

# Notice of Public Meeting San Diego River Conservancy

A public meeting of the Governing Board of  
The San Diego River Conservancy  
will be held Wednesday,

**January 22, 2025**  
**1:00 pm – 3:00 pm**

## Meeting Locations

San Diego County Administration Center 1600 Pacific Highway, Room 302 San Diego, CA 92101	Natural Resources Agency HQ 715 P Street 20-104 (Mojave Room) Sacramento, CA, 95814	San Diego City Administration Building, 202 "C" Street, 10th Floor, San Diego, CA 92101
---	---	---

Teleconference Line  
877-336-1831, Code 2199399

## Meeting Agenda

The Board may take agenda items out of order to accommodate speakers and to maintain a quorum, unless noted as time specific.

### **1. Roll Call**

### **2. Approval of Minutes (*ACTION*)**

Consider approval of minutes for the September 18, 2024, meeting.

### **3. Public Comment (*INFORMATIONAL*)**

Any person may address the Governing Board at this time regarding any matter within the Board's authority and jurisdiction. Presentations will be limited to three minutes for individuals and five minutes for representatives of organizations. Submission of information in writing is encouraged. The Board is prohibited by law from taking any action on matters discussed that are not on the agenda; no adverse conclusions should be drawn by the Board's not responding to such matters or public comments.

**4. Chairperson’s and Governing Board Members’ Report  
(INFORMATIONAL/ACTION)**

**5. Deputy Attorney General Report (INFORMATIONAL/ACTION)**

**6. Health and Safety Report (INFORMATIONAL)**

**7. Election of Officers (ACTION)**

The Executive Officer and the Chairman will conduct the biennial election of officers.

**Presentation:**

Julia Richards, Executive Officer, San Diego River Conservancy

Ben Clay, Chairman, San Diego River Conservancy

**8. Overview of Tijuana Estuary’s Plants and Animals (INFORMATIONAL)**

The Tijuana River Estuary is an intertidal coastal wetland at the mouth of the Tijuana River in San Diego County, bordering Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. The estuary is one of the few remaining salt marshes on the South Coast. Its location positions it under the path of the Pacific Flyway. The estuary covers about 2,500 acres. Many species of migratory and native species rely on the estuary as an essential breeding, feeding, and nesting habitat.

**Presentation:**

Dr. Jeff Crooks, Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve and the Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association

**9. 2024 Climate Bond - Proposition 4 (INFORMATIONAL/ACTION)**

On November 5, 2024, the voters approved “The Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024.” Under this bond the San Diego River Conservancy was allocated \$73.5 million. The Executive Officer will provide an overview of the bond, its goals and provide a summary of allocations for fiscal year 2025-2026.

**Presentation:**

Julia Richards, Executive Officer, San Diego River Conservancy

**10. Conservancy Reports: 2023-2024 Legislative Report and 2025  
Annual Report (INFORMATIONAL)**

The San Diego River Conservancy Act requires the Conservancy to submit a written report to the legislature biennially on the status of all projects by strategic program areas. In addition, the Conservancy prepared an annual report looking forward into the calendar year 2025. Reports are included in the board material and staff will provide an overview.

**Presentation:**

Dustin Harrison, Senior Environmental Scientist, San Diego River Conservancy

## **11. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL/ACTION)**

The following topics may be included in the Executive Officer's Report. The Board may take action regarding any of them:

- Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation – land acquisitions

### Conservancy staff attended the following events/meetings:

All Directors Convening – Natural Resources Agency  
San Diego State University Water Days 2024  
Cleveland National Forest meeting  
Trans County Trail meeting – County of San Diego  
California State Leadership Forum - Cal Gov Operations Agency  
California-Mexico Border Relations Council Meeting (CalEPA)  
San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board  
Wynola Estates Fire Safe Council meeting  
Regional Habitat Conservation Taskforce Meeting  
California Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force Meeting  
Tijuana River Valley Recovery Team Steering Committee Meeting  
Fire Safe Council of San Diego County meeting  
Climate Science Alliance, Binational Working Group  
Truth & Healing Council, sub-committee meetings

## **12. Next Meeting**

The next regularly scheduled Board meeting is anticipated to be held in person on Wednesday, March 19, 2025, from 10:00 am to noon.

## **13. Adjournment**

### Accessibility

If you require a disability related modification or accommodation to participate in this meeting, including auxiliary aids or services, please call Wendell Thompson at 619-390-0568 or [Wendell.Thompson@sdrc.ca.gov](mailto:Wendell.Thompson@sdrc.ca.gov).

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 22, 2025**

ITEM: 1

SUBJECT: ROLL CALL AND INTRODUCTIONS

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 22, 2025**

ITEM: **2**

SUBJECT: **APPROVAL OF MINUTES (ACTION)**

The Board will consider adoption of the September 18, 2024, Board Meeting.

PURPOSE: The minutes of the Board Meeting are attached for review.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve minutes

**SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

Minutes of September 18, 2024, Public Meeting  
(Draft Minutes for Approval on January 22, 2025)

**CONSERVANCY Board Member, Ben Clay** called the September 18, 2024, meeting of the San Diego River Conservancy to order at approximately 10:00 a.m.

**Item 1. Roll Call**

Members Present

Christian Beltran	Department of Finance
Emily Burgueno	Kumeyaay Diegueño Land Conservancy (Arrive 10:26 am)
Raul Campillo	Councilmember, City of San Diego, District 7
Ben Clay, Chair	Public at Large
Rebecca Fris	Wildlife Conservation Board
Ruth Hayward	Public at Large
Ray Lennox	Department of Parks and Recreation
Glen Lubcke	Department of Fish and Wildlife
Phil Ortiz	City of El Cajon
Cody Petterson	Speaker of the Assembly
Elsa Saxod	Public at Large
Andrea Scharffer	Natural Resources Agency
Gary Strawn	San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board
Lisa Tomas	Department of Parks and Recreation

Absent

Joel Anderson	Supervisor, County of San Diego, Second District
Jennifer Campbell	Mayor, City of San Diego, Designee
Dustin Trotter	City of Santee

Staff Members Present

Julia Richards	Executive Officer
Wendell Taper	Associate Governmental Program Analyst
Dustin Harrison	Environmental Scientist
Hayley Peterson	Deputy Attorney General

**Item 2. Approval of Minutes**

Elsa Saxod moved for approval of the July 17, 2024, minutes and Phil Ortiz seconded. Roll Call: Ayes: Ben Clay, Ruth Hayward, Andrea Scharffer, Christian Beltran, Lisa Tomas, Ray Lennox, Glen Lubcke, Cody Petterson, Raul Campillo, Phil Ortiz, Elsa Saxod (11-0-0)

**Item 3. Public Comment (INFORMATIONAL)**

Ben Clay welcomed everyone and asked if there were any comments.

Julia Richards stated there were no written comments received in advance of the meeting today.

**Item 4. Chairperson's and Governing Board Members' Report (INFORMATIONAL)**

**Gary Strawn** discussed his preliminary information. The water quality sampling team identified toxic algae blooms in Mission Valley. The San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board posted a warning. This is typically cyanobacteria which can make people and dogs sick to their stomach. Gary attributes the algal growth to warmer water temperatures in the summer and eutrophication.

**Cody Petterson** noted *Quercus dumosa* and *Quercus agrifolia* (coast live oak) are producing a lot of acorns this year. US Forest Service and CalFire have conifer restoration under control, but acorns are harder to produce in mass because acorns do not last long. It would be good at some point to circle back on the oak restoration and fund agencies. It is a gap in the ecosystem for restoration work in San Diego County.

**Item 5. Deputy Attorney General Report (INFORMATIONAL/ACTION)**

**Hayley Peterson**, Deputy Attorney General reminded the Conservancy Board Members to complete the biennial ethics training. Several people have completed it already. Local agency training is different than state training. Board Members will need to complete the State training in addition. Once complete, please provide your certification to the Executive Officer. She has requested they be received by October 22, 2024.

Please reach out to Conservancy staff if you have any questions.

**Item 6. Health and Safety Report (INFORMATIONAL)**

**Raul Campillo** discussed the Mission Trails Regional Park Task Force for the City of San Diego to allocate money to dredge the Old Mission Dam. It is an important historical and environmental artifact. Erica Ferreira, Open Space Director and others have been working hard to get permits for dredging. Bids are going out soon and dredging occurs about every 5 years.

**Item 7. An Overview of Atmospheric Rivers (INFORMATIONAL)**

**Julia Richards** stated the presenter is not available today, but we hope to have her present at a future Board Meeting.

**Item 8. San Diego Regional Fire Foundation's Proposal to Procure Personal Protective Equipment for Imperial Beach's Lifeguards and Firefighters (ACTION)**

**Ben Clay** stated there are two river rescue units in the County, City of San Diego and Imperial Beach. The Conservancy realized some of the team members down south didn't have the same equipment as the folks up north.

**Julia Richards** thanked Chair Clay.

The City of Imperial Beach is located within the Tijuana River watershed in the County of San Diego. As you see from the map, the Tijuana River enters the Pacific Ocean and travels north to the Imperial Beach pier.

