis, pump, water tank and compartments, emergency lighting, emergency radios and onboard wireless technology.
San Diego Canyonlands	Reduce fire risk across approximately 1,110 acres owned by the City of San Diego's Open Space Division in the San Diego River watershed.
Lakeside's River Park Conservancy	Reduce flammable fuels across approximately 62 acres in El Monte Valley on public and private land in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) of the unincorporated community of Lakeside.
Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County	Provide defensible space and free chipping for private landowners or homeowners over 1,200 acres.
City of El Cajon	Develop a vegetation and wildfire management plan, training and education program, and wildfire management activities to clear and reduce flammable fuels across 85 acres in Fletcher Hills Open Space and Hillside Park.
San Diego State University Research Foundation	Remove highly flammable invasive non-native trees and vegetation across 9 acres of university campus.
City of Santee	Implement wildfire management strategies and reduce fuel loads on 11 acres along the San Diego River.
Lakeside Fire Protection District	To install 3 very high frequency (VHF) radio repeaters in east county San Diego to cover dead zones in Lakeside and the western foothills of the Cuyamaca Mountains (Disadvantaged and low-income community)

### Program 4: Protect and Preserve Cultural and Historical Resources

To better protect and preserve sensitive cultural resources associated with the Cleveland National Forest's Wildfire Resilience and Forest Health project, additional funds were awarded to engage qualified Kumeyaay Cultural Monitors who will have firsthand exposure to project activities so that they may make recommendations to the archaeologist onsite, as well as directly report their observations to their tribal leadership. In the past, Cleveland National Forest did not have funding to pay for cultural monitors, who often volunteered their services and expertise. This \$150,000 grant provides compensation for qualified Kumeyaay cultural monitoring activities in the Conservancy's services areas.



## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY WORK PLAN 2023**

---

### **Program 5: Enhance Water Quality and Natural Flood Conveyance**

The Conservancy will continue collaborating with its partners on projects and programs that improve water quality and supply within the local watersheds of the San Diego, Sweetwater, Otay, and Tijuana Rivers. Three of the 4 projects serve disadvantaged communities in the County of San Diego.

#### **Broadway Creek Restoration (Phase A)**

This project will reinforce a heavily eroded section of Broadway Creek through the installation of gabions and the removal of invasive non-native plants to promote nature-based solutions for stormwater management in an urban environment.

#### **Wells Park Improvement Project**

The City of El Cajon will install 5 structural Low Impact Development devices including 2 stormwater retention basins to collect stormwater runoff and reduce the risk of flooding at Wells Park. Currently, this park lacks stormwater infrastructure and minor rain events have an adverse effect on park grounds causing floods and park closures. The project is located in a designated severely disadvantaged community.

### **Program 6: Expand the Organizations Capacity and Public Outreach**

**San Diego Canyonlands** was awarded a grant to assist Conservancy staff in developing a 5- year strategic plan based on state plans and priorities. This yearlong process includes interviews with Governing Board Members, land managers, stakeholders and the general public.

#### **Native American Conservation Corps**

The lead for the project is the Colorado Desert District of the California Department of Parks and Recreation. State Parks developed a two-year pilot program for local Native American tribes to participate in training for fire and forest resiliency activities in San Diego County. The goal is to increase employment opportunities for local Native Americans with their respective tribes, State Parks, U.S. Forest Service, or other local organizations.



## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY WORK PLAN 2023

### DIRECTED GRANT PROGRAM

The following applicants were invited to submit a full application. Conservancy staff is currently reviewing these proposals as follows:

<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Project Description</b>
<b>San Diego Fire-Rescue Foundation</b>	Request for thirty (30) new dry suits for the City of San Diego's Swiftwater and Flood Rescue Team
<b>San Diego State University</b>	Install interpretive signs program at the River Park at SDSU Mission Valley
<b>San Diego State University Research Foundation</b>	Invasive plant removal in partnership with the Soil and Ecology Restoration Group on Alvarado Creek, Phases 7-9
<b>Center for Natural Lands Management</b>	Enhancing critical wildlife refugia in the San Diego River Watershed through ecological restoration
<b>Lakeside's River Park Conservancy</b>	Invasive removal and restoration in east county San Diego
<b>County Parks and Recreation</b>	Improvements for the Flume Trail segment of the San Diego River Trail
<b>County Parks and Recreation</b>	Cactus County Park restroom replacement and site improvements
<b>County Parks and Recreation</b>	Cactus County Park refurbishments: Dugout, playgrounds, interpretive signs and snack bar
<b>County Parks and Recreation</b>	Lindo Lake County Park improvement project, Phase 2 (West Basin): Water quality and walking path improvements and facility maintenance
<b>Lakeside Fire Protection District</b>	Type 3 Wildland Engine
<b>San Diego Audubon Society</b>	Silverwood Wildlife Sanctuary conservation project
<b>City of El Cajon</b>	Broadway Creek restoration, Phase B
<b>City of El Cajon</b>	Broadway Creek's trash capture project
<b>City of El Cajon</b>	San Diego River trash capture and reduction project in the City of El Cajon
<b>Cleveland National Forest</b>	Wildfire and forest resilience project, Phase 2
<b>Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation</b>	Interpretive program implementation



# SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY WORK PLAN 2023

## SUMMARY OF BOND FUNDS

### **Proposition 1 – Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014**

- \$17,000,000 allocated to the Conservancy.
- \$11,313,641 approved for 23 projects.
- \$5,686,359 remains for program delivery and project implementation.

### **Proposition 68 – California Drought, Water, Parks, and Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018**

- \$12,000,000 allocated to the Conservancy.
- \$4,262,841 approved for 12 projects.
- \$5,737,159 remains for program delivery and project implementation.

The Governor's proposed Budget for 2023-24, released in January 2023, allocated approximately \$25,250,000 to the Conservancy for programs and activities that advance multi-benefit wildfire and forest resilience, land conservation (state 30x30 initiative), and nature-based projects. The May Revision will likely reduce allocations due to the projected shortfall in the state budget.

## ADMINISTRATION/FISCAL DUTIES

- State Operations Budget \$428,000; California Environmental License Plate Fund for FY 2022-23;
- State Operations Budget \$390,000; California Environmental License Plate Fund for FY 2023-24;
- Prepare, execute and conduct Governing Board meetings;
- Coordinate and communicate with other state agencies, grantees, partners and the public;
- Review, respond and participate in various planning efforts in the San Diego River watershed, including CEQA review;
- Support state priorities and plans that align with Conservancy purposes and mission;
- Provide Bond accountability updates to state departments and databases, reports, cash projections and other relevant information as requested;
- Leverage funds through grant agreements;
- Prepare budgets, agreements, purchase documents, vendor payments, timesheets, accounting and various reports to other state agencies;
- Process bills, input purchase orders and pay invoices in Fi\$Cal system;
- The Conservancy contracts out its accounting, budget and human resources services to the Department of General Services - Office of Fiscal Services, Contracted Fiscal Services and Office of Human Resources.