

# **Revised 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 21, 2026  
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 20-105 (Farallon Room) Sacramento, CA, 95814	San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board, 2375 Northside Drive, San Diego, CA 92108
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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 17, 2025, 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. Renovations for the City of El Cajon's Fire Station No. 7 (ACTION)**

The City of El Cajon Fire Department is proposing a project to renovate Fire Station No. 7 to ensure compliance with building and fire codes while improving the design and functionality. This renovation will include the construction of a new apparatus bay, utility upgrades, the installation of energy-efficient systems, and enhancements to the facility's size. These upgrades will increase the station's capacity for staffing, equipment and improve response times. The total cost for the renovations is \$5,500,000. Conservancy staff recommends funding in the amount of \$1,500,000 from Proposition 4.

**Presentation:**

Senan Kachi, PE, Associate Engineer, City of El Cajon  
Bent Koch, Fire Chief, Heartland Fire & Rescue

Recommendation: Approve Resolution No. 26-01

**8. Viejas's Proposal for a Wildland Type VI Fire Engine and  
Construct a Fire Engine Bay and Training Room (ACTION)**

The Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians is in a remote area of San Diego's east county, which contains wetlands, riparian, meadow, upland, and oak woodland habitats in a wildland urban interface area. The Viejas Fire Department is seeking funding to purchase a Type VI Fire Engine and to build an additional structure next to the fire station. This new building will include an apparatus bay and a training room. Conservancy staff recommends funding in the amount of \$650,000 from Proposition 4.

**Presentation:**

Ray Teran, Resource Management Director, Viejas Tribal Government  
Bob Pfohl, Fire Chief, Viejas Fire Department  
John Sengebusch, Fire Division Chief, Viejas Fire Department

Recommendation: Approve Resolution No. 26-02

**9. Descanso Ranger District Wildfire Resilience and Community  
Defense (ACTION)**

The National Forest Foundation has proposed a project in partnership with the Cleveland National Forest to reduce hazardous vegetation targeting approximately 246 acres within the Descanso District. The proposed activities include increasing defensible space, clearing understory vegetation, trimming tree branches, and

establishing a shaded fuel break. The Conservancy staff recommends funding in the amount of \$538,496 from Proposition 4.

**Presentation:**

Brain Robey, Southern California Program Manager, National Forest Foundation

Kyle Smith, Descanso District Ranger, Cleveland National Forest

Recommendation: Approve Resolution No. 26-03

**10. San Diego River Watershed – Canyon Wildfire Resilience Project (ACTION)**

San Diego Canyonlands proposes a 59.5-acre fuel treatment project in Zone 2 of the Shepherd and Rueda Canyons brush management zones, in partnership with the City of San Diego's Open Space Division. These high-risk areas require defensible space around homes and buildings to reduce wildfire impacts and protect life and property. Conservancy staff recommends \$649,875 in funding from Proposition 4.

**Presentation:**

Clayton Tschudy, Executive Director, San Diego Canyonlands

Recommendation: Approve Resolution No. 26-04

**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:

- Proposition 4 – Nature Based Solutions update

**Conservancy staff attended the following events & meetings:**

2024 Climate Bond/ Proposition 4 meetings and site visits

Climate Bond Program Coordination Team meeting

San Diego State University's One Water Symposium: Indigenous Knowledge & Sustainable Watersheds

Fall 2025 All State Conservancy meeting

Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians event

CA-MX Border Relations Council meeting

CA Department of Fish and Wildlife meeting

Assemblymember Christopher M. Ward's Environmental Roundtable

City of Santee Station #5 fire engine push in event

California Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force meeting

Access Working Group - Natural Resources Agency meeting

Department of General Services – Real Estate Services meeting

Tijuana River Valley Recovery Team Steering Committee meeting

County of San Diego Board of Supervisors Regular Meeting – Cottonwood Sand Mine

San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board presentation  
Kumeyaay Community College meeting  
County Parks and Helix Water District meeting  
San Diego State University's One Water Lab event  
California Department of Transportation, District #11 meeting

## **12. Next Meeting**

The next regularly scheduled Board meeting is anticipated to be held in person on Wednesday, March 18, 2026, from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm.