Various contaminants found in the Tijuana River include, but are not limited to untreated wastewater, pesticides, heavy metals, fuel and oil, industrial waste, trash and debris, septic tanks and sewer leaks.

The proposed Project will procure Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the City of Imperial Beach's lifeguards and firefighters. These first responders need updated safety equipment because old and damaged

PPE is less effective because of degraded material. New PPE would reduce staff exposure to polluted and contaminated water encountered when responding to emergencies.

This proposed Project is consistent with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, Program 6, Expand the Organization's Capacity and Public Outreach.

The proposed Project is consistent with the San Diego River Conservancy Act and is aligned with multiple state plans and priorities. San Diego Regional Fire Foundation, in partnership with the City of Imperial Beach Marine Safety Department and Fire- Rescue Departments, requests funding in the amount of \$75,143.00. Conservancy staff recommends approving Resolution 24-20.

Julia introduced Joan Jones, Executive Director, San Diego Regional Fire Foundation, Jason Lindquist, Marine Safety Captain, Marine Safety, City of Imperial Beach, and John French, Fire Chief, Imperial Beach Fire-Rescue, City of Imperial Beach.

**Joan Jones** also introduced Frank Ault, San Diego Regional Fire Foundation's Board Chair. She thanked the Board for this opportunity. This project today will help protect the health and safety of Imperial Beach's Lifeguard and Firefighters. Not enough can be said and not enough thanks given to the dedicated IB Lifeguards and Firefighters who risk their life every day to rescue people and wildlife. Doing all this when faced with a threat to their own health due to the extreme levels of waste which average 40-50 million gallons coming from the Tijuana River flowing out to the Pacific Ocean every day.

She has been aware of this cross-border pollution for a long time. A front-page article in the Union Tribune from April quoted Coronado Fire Captain Sean Carey as saying "we can't wait for years for the federal government to get enough money to do all the construction to fix the treatment plant. We need protection now because the pollution is the lifeguards' cancer." When she read this, Joan knew action needed to happen. Knowing that the Conservancy had provided drysuits to the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department last year, she discussed the feasibility of bring a proposal before the Conservancy.

Afterwards, she reached out to Captain Lindquist and Chief French to get their input on what the immediate needs were. They both said their priority is drysuits for lifeguards and PPE for firefighters. Twelve months into June 30 this year, lifeguards entered the water to rescue 23 people in these polluted waters. They also performed 10-15 rescues in the Tijuana River each year.

Most lifeguards have gotten sick from going into the water at some point in their careers. Recently 10-12 lifeguards have had headaches and nausea from the horrible smell, and many have had flu-like symptoms. Two have had foot infections – one was admitted to the hospital from being stung by a stingray and contaminated water infection. The long-term health impacts are unknown from continuous exposure to contaminants. Joan introduced Captain Lindquist.

**Jason Lindquist** thanked the Board for having him. His responsibility is saving lives and ensuring the health of the lifeguards is his priority. He brought equipment for the Board to see. Their staff is 9 full-time employees and about 30 part-time employees. Their ask today is to help support part-time as well. All full-time get a set of dry suits. They are surrounded by water on three sides – Otay River and South San Diego Bay to the North, the Pacific Ocean and of course Tijuana River.

The pictures he showed were of the street with high tide and overtopping with polluted water in the street. Just to access the beach, they must drive through polluted water every time then rinse the truck. The picture in the middle is draining the water to the back of the street so citizens don't have to drive through polluted water. Immigration rescues occur where they save migrants from drowning. They check for victims, fuel leaks and removed a vessel from one smuggling incident.



**John French** Fire Chief Imperial Beach Fire Rescue. They have different exposures than lifeguards. For example, the PPE they are interested in is a Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) and mask. 80-90% of calls are medical aids. The other 10-20% are Fire Department. Exposures are worse than they used to be. Their equipment is aged and worn. Every time they go into a fire, equipment needs to be decontaminated and cleaned, putting it temporarily out of service. Once a year, equipment needs to go in for maintenance and testing. Having additional sets will help as these sets get worn and don't last as long as they used to.

They are looking for 12 sets of PPE and 12 masks. Some images of a brush fire due to homeless encampment, car accident and broken water main demonstrate different exposures. He appreciates the Board's consideration.

**Joan Jones** the total project cost is \$82,403. This includes their funding request from the Conservancy of \$75,143 with the City of Imperial Beach matching 10%. The request includes 20 dry suits for full and part-time employees. Current dry suits are 10 years old. The next item includes 12 sets of PPE for firefighters. They have spent thousands of dollars on repairing this equipment. The lifespan of PPE used to be 10 years but now it is shortened because of the many toxins that remain in the PPE and expose the firefighter. The older the PPE, the more at risk the firefighter.

The facemask is a vital piece of a firefighter's PPE. It protects their face from embers and lungs from harmful contaminants. The last item is program management and working with Imperial Beach to provide progress reports and pictures of equipment. She thanked the Board and asked for questions.

**Phil Ortiz** asked with 40 people on staff and only 10 drysuits available, what would the lifeguards do in the absence of suits? Not having these suits is inhibiting normal work. As a community this should be framed as an ecological disaster. With an oil spill there would be no doubt.

**Jason Lindquist** responded, normally the dry suits used in the river rescue season (October to April), do not get used in the ocean. Now that the Ocean is polluted every day, they don't go in the water unless it is an emergency. Nowadays they talk to everyone and advise them of the risks. Whenever staff enter the water, they end up filling out workers' compensation papers, as a result. They are the only ones in the nation dealing with 100% polluted wastewater in the ocean. The river rescue outfit is different, so they are adapting to normal day-to-day work in the ocean.

**Cody Petterson** thanked the lifeguards for their work. He recommended inviting council members and supervisors outside of the San Diego River Conservancy's Board such as Mayor Paloma Aguirre. It would be good to get representation both from their perspective and advocacy for their concerns.

**Ben Clay** commented they have reached out to Imperial Beach Mayor to inform her of what the Conservancy is doing. Ben asked Ray Lennox if State Parks has lifeguards.

**Lisa Tomas** replied they have similar needs. They do not have dry suits as she is not sure if they are conducive in wave action. State Parks does not currently have dry suits. She will take this back to their division to discuss options.

**Jason Lindquist** dry suits are used when they predict they will enter the ocean water. It's not the best tool for every situation, but the kit they are requesting will help prepare them whenever they need to enter contaminated water.

**Ruth Hayward** asked if there is any data about what this pollution is doing to wildlife. There are organizations that support this type of work, not just the human aspect. By shedding light on the situation people will get involved. Sometimes talking about animals gets people's attention faster than something they read every day.

**Jason Lindquist** responded it is hard to say from the lifeguard's perspective, however United States Fish and Wildlife Service, State Fish and Wildlife and County of San Diego. They do not share data, but from observation they see dead fish on occasion.

**Glen Lubcke** has been with the Department of Fish and Wildlife for four months now and is getting a better idea of what is happening region-wide to see what they know about it and who is studying it.

**Lisa Tomas** the Tijuana River National Estuary Research Reserve conducts research in partnership with Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association (SWIA). There is indication of significant loss of oxygen levels in the water and the river mouth closure due to sediment.

**Cody Petterson** moved for approval of Resolution 24-20, and **Phil Ortiz** seconded. Roll Call: Ayes: **Ben Clay, Ruth Hayward, Andrea Scharffer, Christian Beltran, Lisa Tomas, Ray Lennox, Glen Lubcke, Cody Petterson, Raul Campillo, Emily Burgueno, Phil Ortiz, Elsa Saxod (12-0-0)**

#### **Item 9. Kumeyaay Diegueno Land Conservancy (INFORMATIONAL)**

**Julia Richards** thanked Chair Clay. San Diego River Conservancy Board Member, Emily Burgueno, will provide an overview of the Kumeyaay Diegueño Land Conservancy.

Board Member Burgueno is Chair of Kumeyaay Diegueño Land Conservancy and Head Seed Keeper of the Iipay Nation of Santa Ysabel.

**Emily Burgueno** thanked Julia and the Board. She introduced herself in Kumeyaay language and translated in English. She comes from the Elcuanan Village also known as the Iipay Nation of Santa Ysabel in north county. She also comes from the Snyawkwatun Village which is the Manzanita Band of the Kumeyaay Nation in east county. They are two of twelve federally recognized Kumeyaay bands in San Diego County. Her work is to be a strong heart and have e'Muht Mohay (love of the land). She acknowledges we are on Kumeyaay land.

She started by sharing her ancestral Kumeyaay homelands are within the traditional waterways often sharing areas with neighboring tribal nations. Kumeyaay predates modern international borders and reservation boundaries. The map showed before colonization of San Diego. The representation of bands and reservations show they have been displaced from the coast and are more inland. The Kumeyaay Nation flag was put together by the Kumeyaay Heritage Preservation Committee (KHPC) represented four direction colors as well as twelve federally recognized Kumeyaay Bands. Sharing their mission statement is to renew their ancestral ties to the ocean, mountains, and desert through protective land management, cooperative agreements and educational programs.

Established in 2005, ten bands of the Kumeyaay nation united to form an organization to promote the protection of sacred sites and cultural landscapes with biodiverse ecological habitats throughout San Diego and imperial counties. Through monumental partnerships with Native American Land Conservancy, KDLC received non-profit status in 2010. Through acquiring land, managing sites and creating active partnerships, KDLC preserves lands and sacred sites from the ocean to the desert. Their work includes purchasing properties or preserves, protecting submerged sites along the coastline, developing and holding conservation easements in partnerships with non-profits and developing their own educational programs for tribal youth.

KDLC acts as a coordinated systematic and traditional matter for ten of the twelve federally recognized Kumeyaay Bands represented by tribal council resolutions. Kumeyaay land stewardship and act of conservation of bringing traditional ecological knowledge forward is intended to include and prioritize traditional knowledge that has been systematically removed from these lands. She showed images of culture burn, which is criminalized. Using the respectful knowledge that her father has had since the age of seven and now he's 67 – 60 years of cultural burning. Another image showed a family member making medicine at a ceremony. Her great

grandmother was a well-known basket weaver. Her cousin was shown trimming willow trees, utilized for storage baskets. Nothing goes to waste or is seen as trash with this relationship with the land. Traditional knowledge carries this forth. Another pottery demonstration was shown. She promotes the decolonization initiative.

The Kumeyaay homelands are host to tremendous resources that are under dire threat. Over 5 million people live within the traditional homelands. There are more endangered species within Kumeyaay homelands than any county in the United States. Some of the oldest archaeological sites in America are in the Kumeyaay homeland. Extensive examples of engineering and astronomy are widespread. Sites of tremendous spiritual and cultural importance are being directly impacted by rural development. For example, environmental threats are in alignment of the cultural threats as they don't separate themselves which was forced upon them to be removed from the environment.

When removing essential elements or species within an ecosystem short and long-term repercussion will begin to develop. Displacement of Kumeyaay has affected freshwater health, ocean health, native plant health, wildlife co-habitation, created wildfire risk and other factors within society like loss of village names and traditional language.

Invasive vegetation has drowned out native plant relatives throughout San Diego and Imperial Counties where Kumeyaay have been systematically displaced. Criminalization by cultural practitioners by state and federal agencies require certifications and permits to burn as well as gathering traditional food in ancestral homelands.

The image shown in McCain Valley was a road widening project at the displacement and desecration of a cemetery and cultural landscape. Vandalism, theft and looting directly affect Kumeyaay existence and longevity of homelands. Acts of desecration of land is continuance of genocide. It is the collective responsibility to protect and preserve Kumeyaay knowledge and philosophy to stay active on the land. Many artifacts are housed at the Museum of Man.

ATVs go through this area and often fences are vandalized despite their efforts to keep people off. A well-known looter in San Diego County, Malcom Rogers, was shown in a photograph with ancestral remains being studied and dehumanized. This has been happening since encroachment and up to today. This also happens at submerged sites along the coastline.

Massive energy developments have disrupted the sanctity of sacred sites. She is not against green energy, rather they are against the erasure, dehumanization and desecration of their existence for these projects. There is a way to go about this, but it hasn't been done yet because it is at risk of their existence.

She brought it back and highlighted their philosophy of e'Muht Mohay (love of the land), which is the protection of culturally significant sites, areas and resources. This requires a comprehensive stewardship standard for cultural and ecological resources management that recognizes the stewardship, decisions and actions based on management process.

KDLC has three preserves, starting with Mosler Property. Originally gifted by Native American Land Conservancy (NALC) from Francis Helen Mosler, in 2010 NALC gifted it to KDLC after gaining non-profit status. Sloan Canyon, 608 acres, near the village of Matamo, also known as Sycuan Reservation in Dehesa, KDLC purchased the property in 2013 along with the Endangered Habitats Conservancy. Lastly, Kuuchamaa Mountain, 42-acre preserve near Tecate, was the first Native American sacred mountain to be recognized on the National Register of Historical Places solely based on the significance to indigenous people. That was in 1992.

The Kumeyaay Calendar is going into the months of Kupihaaw or fall. Cultural revitalization programs will help draw upon knowledge of the land and themselves because they don't separate themselves from the land. Programs include Kumeyaay traditional language, birth songs, ethnobotany, diet and land stewardship.

They are actively seeking funds to acquire lands near sacred mountain ranges within the Kumeyaay homelands. They are building upon relationships with local, state and federal agencies as well as with like-minded non-profit and grassroots organizations. They have monthly board meetings every third Monday. The executive board consists of her as chairwoman, Jamie LaBrake, also a Sycuan tribal councilmember, Eric LaChappa, and Daniel Tsosie, also a Campo tribal councilmember. She acknowledged other delegates supported by tribal council, thanked the Board and asked for any questions.

**Cody Petterson** thanked Emily for her presentation. He sits on the Volcan Mountain Foundation Board which interdigitates with Kumeyaay lands and wants to foster relationship between the work they do and the Kumeyaay. One challenge he noted is with conservation easements or acquisitions with endowments to maintain in perpetuity which is an impediment for them. He would like to do more and thought of legislation that would help pay endowment rather than just the acquisition. Cody asked if the Conservancy could help pay endowment for long term maintenance. He also has 200 colter pine seedlings and would like to outplant those this year.

**Ben Clay** commented this has been insightful. He appreciates Emily's time briefing the Conservancy.

#### **Item 10. County of San Diego Parks and Recreation Updates on the Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District (INFORMATIONAL)**

**Julia Richards** thanked Chair Clay.

The County is exploring efforts to pursue an Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District (EIFD), which will help develop an alternate funding source for trail, infrastructure, and other improvements along the San Diego River Corridor to help complete the San Diego River Trail and the San Diego River Park vision. This is a follow-up to the November 9, 2023, presentation from County Parks.

Julia introduced Crystal Benham, Resource Management Chief, County of San Diego, Parks and Recreation, and Lizzy Bendrick, Trails Program Manager, County of San Diego, Parks and Recreation.

**Crystal Benham** thanked Julia for the introduction. She reviewed the details previously and updated the Board where they are. The overall San Diego River Park vision includes the trail from Julian to Ocean Beach. They are also looking at habitat restoration, water quality improvements, pocket parks and other amenities to fully realize the vision of this River Park.

There have been several planning documents laying out the gaps and vision, helping to drive projects to date. In 2021, county supervisors pointed out the main barriers to obtaining this goal and created a task force. The lack of funding was the main issue, and an analysis determined long-term funding. In September of 2022 they were directed to pursue an Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District in partnership with the City of San Diego.

A technical consultant was hired. The funding analysis looked at how much trail needs to be built and where the gaps are. Of the 130-mile trail system, 75 miles remain. This figure was the basis of the cost analysis. Their analysis also looked at different types of trails with different infrastructure needs throughout the San Diego River Trail. The high end will take about \$660 million to build out the trail. That's just the trail. The bulk of the funding is land acquisitions. As agencies, they do not own land or have easements for most of the identified trail segments.

Since the original study, they cost out restoration, pocket parks and other amenities. That full vision is likely \$900 million. The EIFD is relatively new, allowed in state law. It is not a new tax. It freezes the tax base and within the portion on land, any additional tax accrued, a portion will be set aside for the EIFD. Future general fund funding would go to the EIFD. EIFDs are used for bonding. As of now, City of San Diego is the only jurisdiction exercising this in the County located in Otay Mesa. After the EIFD has been established for a couple years they can bond and get larger amounts of funding. The future tax base will pay back the bonds, it's a debt financing mechanism.

They planned to go to the Board of Supervisors this fall. Rather they will provide a memorandum, going through the steps required to make the EIFD. Also, they are disclosing how much general funding would be needed. The memorandum will be public once completed. A website and email distribution list is available.

A separate governance body will need to be created – Public Financing Authority (PFA). It would consist of seven people, two County Boards of Supervisors, two members from the City Council, and three members from the community. This model has been used across the state. The first step is forming the PFA guiding development of an Infrastructure Financing Plan.

**Ben Clay** mentioned the Conservancy cannot condemn property. It comes down to a willing seller and a willing buyer. Ben asked if this applies to schools.

**Crystal Benham** responded that the County typically does not condemn property. If there are private property developments, they require portions adjacent to the trail to be developed by the developer. The County has discretionary funding from the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP). There is not discretionary funding for the trail. So, if a property owner wants to sell to the County, she would need to bring it before the Board to approve general fund funding. This takes time and is a barrier to negotiation.

It involves public input. Once PFA is established, they are legally required through government code to hold public meetings. Both City and County would give up future general-purpose revenue. It is a finance decision to be approved by both entities. This does not apply to schools.

**Cody Petterson** the tax increment needs to be attributable to investments. If the projects don't generate additional revenues, it's unsustainable. A revitalized Mission Valley, where projects invested in the River turning development towards the river as the key asset. The Conservancy Board should collaborate on investments to interact with the River.