## **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 21, 2026**

ITEM: 1

SUBJECT: ROLL CALL AND INTRODUCTIONS

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 21, 2026**

ITEM: **2**

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

The Board will consider adoption of the September 17, 2025, Board Meeting.

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

RECOMMENDATION: Approve minutes

## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

Minutes of September 17, 2025, Public Meeting  
(Draft Minutes for Approval on January 21, 2026)

CONSERVANCY Board Member, Ben Clay called the September 17, 2025, meeting of the San Diego River Conservancy to order at approximately 10:05 a.m.

### Item 1. Roll Call

#### Members Present

Jennifer Campbell	Mayor, City of San Diego, Designee
Ben Clay, Chair	Public at Large
Ruth Hayward	Public at Large
Emily Burgueno	Kumeyaay Diegueño Land Conservancy
Ray Lennox	Department of Parks and Recreation
Glen Lubcke	Department of Fish and Wildlife
Cody Petterson	Speaker of the Assembly (called in 10:18am)
Elsa Saxod	Public at Large
Andrea Scharffer	Natural Resources Agency (called in 10:18am)
Gary Strawn	San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board
Dustin Trotter	City of Santee
Nicole Van Doren	Department of Parks and Recreation

#### Absent

Joel Anderson	Supervisor, County of San Diego, Second District
Stephen Benson	Department of Finance
Raul Campillo	Councilmember, City of San Diego, District 7
Rebecca Fris	Wildlife Conservation Board
Phil Ortiz	City of El Cajon

#### Staff Members Present

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

### Item 2. Approval of Minutes

Elsa Saxod moved for approval of May 22, 2025, minutes, and Dr. Jennifer Campbell seconded. Roll Call: Ayes: Ben Clay, Andrea Scharffer, Nicole Van Doren, Ray Lennox, Glen Lubcke, Cody Petterson, Dr. Jennifer Campbell, Dustin Trotter, Elsa Saxod (9-0-2) Abstain: Ruth Hayward, Emily Burgueno

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

**Ben Clay** welcomed Deputy Attorney General Paul Batchner from the Department of Justice, who is sitting in for Hayley Peterson.

**Julia Richards** noted no written comments were received in advance of the meeting today.

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

**Ben Clay** mentioned he had the privilege to attend an event at SDG&E with the Fire Safe Councils (FSC). He better understands the process of how fire safe councils are formed. He was impressed with their role and the input they provide to the various fire services from the federal, state and local government. This is one example of the public having direct input on an issue. He enjoyed hearing from the public.

**Dustin Trotter** shared the City of Santee put their new brush rig into service with the donated money provided by the Conservancy and San Diego Regional Fire Foundation. It has been deployed twice already. The normal procedure for receiving a new fire engine for the firefighters is to push the apparatus into the bay. The Santee Fire Department has an incline into the driveway, so it took a little effort to push it into place.

**Ray Lennox** announced in 2024, the Conservancy received the California State Parks Director's Award. The award is on its way. This was part of a project the Conservancy funded for the Native American Conservation Corps. This two-year pilot program is now in year 5 and has become successful with the seed money for the forest health in Cuyamaca. Danny McCamish, the Senior Environmental Scientist overseeing the program will present the award.

**Emily Burgueno** Kumeyaay Diegueño Land Conservancy will be requesting a letter of support from the River Conservancy on the name change they are actively in progress of. The California Geographic Advisory Committee approved it last month and next it will be approved on the federal level by the United States Geological Survey (USGS). They are waiting for a letter of support from the county supervisor's office, and she is putting in the request today for a letter from the Conservancy.