**Crystal Benham** the PFA will have continual meetings annually. There are large disclosure requirements for how they will spend money. She hopes the Conservancy is involved with this. She shared the link to apply for the PFA.

**Raul Campillo** supports the vision, and he thinks this is the beginning of something positive, both environmentally and economically. This asset includes residential and business properties. He thanked Crystal for her presentation.

**Ben Clay** asked if this would compete with other developments in the area.

**Crystal Benham** mentioned this will require cooperation as EIFDs can overlap.

**Phil Ortiz** asked about the map and boundaries. The river goes through other jurisdictions. How will those cities be involved with decision making? The City and County of San Diego look like they are the ones that need most trail improvements.

**Crystal Benham** responded that both Santee and El Cajon did not want to be involved because their portions of the trail have been built out or planned for the most part.

**Emily Burgueno** recommends including tribal entities in the PFA. The project is passing through three federally recognized tribes, and she suggested involving those tribes. She wanted to know when collaboration will begin noting the areas of trails that have already been developed. Cultural sites are throughout the river boundary. During land acquisition, consider land easements with KDLC.

**Crystal Benham** commented that existing developments went through their review process. This EIFD is at the beginning of the planning phase. She would like to engage with tribes. She appreciates input and will be happy to provide updates to the Board.

**Raul Campillo** to Emily's comment, the EIFD wouldn't be able to do anything on private land. There must be coordination for anything to get done.

**Item 11. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL/ACTION)**

**Julia Richards** announced there are just a few more items. The all-State Conservancies meeting last week was in Calabasas. They talked about goals, mission and how to better serve stakeholders, more funding and homelessness. Also, Dustin will provide a few updates on the Conservancy's permits and social media.

**Dustin Harrison** The San Diego River Conservancy has been working with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to renew its invasive removal permits. The application was submitted earlier this year and just last week, the Conservancy received the final permit. Special thanks to Glen Lubcke for helping to move the permit forward during the review process. Currently, we are working on drafting partnership agreements so that some of our partners can work under this suite of permits to restore native habitat in the watershed.

In August, the Conservancy had an intern for two weeks to help set up our Social Media accounts. Facebook and Instagram accounts are for informational purposes. If you would like to formally contact the Conservancy, please reach out to staff via email or phone numbers.

**Ben Clay** mentioned the report given by Emily should go on social media, so people understand the relationship of what the Conservancy is trying to do. He thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

**Emily Burgueno** recommends highlighting every organization the Conservancy works with and she offered her assistance to get the word out.

**Item 12. Next Meeting**

The next regularly scheduled Board meeting will be held Wednesday, January 15, 2024, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

**Item 13. Adjournment**

**Ben Clay** adjourned the meeting at 11:42 am

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 22, 2025**

ITEM: 3

SUBJECT: **PUBLIC COMMENT (*INFORMATIONAL*)**

PURPOSE: Any person may address the Governing Board at this time regarding any matter within the Board's authority. Presentations will be limited to three minutes for individuals and five minutes for representatives of organizations. Submission of information in writing is encouraged. The Board is prohibited by law from taking any action on matters that are discussed that are not on the agenda; no adverse conclusions should be drawn by the Board's not responding to such matters or public comments.

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 22, 2025**

ITEM: 4

SUBJECT: **CHAIRPERSON'S AND GOVERNING BOARD  
MEMBERS' REPORTS (*INFORMATIONAL/ACTION*)**

PURPOSE: These items are for Board discussion only and the Board will take no formal action.



State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 22, 2025**

ITEM: 5

SUBJECT: DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL REPORT  
*(INFORMATIONAL/ACTION)*

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 22, 2025**

ITEM: 6

SUBJECT: HEALTH AND SAFETY (*INFORMATIONAL*)

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 22, 2025**

ITEM: 7

SUBJECT: **ELECTION OF OFFICERS (*ACTION*)**

The Executive Officer and the Chairman will conduct the biennial election of officers.

**Presentation:**

Julia Richards, Executive Officer, San Diego River Conservancy  
Ben Clay, Chairman, San Diego River Conservancy

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 22, 2025**

ITEM: 8

SUBJECT: **OVERVIEW OF TIJUANA ESTUARY'S PLANTS  
AND ANIMALS (*INFORMATIONAL*)**

The Tijuana River Estuary is an intertidal coastal wetland at the mouth of the Tijuana River in San Diego County, bordering Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. The estuary is one of the few remaining salt marshes on the South Coast. Its location positions it under the path of the Pacific Flyway. The estuary covers about 2,500 acres. Many species of migratory and native species rely on the estuary as an essential breeding, feeding, and nesting habitat.

**Presentation:**

**Dr. Jeff Crooks, Tijuana River National Estuarine Research  
Reserve and the Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association**

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 22, 2025**

ITEM: 9

SUBJECT: **2024 CLIMATE BOND – PROPOSITION 4**  
***(INFORMATIONAL/ACTION)***

On November 5, 2024, the voters approved "The Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024." Under this bond the San Diego River Conservancy was allocated \$73.5 million. The Executive Officer will provide an overview of the bond, its goals and provide a summary of allocations for fiscal year 2025-2026.

**Presentation:**

**Julia Richards, Executive Officer, San Diego River Conservancy**

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 22, 2025**

ITEM: 10

SUBJECT: **CONSERVANCY REPORTS: 2023-2024  
LEGISLATIVE REPORT AND 2025 ANNUAL  
REPORT (*INFORMATIONAL*)**

The San Diego River Conservancy Act requires the Conservancy to submit a written report to the legislature biennially on the status of all projects by strategic plan program areas. In addition, the Conservancy prepared an annual report looking forward into the calendar year 2025. Reports are included in the board material and staff will provide an overview.

**Presentation:**

Dustin Harrison, Senior Environmental Scientist, San Diego River Conservancy

# SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY'S LEGISLATIVE REPORT 2023-2024



January 22, 2025  
San Diego River Conservancy  
11769 Waterhill Road, Bldg. #2  
Lakeside, CA 92040

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	1
I. Overview of the Conservancy's Highlights.....	3
II. Strategic Plan Update .....	3
III. Operating Budget .....	4
IV. Summary of Conservancy Projects by Program Area .....	5
Program 1: Conserve Land within the San Diego River Watershed .....	5
Program 2: Support and Encourage Recreation and Education .....	5
Program 3: Preserve and Restore Natural Resources.....	7
Wildfire and Forest Resilience.....	7
Invasive Non-Native Plant Removal and Control Program .....	10
Program 4: Protect and Preserve Cultural and Historical Resources .....	11
Program 5: Enhance Water Quality and Natural Flood Conveyance .....	11
Program 6: Expand the Organization's Capacity and Public Outreach.....	12

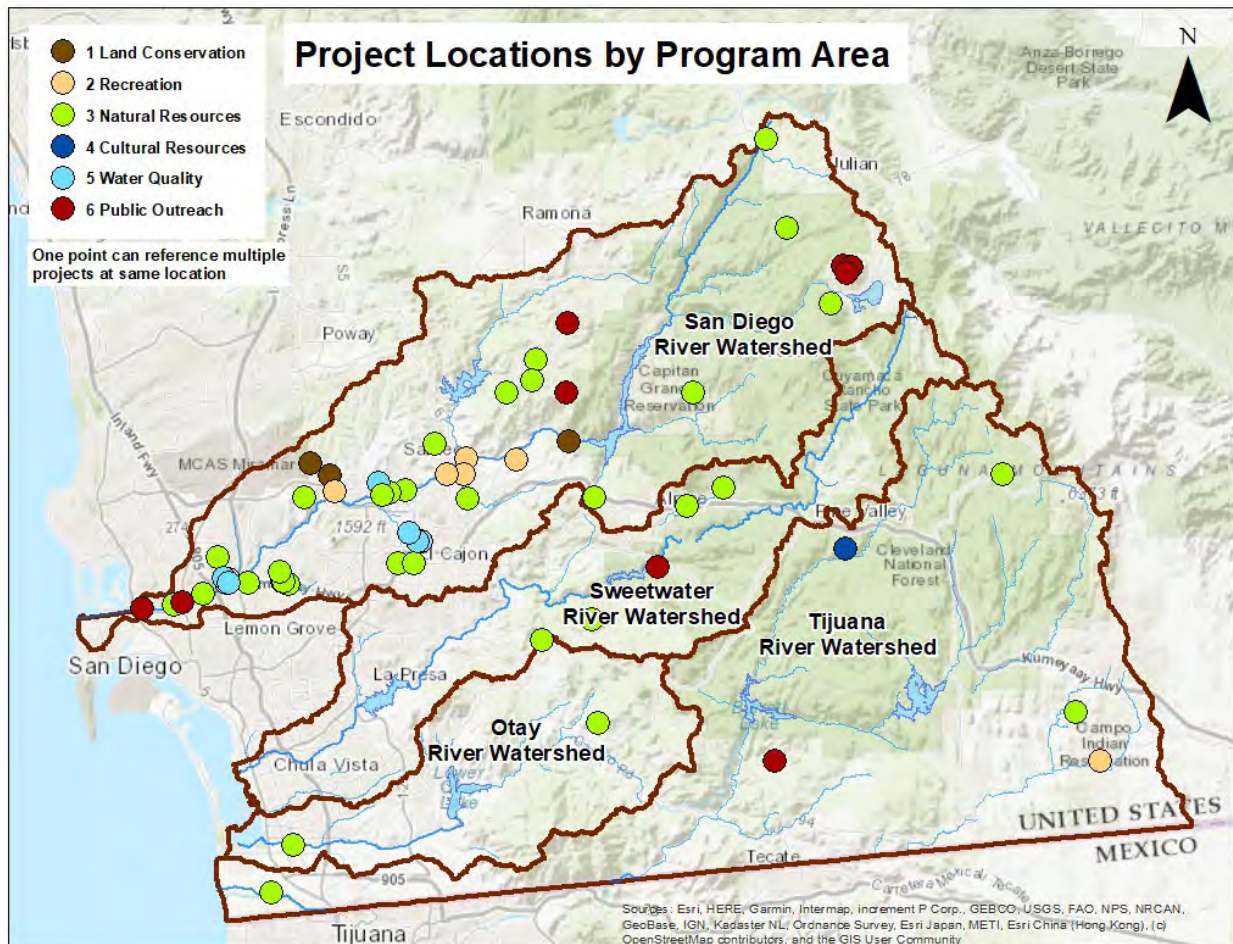


**Executive Summary**

The San Diego River Conservancy, established in 2002, was created by the Legislature to conserve land, protect and preserve natural, cultural, and historic resources, and provide recreational opportunities for the public within the San Diego River watershed. A key part of its mission is to promote outdoor recreation and education while engaging the public in conservation efforts. The headwaters of the San Diego River start in Julian, flow southwest through the Cleveland National Forest and collect at El Capitan Reservoir, continuing westward through rural Lakeside, suburban Santee and urban San Diego before finally reaching Ocean Beach at the mouth of the river. The Conservancy's goals include conserving land and completing the San Diego River Trail from the Pacific Ocean to the Cuyamaca Mountains.

Over the years, the Conservancy's scope has expanded to include preserving cultural and tribal resources connected to the river and increasing biodiversity and wildlife corridors through native habitat restoration while balancing the need for public access. In this report, the Conservancy outlines its highlights, its operating budget, and summarizes its 2023-2024 accomplishments under each of the six program areas within its strategic plan and by funding source.

**Map 1.** Conservancy Projects Identified by Program Area and Location



The Conservancy received allocations from the Budget Acts of 2022-23 and 2023-24 for wildfire and forest resilience projects and nature-based solutions from the State's general fund. This money, along with other funding sources, was crucial in implementing various projects. Grant funds were used to implement projects that reduce flammable fuel loads on public and private lands, decrease the risk and intensity of wildfires in the San Diego region, and restore the ecological health of native habitats within the San Diego, Sweetwater, Otay, and Tijuana River watersheds, see Map 1 on page 2. (One point may represent more than one project)

In summary, during 2023 and 2024 the Conservancy:

- Awarded approximately \$47.6 million in grants
- Completed 33 projects
- Initiated 35 new projects
- Reduced hazardous fuel loads on 2,586 acres
- Invested \$7 million in historically underrepresented communities
- Contributed over \$2 million to expand capacity and public outreach

The Conservancy continues to focus on expanding its capacity and public outreach by strengthening existing partnerships and forming new ones when feasible to support statewide initiatives and the impacts they have on our communities. In this report, the Conservancy gives an overview of its grant projects that utilize nature-based solutions, protect biodiversity, and mitigate climate change. Working alongside California Native Americans further amplifies our efforts. Additionally, investments in disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities and vulnerable populations help contribute to healthier ecosystems, improve water quality, increase public access to parks and open spaces, and enhance wildlife connectivity. Through these strategies, the Conservancy's mission aligns with the California Natural Resources Agency's priorities.

## I. Overview of the Conservancy's Highlights

The Governing Board has approved projects that align with the Conservancy's mission and help the Conservancy build connections with various communities and stakeholders in the San Diego region to promote equity and environmental justice. The Conservancy continues to invest in historically underrepresented communities.

### Tribal

- 7 projects
- \$3.1 million
- Procurement of fire engines, emergency vehicles, handheld communication devices, wildfire supplies, personal protective equipment, and other park improvements.

### Critically underserved, low-income and disadvantaged communities

- 5 projects
- \$3.9 million

### Multi-benefit

- 24 Projects
- \$18.1 million

## II. Strategic Plan Update

For the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan Update, the Conservancy engaged San Diego Canyonlands, a community benefit organization, to assist with public outreach. Over 200 community members were surveyed, including key stakeholders, agency leaders, land managers, and others for insight into their perspective on the role and efficacy of the Conservancy's program areas.

Community members voiced support for projects that are multi-benefit (i.e., projects that support multiple Strategic Plan program areas), that contribute to regional climate and fire resilience, and that support outdoor recreation and equitable access to nature.

The Conservancy considered new data on climate change impacts, mitigation opportunities, water quality challenges, and community needs as well as evolving conservation priorities from the State of California consistent with statutory obligations of the Conservancy in drafting this Update. Click here for a PDF version of the: [Conservancy's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan Update](#).

### III. Operating Budget

- State Operations Budget \$411,000; Environmental License Plate Fund for FY 2023-24
- State Operations Budget \$431,000; Environmental License Plate Fund for FY 2024-25
- The Conservancy's accounting, budget, and human resources services are provided by the Department of General Services – Office of Fiscal Services, Contracted Fiscal Services, and Office of Human Resources.

#### Current Bonds

State bonds provide funding to the Conservancy through:

- Proposition 1: \$17 million allocated through the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014. Twenty-four projects awarded.
- Proposition 68: \$12 million allocated through the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018. Twelve projects awarded.
- Proposition 4: \$25.5 million allocated for watershed improvements, restoration and wildfire resilience and \$48 million for climate resilience projects as allocated through the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024.

#### Budget Acts – General Fund Allocations

Conservancy grant awards typically cover multiyear projects. Some projects discussed in this report were funded by prior budget years and are currently in progress.

- The Budget Act of 2022-23 allocated \$13 million to the Conservancy for climate or wildfire resilience projects, community access, nature-based solutions, and a two-year pilot program for the Native American Conservation Corps.
- The Budget Act of 2023-24 allocated \$9.3 million to the Conservancy for programs and activities that advance wildfire protection, multi-benefit and nature-based solutions.

#### IV. Summary of Conservancy Projects by Program Area

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

In this reporting period, the Conservancy played a key role in protecting approximately 185 acres of land in San Diego County for the long term. Specifically, the Conservancy awarded \$3.1 million to the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation to purchase approximately 108 acres of land in the East Elliot area of Mission Trails Regional Park, located in the city of San Diego. This land will be preserved permanently and will offer multiple benefits, including public access to open space, outdoor recreational opportunities, and protection of wildlife corridors. These land acquisitions align with the State of California's and Natural Resources Agency's goal to conserve 30% of California's land and coastal waters by 2030.

**Table 1.** Project List for Program 1

Grantee	Title	Amount	Funding Source	Status
Lakeside's River Park Conservancy	Digenan Appraisal 75 Acres	\$8,750	General Fund	Completed
Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation	East Elliott Acquisition 55 Acres	\$1,109,000	General Fund	In Progress
Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation	East Elliott Acquisition 53 Acres	\$2,000,000	General Fund	In Progress

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

The Conservancy helps provide access to the outdoors by including Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, multilingual interpretive panels, informational kiosks, digital maps and educational engagement for local, regional, and state parks, federal forests and open spaces. This program supports the Natural Resources Agency's Outdoors for All initiative. Below is a table of projects supporting access to recreational opportunities and park facilities:

##### Campo Band of Mission Indians

Ralph Goff Community Park improvements include a new self-contained, 2-unit prefabricated accessible vault restroom with potable water, erosion control measures and one shade structure for the playground.

##### Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation

Install 50 multilingual interpretive panels throughout Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP). MTRP is one of the largest urban parks in the country consisting of 8,000 acres of natural and developed recreational areas. MTRP averages more than 2 million visitors annually.