The name change is for Stonewall Peak, named after a Confederate soldier who has never visited Kumeyaay homelands including the peak. They are re-naming it back to the traditional term: Cush-Pii which means sharp peak. Emily has a full write-up that she will share with her request.

Kumeyaay Diegueño Land Conservancy (KDLC) in conjunction with the Kumeyaay Heritage Preservation Committee (KHPC) and Kumeyaay Community College, in partnership with the Resource Conservation District (RCD) of Greater San Diego County will be facilitating a lands stewardship and nursery training. This will be a year-long training which they will focus on each season visiting different bioregions in San Diego. It serves all 18 federally recognized tribes in the county and will extend beyond the Kumeyaay Nation to their relatives including the Luiseño, Cahuilla and Cupeño.

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

**Paul Batchner** introduced himself with the Attorney General's office. He is filling in today for Hayley Peterson. He had no report.

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

No Report.

## Item 7. CAL FIRE Overview for the San Diego Region (*INFORMATIONAL*)

**Julia Richards** today Eric Just, Division Chief, Community Risk Reduction from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection is here to provide an overview of CAL FIRE projects taking place in San Diego and a summary of the Fire Hazard Severity Zone mapping.

**Eric Just** thanked the San Diego River Conservancy for the invitation. The community risk reduction program began about 5 years ago in San Diego County. It is a cohesive fire strategy. There is more to fuels work than just fuel. There are many other components when it comes to fire safety that are just as important than fuel reduction. Community engagement is handled by the Fire Safe Councils. They help with Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) which are tied into potential funding and focus on defensible space and home hardening. They help community members make their homes more fire resistant.

They inspect over 100,000 properties in their jurisdiction that are within the fire hazards severity zone that dictates they are required to have defensible space inspections (DSI). Community fuel reduction is prescribed fire and post management work. Evacuation planning is something they focus on. Fire can happen in the middle of the night, so having clear evacuation routes for the community is crucial. They focus on communities in the backcountry.

FSCs develop CWPPs that help them plan the area they represent but also access grant funding. They host chipping events. A Knox Box is a standardized key set available for houses that may have disabled residents. This allows the fire department to get in without breaking the doors down.

On average, they try to achieve 47,000 DSI inspections. Of the 47,000, 38,000 are done manually sending an inspector out to list vulnerabilities. They work with Red Cross and support the Defensible Space Assistance Program, managed by the RCD of Greater San Diego County. A few grants were awarded to CAL FIRE to help in south county, focusing on houses that need the most help including new roofs, windows, and other necessary items to reach compliance.

Evacuation planning is in the CWPP, so residents are aware of primary and secondary routes. A 20ft roadside clearance helps with heavy fire loads. Evacuation corridors have a standardized approach with alternates. Temporary refuge areas are short-term areas where people can move on to more long-term evacuation areas.

**Ben Clay** asked if CAL FIRE briefs planning commissions on code compliance before structures are built? Is there coordination between CAL FIRE, cities and urban areas within the County? Are they receptive and are they included in municipal code? He asked how would he know when to evacuate?

**Eric Just** responded CAL FIRE has a land use planning group out of Riverside to address issues such as dead ends, secondary access, and cul-de-sacs. It is mainly older housing developments that need inspections. There is a Genesis Program that contacts residents' cell phones if there is an evacuation, and do their best to get people out, but it can be complicated.

**Ben Clay** asked what was learned from the LA fires.

**Eric Just** responded they are doing research, but no official documents have been released.

He began his presentation: Six fuel break example projects were shown in vulnerable communities including the Alpine and Pine Valley fuel breaks. In 2020, funded through the Governor's orders, a statewide fuels project was designed to encircle the Crest and Guatay communities. Fuel breaks are best located surrounding dense urban development. More dispersed developments outside the fuel break are at risk. Lawson Valley Project finished before the Valley Fire and served as an evacuation route. Lawson Valley is one way in, one way out. This project connects the back end of Lawson Valley to Skyline Truck Trail. The Lucky 6 fuel break is a project off the 94-Freeway heading up to Mother Grundy area.