**Table 2.** Project List for Program 2

Grantee	Title	Amount	Funding Source	Status
County of San Diego, Dept. Parks and Rec	Cactus County Park Improvements	\$2,000,000	General Fund	In Progress

Grantee	Title	Amount	Funding Source	Status
Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation	50 Bilingual Interpretive Panels	\$150,000	General Fund	In Progress
County of San Diego, Dept. Parks and Rec	Historic Flume Trail Improvements	\$500,000	General Fund	In Progress
County of San Diego, Dept. Parks and Rec	Lindo Lake East Basin (Phase 1)	\$250,000	Proposition 68	Complete
County of San Diego, Dept. Parks and Rec	Lindo Lake West Basin (Phase 2)	\$2,000,000	General Fund	In Progress
Campo Band of Mission Indians	Ralph Goff Community Park Improvements	\$950,000	General Fund	In Progress
Lakeside's River Park Conservancy	San Diego River Science Field Station	\$1,200,000	General Fund	In Progress
San Diego State University	SDSU Mission Valley River Park Restroom	\$738,000	Proposition 68	Complete
San Diego State University	Mission Valley River Park Interpretive Signage Project	\$150,065	General Fund	Completed

**Project Highlight: San Diego State University's River Park**

San Diego State University installed a 6-stall prefabricated gender-neutral restroom, 11 interpretive panels, both of which are shown in the images below, boulder etchings, mileage medallions, and other interpretive elements which can be found throughout San Diego State University's River Park at Mission Valley.



**Images 1 and 2.** Prefabricated gender-neutral restrooms (left) and one interpretive panel (right) installed throughout San Diego State University's River Park at Mission Valley. (Photo courtesy San Diego State University)

**Program 3: Preserve and Restore Natural Resources**

The majority of the Conservancy's projects are dedicated to safeguarding natural resources from the constantly changing climate. This program actively supports the Natural Resources Agency's Protecting Biodiversity and confronts climate change through Expanding Nature-Based Solutions. Nature-based solutions harness the power of nature to bolster climate resilience for future extreme weather events, protect vulnerable communities, and utilize carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change. Projects encompass wildfire and forest resilience, invasive plant control, and restoration. In 2023-2024, the Conservancy's grantees treated 1,364 acres through hazardous fuels reduction, invasive plant control, and removal of dead, dying, and diseased trees, marking a significant increase over previous years.

**Wildfire and Forest Resilience**

The Governing Board of the Conservancy has approved 19 projects totaling over \$19.4 million to help reduce the risk and intensity of wildfires in the County of San Diego. This program supports wildfire and climate resiliency. For Fiscal Year 2023, the Conservancy's funds were used to treat 2,203 acres, provide defensible space for 286 homes, and support for 10 fire districts/departments, 35 fire stations and 13 Fire Safe Councils. A grant from the Conservancy funded a new helicopter landing zone, parking for emergency vehicles and three 10,000-gallon underground water storage tanks. The image below depicts the trailhead where facilities were upgraded to improve safety during wildland fires and other emergencies. For a video by the National Forest Foundation, click here: ["Popular Cha'Chaany Hamuk Trailhead Receives Major Recreation Improvements."](#)



**Image 3.** In May 2024, the Conservancy attended the renaming of the Three Sisters Falls Trailhead to Cha'channy Hamuk in the Cleveland National Forest through a partnership with the National Forest Foundation and the Wildlife Conservation Board.

**Table 3.** Project List for Program 3: Wildfire and Forest Resilience Projects

Grantee	Title	Amount	Funding Source	Status
Cleveland National Forest	Cleveland National Forest Wildfire Program	\$4,900,000	General Fund	In Progress

<b>Grantee</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Status</b>
Lakeside's River Park Conservancy	East County Fuels Management	\$649,000	General Fund	In Progress
Kumeyaay Diegueño Land Conservancy	Equipment for Fire Management	\$800,000	General Fund	Completed
Campo Band of Mission Indians	Fire Equipment, Tools and Supplies	\$560,619	General Fund	Completed
Viejas Band of the Kumeyaay Nation	Type 3 Fire Engine and Vegetation Management	\$983,911	General Fund	In Progress
County of San Diego, Dept. of Parks and Rec	Fuel Reduction in County Parks	\$3,450,000	General Fund	Completed
San Diego Fire-Rescue Foundation	Fire Engine, Supplies and Fuel Reduction	\$411,701	General Fund	In Progress
City of Santee	Fuel Treatment and Outfit Type 6 Fire Engine	\$1,117,568	General Fund	In Progress
Girl Scouts San Diego	Fuel Reduction and Nursery at Camp Winacka-Camp Whispering Oaks	\$759,158	General Fund	In Progress
Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation	Mission Trails Regional Park Fuels Reduction	\$1,800,000	General Fund	In Progress
San Diego Regional Fire Foundation	Fire Vehicles, Equipment and Fuels Management	\$2,710,000	General Fund	In Progress
San Diego Fire-Rescue Foundation	City of San Diego Fuel Reduction	\$366,949	General Fund	Completed
San Diego Canyonlands	Canyons Wildfire Reduction	\$1,070,563	General Fund	Completed
City of Santee	San Diego River Bottom Fuels Reduction	\$500,000	General Fund	Completed
Alpine Fire Protection District	Type 6 Wildland Fire Engine and Fuels Removal	\$800,000	General Fund	In Progress
Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County	Making San Diego Fire Safe	\$3,500,000	General Fund	Completed
San Diego Regional Fire Foundation	Fuels Reduction and Support for Fire Safe Councils 2023 & 2024	\$378,958	General Fund	Completed
Barona Band of Mission Indians	Brush Rig	\$350,000	General Fund	Completed



Grantee	Title	Amount	Funding Source	Status
San Diego State University Research Foundation	Wildfire Resilience at SDSU	\$656,815	General Fund	In Progress
Lakeside's River Park Conservancy	El Monte Valley Fuels Reduction	\$500,000	General Fund	Completed
City of El Cajon	El Cajon Vegetation Management Plan	\$3,125,000	General Fund	In Progress

**Grantee Highlight: San Diego Regional Fire Foundation**

For over 30 years, the San Diego Regional Fire Foundation (SDRFF) has been striving to make San Diego the safest county in the nation. Their mission is to protect lives, property and the environment by strengthening the fire and emergency services system. In addition, the SDRFF is the only fire foundation that supports all 43 fire departments in San Diego County. Over the past few years, the Conservancy has awarded over \$3 million to the SDRFF to acquire wildfire suppression equipment including 4 fire engines, firefighter safety gear, fuels management equipment (2 chippers and a skid steer) to help prevent wildfires in the Wildland-Urban Interfaces and in High Fire Hazard Severity Zones.

Also, the Conservancy has provided the SDRFF \$392,405 to support 13 Fire Safe Councils (FSCs) in San Diego County. The FSC community volunteers contributed over 14,000 hours to chip and remove 900,000 cubic feet of vegetation and conducted community educational sessions attended by 8,000 individuals to learn how to make their properties fire-safe and create evacuation plans and determine escape routes. Below is an image of San Diego County Fire Safe Council representatives and grant funders.



**Image 4.** The 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Fire Safe Council Awards ceremony in May 2024. (Photo courtesy of the San Diego Regional Fire Foundation)

### Invasive Non-Native Plant Removal and Control Program

The Conservancy and its partners have been implementing this invasive non-native plant control and restoration program for 15 years. At no cost, the Conservancy allows for local entities to use its existing permits under a "Partnership Agreement." During 2023-2024, the Conservancy's grantees and partners implemented fifteen projects working across 814 acres in the San Diego River watershed. Partners such as City of San Diego, Public Utilities Department show commitment by managing El Capitan Reservoir, while the San Diego River Park Foundation and volunteers are dedicated to maintaining downstream areas at Fashion Valley Mall and Mission Valley Preserve. Furthermore, various canyon tributaries are managed by San Diego Canyonlands, giving underserved communities career experience through their workforce development program. These activities provide multi-benefits including weed abatement, hazardous fuels reduction, as well as wildlife habitat restoration.

**Table 4.** Project List for Program 3: Invasive Non-native Plant Removal and Control Program

Grantee	Title	Amount	Funding Source	Status
San Diego Canyonlands	Ruffin Canyon Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Project Phase 2	\$600,000	Proposition 1	Completed
San Diego State University Research Foundation	Alvarado Creek Invasive Restoration - SDSU Phase 5	\$600,000	Proposition 1	Completed
California Department of Parks and Recreation	Cuyamaca Rancho State Park Reforestation 2	\$500,000	Proposition 68	Completed
Nature Collective	Permit Renewal and Invasive Control	\$81,266	General Fund	In Progress
San Diego State University Research Foundation	Alvarado Creek Restoration Phase 7	\$1,978,182	General Fund	In Progress
Lakeside's River Park Conservancy	East County Invasive Removal	\$1,917,980	General Fund	In Progress
San Diego Audubon Society	Silverwood Wildlife Sanctuary	\$188,510	General Fund	In Progress
Barona Band of Mission Indians	Eucalyptus Removal & Restoration	\$129,016	General Fund	In Progress
San Diego Canyonlands	Navajo Canyon Restoration	\$600,000	General Fund	Completed

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

To better protect and preserve sensitive cultural resources, funds were awarded to Cleveland National Forest to engage qualified Kumeyaay Cultural Monitors. This grant provides compensation for Kumeyaay cultural monitoring activities during the Wildfire Resilience and Forest Health project in parts of the Conservancy's service areas.

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

The Conservancy invested \$5 million for water quality and natural flood conveyance projects. Three of the four projects serve disadvantaged communities in El Cajon, located in the San Diego River watershed. This program supports California Natural Resources Agency's initiatives to protect biodiversity and build climate resiliency.