He noted an interesting topic began in the first round in 2007 when the distinction between fire hazard and fire risk was defined. Hazard is the existing issue of a fire, not the likelihood of a fire happening. In 2024, the state went through the second process of establishing the current hazard fire severity zones. Zones are moderate, high and very high. This characterizes the hazard and risk associated with people living in different areas throughout the county.

**Ben Clay** asked if this risk assessment ties in with SDG&E.

**Eric Just** responded no there are different factors that Sacramento uses to come up with this. To produce this map, CAL FIRE is required by statute to classify all state lands. The discussion is its influence on insurance prices and other relationships.

**Andrew Hayes** thanked Eric for the presentation and all the work they are doing. He is with Supervisor Anderson's office which is in a very high-fire risk zone. He asked about Zone 0 and if there are any details on that. He understands the final guidelines are not yet formalized by CAL FIRE. He asked Eric to elaborate on that to educate constituents on the resources available and funding for clearing vegetation.

**Eric Just** responded a lot of homes don't burn from the fire front. Often, homes end up burning because of combustible fences, decks or vegetation attached to the house. He added there was a presentation earlier this year on wildfire prevention at their training center. They demonstrated two different houses; one with Zone 0 implemented and another without. The one without Zone 0 burned down. It's a huge benefit and research supports this.

**Gary Strawn** mentioned an article he read about a machine that burned the vegetation along the right-of-way as opposed to mowing it which comes back faster.

**Eric Just** experimented with the BurnBot. Like the pizza oven, it slowly moves along the ground. The finished product is a black line. While it has its place in certain situations, it is slow. It does not have the productivity they need.

**Emily Burgueno** asked if prescribed burns are more effective than mechanized equipment. One concern she has is the acreage they will be covering. It is within cultural homelands. Overgrowth is unmanaged land. Because of the lack of tribal inclusion, there are no opportunities to collaborate and see how tribal nations can benefit from this. Tribes need to be made aware of the vegetation before it is

removed so they can collect. This is highlighted in the meaning of Prop 4. The ground will be impacted so there will be ground disturbance. From her understanding, these projects do not go through CEQA. She would like to know if anyone from the FSC will be there. She asked if Eric knows of all the cultural resources in the area and recommends a certified read advisor from within the Kumeyaay Nation.

**Eric Just** confirmed prescribed burns are more effective. This is not a proposal for funding. Part of the CEQA process involves cultural notifications. He is a licensed archeological surveyor. Letters were sent to the effective tribes inviting them to speak. It's an opportunity to share knowledge of sites. He knows of the information from San Diego State University. He sent approximately 70 letters out.

**Ben Clay** thanked Eric for clarifying CAL FIRE's projects in San Diego.

**Julia Richards** stated a one-page overview of wildfire projects submitted to the Conservancy's Directed Grant Program was provided in the board book. This highlights the applications received under the Early Action Wildfire & Forest Resilience Package of Prop 4. The Conservancy received 23 concept proposals requesting \$41 million and 11 applicants were invited to submit a full application.

Of these 11 applications, the total amount requested was approximately \$15 million in funding, leveraging \$7.3 million. The applications were submitted by 5 nonprofits, 3 government agencies, 3 tribal governments, and approximately 80% of project proposals submitted directly benefit disadvantaged/severely disadvantaged communities (DAC/SDAC) and vulnerable populations.

She noted today, the Board will consider 3 proposed projects for approval and additional proposals will be considered at the November, January and March board meetings. Julia asked if there were any questions.

#### **Item 8. San Diego Regional Fire Foundation Proposal "Saving Lives, Property & the Environment by Preventing and Controlling Wildfires" (ACTION)**

**Julia Richards** shared the San Diego Regional Fire Foundation proposes a crucial project in collaboration with six fire departments and over 20 Fire Safe Councils to enhance safety in the wildland-urban interface and rural areas of San Diego County. The proposal includes hazardous fuel reduction on approximately 54 acres in the City of Chula Vista.