**San Diego State University (SDSU) One Water Center**

This project will install a modular lab system to serve as a testing, training, and research facility for water resources in the San Diego region and involve students and professors at SDSU. The living learning laboratory will be located at SDSU's Mission Valley River Park within walking distance to the San Diego River.

**City of El Cajon - Broadway Creek Restoration (Phase B)**

This second phase of an urban stream restoration project runs through disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities and includes improvements to native habitat and bank stabilization at Broadway Creek, a tributary to the San Diego River in El Cajon.

**City of El Cajon - Trash Full Capture Devices**

The city of El Cajon installed 70 full capture trash devices in disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities to improve stormwater quality draining through the City of El Cajon.

**Table 5.** Project List for Program 5

Grantee	Title	Amount	Funding Source	Status
City of El Cajon	Broadway Creek (Phase B) and 70 Full Trash Capture Devices	\$3,000,000	General Fund	In Progress
City of El Cajon	Wells Park Sustainability Improvements	\$400,000	Proposition 1	Completed
East County AWP JPA	East County Advanced Water Purification Program	\$2,000,000	General Fund	Completed
San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board	Technical Assistance	\$175,000	General Fund	In Progress

Grantee	Title	Amount	Funding Source	Status
San Diego State University	One Water Living Learning Laboratory	\$2,000,000	General Fund	In Progress
County of San Diego, Dept. of Parks and Rec.	Lindo Lake Improvements Phase I – East Basin	\$600,000	Proposition 1	Completed
San Diego State University Research Foundation	Revegetation and Bioassessment in Alvarado Creek	\$467,691	Proposition 68	Completed
City of El Cajon	El Cajon Main Street - Green Street Improvements	\$250,000	Proposition 68	Completed
City of El Cajon	El Cajon Transit Center Improvements	\$250,000	Proposition 68	Completed

**Program 6: Expand the Organization’s Capacity and Public Outreach**

The Conservancy invested \$2 million to expand Program 6. Projects include procuring over 60 drysuits for City of San Diego and Imperial Beach lifeguards, who are shown in the image below. Other projects include procurement of handheld radios, supporting community wildfire education and outreach, studying carbon sequestration in the San Diego region and preparing the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan Update for 2024-2028.

The San Diego Lifeguard Service established its river rescue team in 1978 to respond to emergencies created by flooding due to heavy rain. The task of the team is to rescue people or property surrounded by water. Image 5 shows the river rescue team in action. In addition to their local responsibilities, the team is assigned to the Urban Search and Rescue Task Force. For a video by CBS News 8, click here: [“San Diego River Rescue team gets new dry suits.”](#)



**Image 5 and 6.** The City of San Diego’s River Rescue Team (left) wearing new dry suits in San Diego River. Members of the City of San Diego Fire-Rescue, San Diego Fire-Rescue Foundation and the San Diego River Conservancy (right). (Photos courtesy of City of San Diego Fire-Rescue and the Swiftwater and Flood Rescue Team)

**Table 6.** Project List for Program 6

<b>Grantee</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Status</b>
San Diego Fire-Rescue Foundation	Swiftwater and Flood Rescue Team Personal Protective Equipment	\$50,759	General Fund	Completed
San Diego Regional Fire Foundation	20 Dry Suits and PPE for Imperial Beach Lifeguards and Firefighters	\$75,143	General Fund	In Progress
San Diego Canyonlands	Carbon Storage and Sequestration	\$65,000	Proposition 68	Completed
Heartland Fire-Rescue Department	VHF Radio Repeater Towers	\$600,000	General Fund	In Progress
San Diego Fire-Rescue Foundation	30 Dry Suits	\$37,068	General Fund	Completed
San Diego Canyonlands	Strategic Plan Update	\$65,000	General Fund	Completed
Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County	Native American Conservation Corps	\$338,678	General Fund	Completed
California Department of Parks and Recreation	Native American Conservation Corps	\$545,321	General Fund	Completed
San Diego Canyonlands	Native American Conservation Corps	\$25,000	General Fund	Completed



The San Diego River Conservancy is making significant progress in fulfilling its mission, enhancing partnerships, and implementing projects aligned with its goals. The Conservancy's staff of three and its Governing Board prioritize the improvement of resources in the San Diego region through initiatives including land acquisition, recreational opportunities, preserving natural and cultural resources, and improving water quality. In collaboration with partner organizations, the Conservancy is working to complete the San Diego River Trail and supports conservation projects aimed at restoring native habitats, addressing climate change, and enhancing forest and fire resilience. Additionally, the San Diego River Conservancy Act empowers the Conservancy to assist neighboring watersheds, including the Sweetwater, Otay, and Tijuana Rivers. The strategic plan and Governing Board provide guidance for the Conservancy, while grant programs emphasize maximizing public benefit by leveraging local funding and volunteer efforts.

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

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

Land conservation supports the path to conserving 30% of California's lands and coastal waters by 2030. In 2025, the Conservancy seeks to conserve more open space parcels through the 2024 Climate Bond (Proposition 4).

#### **Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation (MTRPF)**

After completing a 55-acre conservation acquisition in December 2024, MTRPF plans to complete another acquisition of 53-acres in the East Elliot section of Mission Trails Regional Park in the City of San Diego.

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

The Conservancy supports public access and outdoor recreation by helping to provide Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, multi-lingual interpretive panels, informational kiosks, digital maps and educational engagement for local and regional parks and open spaces in San Diego County.

#### **Lakeside's River Park Conservancy–San Diego River Science Field Station**

The San Diego River Science Field Station is a living laboratory situated on 100 acres of restored riparian habitat in the unincorporated community of Lakeside. This unique facility offers local school districts, students, teachers, and scientists the opportunity to study the natural environment. It provides essential tools and resources to enhance scientific inquiry and workforce training for future stewards of the San Diego River. Construction is expected to be completed by 2025.



# San Diego River Conservancy Work Plan 2025

## **County of San Diego, Department of Parks and Recreation**

County Parks will remove hazardous material and improve the Historic Flume segment (Section 60A) of the San Diego River Trail through vegetation management, erosion control and other restoration activities.

Cactus County Park's Improvement Project will enhance restroom facilities, replace light poles, and install energy-efficient LED lights on three ballfields.

The Lindo Lake County Park Phase 2 Improvement Project aims to restore native habitats and enhance public access in the West Basin. This project includes the addition of native vegetation and the construction of recreational amenities, such as a fishing pier, two bird viewing stations, and an accessible trail.

## **Campo Band of Mission Indians**

A new 2-unit prefabricated ADA accessible vault restroom will be installed with potable water, solar power, fencing, parking, erosion control measures and one shade structure for the playground at Ralph Goff Community Park on the Campo Reservation.

## **Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation**

Mission Trails Regional Park welcomes approximately 2 million visitors each year and spans over 8,000 acres of natural and developed areas. It features 60 miles of trails and offers camping at Kumeyaay Lake. This project aims to design, fabricate, and install 50 bilingual interpretive panels at various locations throughout the park. These panels will educate the public on the importance of protecting, understanding, and preserving the park's natural, cultural, and historical resources.

In addition, they recently submitted a proposal for visitor center improvements. Project components include shading around the building, creating a path to the loop trail, reconfiguring the trailhead and improving the parking lot with 13 additional parking spaces with ADA accessibility. (Proposal submitted)

## **Program 3: Preserve and Restore Natural Resources**

San Diego County is home to the most threatened plant and animal species anywhere in the continental United States. Factors threatening biodiversity include invasive species, climate change, fire disturbances, and habitat fragmentation. As such, the Conservancy recognizes the need to protect biodiversity through its watershed-wide invasive removal program. The Conservancy's Invasive Non-native Plant Removal and Control permits were renewed with regulatory agencies last year, including the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's streambed alteration agreement.



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

The Conservancy and its partners have been implementing this invasive non-native plant control and restoration program for 15 years. At no cost, the Conservancy allows for local entities to use its existing permits under a “Partnership Agreement.” Partners such as City of San Diego, Public Utilities Department show commitment by managing El Capitan Reservoir, while the San Diego River Park Foundation and volunteers are dedicated to maintaining downstream areas at Fashion Valley Mall and Mission Valley Preserve. These activities provide multi-benefits including weed abatement, hazardous fuels reduction, reduced flood and fire risk, as well as native habitat restoration.

### **Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation**

Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation identified 2.1 acres of floating primrose-willow (*Ludwigia peploides*), an invasive non-native aquatic plant threatening native habitat and water quality at Kumeyaay Lake. Manual removal and herbicide treatment will keep this unwanted species out of the water body. Moreover, *Ludwigia* species change their environment by lowering dissolved oxygen. In the summer, high biological oxygen demand within dense stands leads to oxygen depletion, negatively affecting aquatic organisms. (Concept submitted)

## **Wildfire and Forest Resilience**

Recently, the Conservancy has utilized General Funds for wildfire resilience, specifically to fund vegetation removal aimed at addressing invasive non-native plant species infestations in the watershed. Grant awards support fuel reduction activities, including road brushing, the creation of fuel breaks, and pile burns. To further reduce the risk and intensity of wildfires in San Diego County and assist residents in preparing for such events, project partners and local jurisdictions will procure personal protective equipment (PPE), fire engines, 4x4 trucks, brush removal tools, and fire suppression equipment.

In addition, Heartland Communications is set to install a very high frequency (VHF) radio repeater tower at the Barona Band of Mission Indians’ cellphone tower. This installation will enhance communication services in remote dead zones.

**Table 1. Wildfire Projects with Bands of the Kumeyaay Nation**

<b>Grantee</b>	<b>Project Description</b>
Barona Band of Mission Indians	Remove approximately 40 large mature eucalyptus trees across 1 acre and plant fifteen 15-gallon willow trees on the school campus.
Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians	Procure a Type 3 Brush Engine.



# San Diego River Conservancy Work Plan 2025



Grantee	Project Description
Campo Band of Mission Indians	Procure a Type I Fire Engine, 10 P-25 compliant handheld radio devices, tools, supplies and PPE.
Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians	Procure one off-road firefighter UTV, 26 P-25 compliant VHF portable radios, a chipper, PPE, tools, and other equipment needed for emergency rescue, wildfire response and hazardous fuels treatment.

**Table 2. Grants for Wildfire and Forest Resilience**

Grantee	Project Description
City of El Cajon	Create a Vegetation and Wildfire Management Plan, conduct fire and rescue training, and reduce fuel loads across 40 acres.
Cleveland National Forest	Hire additional personnel to oversee fuel reduction across 1,855 acres. Conduct prescribed fires and pile burns across 72 acres, road brush 77 miles with an additional 56 miles of road maintenance and procure wildfire equipment.
Heartland Communications Facilities Authority	Install a VHF radio repeater tower at the Barona Band of Mission Indian’s cellphone tower to increase communication capabilities.
San Diego Regional Fire Foundation	Reduce fuel loads across 40 acres in Wynola Estates and partially fund a Type 3 Brush Fire Engine for use by the Santee Fire Department.
San Diego Regional Fire Foundation	Reduce hazardous fuel loads on 4.5 acres in the Otay Valley Regional Park and Trail, adjacent to residential and commercial properties in the City of Chula Vista.
San Diego Regional Fire Foundation	Funding for Project SAFE to support 13 fire safe councils to reduce wildfire risk and the purchase of a chipper for use by Alpine Fire Protection District.
San Diego Regional Fire Foundation	Support for 10 fire departments to help procure three fire engines, various supplies, tools and equipment including one Type 3 Brush Fire Engine and partial funding for two Type 6 Fire Engines, one commercial hand-fed chipper, one skid steer chipper with attachments, and one trailer, sixteen sets of National Fire Protection Association certified PPE, twenty fire shelters worn by wildland firefighters and designed to protect firefighters in emergency situations, 308 VHF P-25 compliant radios and replace aging fire hose, nozzles, hose clamps, hose packs, and hand tools.
Alpine Fire Protection District	Approximately 16 acres targeted for fuel reduction along 24 parcels adjacent to Alpine Creek.

# San Diego River Conservancy Work Plan 2025



Grantee	Project Description
San Diego Fire-Rescue Foundation	Procure one Pierce Mini Pumper (F-550 Vehicle or similar), one tow behind chipper, and other fire related equipment and supplies to manage brush on 526 acres of land on property owned by the City of San Diego's Parks and Recreation/Open Space Division.
San Diego Fire-Rescue Foundation	Purchase one F-350 Vehicle, one ATV (4X4), battery-powered trimmers, chainsaws, handheld blowers, chargers, batteries, 7 Mighty Fire Breaker 275-gallon totes w/ MFB-31-CitronTech® and one treatment refill, 10 backpack sprayers and atomizing nozzles, GPS tracking and mapping, and implementation of fuel reduction activities and firebreaks.
Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation	Fuel reduction activities on target trails and grasslands totaling 270 acres in the City of San Diego. Provide volunteer training for ongoing control of invasive plants, purchase of one electric utility terrain vehicle (UTV) and 2 walk-behind trimmer mowers. This project includes educational outreach and establishing a volunteer group to conduct follow-up activities.
Girls Scouts San Diego	Fuel reduction across 144 acres in Julian located at Camp Winacka and Camp Whispering Oaks. The project includes construction and staffing for a new nursery in the San Diego River's headwaters.
San Diego Bird Alliance (formerly San Diego Audubon Society)	Reduce hazardous fuel loads across 65 acres, maintain 8 acres of fuel breaks, provide fire related education programs and update informational kiosk at Silverwood Wildlife Sanctuary.
Cleveland National Forest	Fuel reduction including road brushing, chipping, and prescribed fire, along with associated equipment, tools, and supplies to mitigate risk of fire. Purchase communication equipment to respond to wildfire emergencies.
Lakeside's River Park Conservancy	Fuel reduction across 150 acres in El Monte Valley, Los Coches Creek and other tributaries to the San Diego River in east county.
City of Santee, Santee Fire Department	Procure firefighter PPE, outfit one Type 6 Fire Engine and provide wildland firefighting training for Santee's Fire Department.
City of Santee, Santee Fire Department	Remove flammable fuel loads across 415 acres in the Wildland Urban Interface including brush thinning, reduction of non-native vegetation and debris removal. The Conservancy's funding will be leveraged with

# San Diego River Conservancy Work Plan 2025



Grantee	Project Description
	California Governor's Office of Emergency Services to implement a Fire Hazard Mitigation Project.
Nature Collective	Treatment of <i>Arundo donax</i> across 500 acres and installation of willow and mulefat cuttings across 15 acres.
San Diego State University Research Foundation	Reduce 9.1 acres of fuel loads including invasive non-native vegetation along Alvarado Creek which runs through San Diego State University.

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

To better protect and preserve sensitive cultural resources, funds were awarded to Cleveland National Forest to engage qualified Kumeyaay cultural monitors with specialized traditional ecological knowledge of the San Diego and Tijuana Rivers watershed to work on Forest Service projects. This program supports initiatives to strengthen tribal partnerships.

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

The Conservancy invested \$4.7 million in water quality and natural flood conveyance improvement projects. Also, a significant portion of this funding directly serves disadvantaged communities in the San Diego River Watershed.

### San Diego State University (SDSU) One Water Living Learning Laboratory

This Project will install a modular laboratory at SDSU's River Park at Mission Valley to serve as a testing, training, and research facility. The living learning laboratory will be located within walking distance to the San Diego River.

### City of El Cajon

The second phase of an urban stream restoration project for Broadway Creek, a tributary to the San Diego River is underway. The project's goals include improvements to native habitat and bank stabilization. Additionally, another separate project in the City of El Cajon will install 70 full capture trash devices. Both projects in El Cajon benefit disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities.

### San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board

This project will coordinate and prepare a report memorializing efforts being taken in the Tijuana River watershed related to the Minute 320 Binational Core Group (steering committee) and its member agencies.



# San Diego River Conservancy Work Plan 2025

## **Program 6: Expand the Organization's Capacity and Public Outreach**

The Conservancy seeks ways to assist its partners that align with their goals and mission. For example, there are numerous beneficiaries for PPE, wildfire equipment and communications devices in the San Diego River and adjacent watersheds.

### **San Diego Regional Fire Foundation**

This project provided personal protective equipment (PPE) for the lifeguards and firefighters of the City of Imperial Beach. Situated at the mouth of the Tijuana River, Imperial Beach faces several challenges, including having one of the most polluted rivers in the United States, which ultimately flows into the Pacific Ocean. Lifeguards rescue individuals in distress, whether in the Tijuana River or the ocean, and firefighters also operate in these environments.

### **San Diego Fire-Rescue Foundation**

The City of San Diego's River Rescue Team required 30 new dry suits to help facilitate emergency rescues in the San Diego, Otay, Sweetwater and Tijuana Rivers.

## **ADMINISTRATION/FISCAL DUTIES**

- State Operations Budget \$428,000; Environmental License Plate Fund for FY 2025-26
- Prepare agendas, board materials and hold public meetings
- Liaison to the Governing Board members
- Coordinate with other state agencies, grantees, partners and the public
- Review, respond and participate in various planning efforts in the San Diego River watershed
- Support state priorities and approved plans that align with Conservancy 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 control agencies
- Process bills, input purchase orders and pay invoices in the 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.

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 22, 2025**

ITEM: 11

SUBJECT: **EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT**  
***(INFORMATIONAL/ACTION)***

The following topics may be included in the Executive Officer's Report.  
The Board may take action regarding any of them:

- Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation – land acquisitions

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 22, 2025**

ITEM: 12

SUBJECT: **NEXT MEETING**

The next regularly scheduled Board meeting is anticipated to be held in person on Wednesday, March 19, 2025, from 10:00 am to noon.

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 22, 2025**

ITEM: 13

SUBJECT: ADJOURNMENT