The proposal also includes the acquisition of essential fire prevention and suppression equipment, such as specialized vehicles, a water tank, a Helo-pod, personal protective gear, and various supplies. The Conservancy staff met with the applicant and reviewed the proposal and attended a site visit in Chula Vista.

The proposed Project is consistent with San Diego River Conservancy's enabling legislation, and the Directed Grant Program. It is supported by 2 Conservancy program areas: Program 3 Preserve and Restore Natural Resources and Program 6 Expand the Organization's Capacity and Public Outreach.

The proposed Project is aligned with California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan and 5 state and other local plans. Additional information is located in the staff report, and if approved, funding will be provided through Proposition 4 and the General Fund. Conservancy staff recommends approval of Resolution 25-06 to the San Diego Regional Fire Foundation in the amount of \$2,000,000.

Today, Joan Jones, Executive Director, and Frank Ault, Chairman of the San Diego Regional Fire Foundation will provide a presentation on the proposal and answer questions.

**Joan Jones** thanked the Board for this opportunity. She also thanked Julia for her support. She introduced Frank Ault, Chairman of the San Diego Regional Fire Foundation, Harry Muns, Chula Vista Fire Chief, Marlon King, Chula Vista Emergency Service Manager, and Jason McBroom Alpine Fire Protection District Fire Marshal.

Through early September, there have been over 6,500 wildfires in California and they have burned over 425,000 acres. Fortunately, San Diego has not had any fires above 10,000 acres so far this year. This is due to several factors. The primary factor is their widespread collaboration with so many agencies in the region ranging from fire agencies, the military, governmental organizations, fire safe councils and many more. This region is a model for the nation.

This project is planned to prevent major wildfires in the region by building on these collaborations as well as the use of new technology. There are over 30 organizations involved with this project. Three components of the project are acquiring wildfire prevention, suppression and firefighter safety equipment, supporting over 23 fire safe councils in the Conservancy's service areas and conducting fuels mitigation on 54 acres of high fire risk wildland urban interface (WUI) areas of Chula Vista in the Sweetwater River Watershed.

Wildfire prevention, suppression and firefighter safety equipment. They started by asking all the fire chiefs to develop a list of priorities. Four innovative pieces of equipment crucial to reducing wildfire risk include an air curtain burner for the Alpine Fire Protection District. This is a self-contained mobile unit that will dispose of large hazardous waste such as Mexican fan palms and eucalyptus trees that a chipper can't process. It transforms vegetation into char and is recycled back into the land. It will reduce emissions and reduce waste to landfills. The value of equipment will be made available to the Alpine/ Viejas Fire Safe Council and other neighboring FSCs.

Second, the green climber or remote-controlled masticator is proposed for Chula Vista. It can cut and mulch on slopes up to 60 degrees with a remote operator up to 500 feet away. It will increase efficiency of hand crews performing vegetation removal by 40-50%. A 4 to 5-person team can be reduced to a 2-person team and also improves hand crew safety.

The third and fourth request also includes a 10,000-gallon water tank and one Helo-pod. County Fire Chief Tony Mechum believes staging a water tank in east county will be a major strategic asset for fire suppression. The tank will be in Potrero and insure a reliable and quick water supply during fire suppression operations in remote areas where water hydrants do not exist. The Helo-pod provides a portable water source for helicopters to improve operating efficiencies by having a readily available water source.

Joan asked if Chair Clay recognized anyone in the fire safe council photo. Ben Clay saw himself, Wendell and Julia in the photo.

FSCs protect home communities and environments from wildfire. They invest in chipping defensible space, home hardening and education events. Last year, the FSCs removed over a million cubic feet of vegetation during 71 events. They held over 100 wildfire education events attended by over 6,000 people. FSCs prioritize services to low income, elderly and disabled people.

San Diego County now has over 50 FSCs, the largest number of any county in the United States. This number continues to grow largely because of the Los Angeles and Montezuma fires. She showed a map of the 23 active FSCs in the Conservancy's service area.

The last component is hazardous fuel reduction activities across 54 acres along three canyon rims in Chula Vista. It also includes clearing a crucial evacuation route. This project will help protect 14,000 homes within one mile of the acres being treated. 75% of the vegetation treated have a greater than 30-degree slope. She showed a short drone video of Chula Vista canyons and the Chula Vista hand crew.

The budget for the project's total cost is \$3.7 million. This includes a match from fire departments, 20,000 hours of volunteer labor from FSCs and funding from other donors totaling \$1.7 million or 47% of the project cost. The request today is \$2 million or 54% of the total project cost.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) says every dollar spent on wildfire prevention saves \$3-4 on disaster recovery. With this high level of leveraged funding, the Conservancy will release a substantial return on its investment. She asked the Board for questions.

**Emily Burgueno** asked if the green climber requires training and what are the upfront costs.

**Joan Jones** responded that the fire department will pay for training.

**Ray Lennox** discussed the air curtain burners that they have at Cuyamaca Rancho State Park which has had problems getting permits with the Air Pollution Control District (APCD) over the last 2-3 years. Their burn boss has been in communication trying to get them to understand the emissions. A few agencies within the county have paid a high fee for the permit.

**Jason McBroom** introduced himself as Fire Marshal for Alpine Fire Protection District. San Diego County APCD has been very difficult. They classify this as a miscellaneous use of equipment with an annual operating fee of \$10,000. San Joaquin County APCD issues the same permit for \$125. They are giving them away to tree farmers. He reached out for help with an assembly member.

**Ben Clay** advised talking to Andrew Hayes, who represents Supervisor Anderson. The San Diego County APCD falls under the Board of Supervisors.

**Dr. Jennifer Campbell** offered to help since she sits on the San Diego County APCD Board for the City of San Diego.

**Ben Clay** talked about the Forest Service's use of water tanks.

**Dustin Trotter** moved for approval of Resolution 25-06, and **Dr. Jennifer Campbell** seconded. Roll Call: Ayes: **Ben Clay, Andrea Scharffer, Nicole Van Doren, Ray Lennox, Glen Lubcke, Cody Petterson, Dr. Jennifer Campbell, Ruth Hayward, Emily Burgueno, Dustin Trotter, Elsa Saxod** (11-0-0)

**Item 9. Barona Band of Mission Indians' Proposal to Procure a Type 1 Fire Engine (ACTION)**

**Julia Richards** thanked Chair Clay and invited Chairman Welch for a few words.

**Raymond Welch** in 2022, the Conservancy granted Barona \$350,000 for a brush rig. In 2024, the Conservancy granted \$129,000 to remove several large eucalyptus trees and install a greenhouse to propagate native plant species. This year, the San Diego River Conservancy reached out to learn more about priority mitigation. He thanked the Board for their help and partnership that goes beyond the financial support. Ms. Richards and her team go above and beyond to learn about Barona's history, including their community and fire risk hazards. They appreciate and value the work of the Conservancy.

**Julia Richards** stated the Fire Department of the Barona Band of Mission Indians (Barona) submitted an application to replace its outdated 24-year-old Type 1 fire engine with a state-of-the-art model. Barona's fire department provides automatic aid and response to neighboring San Diego Operational Area communities. Barona also participates in mutual aid to the State of California and is on the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services strike team rotation.

The Conservancy staff met with the applicant, reviewed the proposal and conducted a site visit.

The proposed project is consistent with the San Diego River Conservancy enabling legislation, and the Directed Grant Program. The proposed project is supported by 3 Conservancy program areas: Program 3 Preserve and Restore Natural Resources, Program 4 Protect and Preserve Cultural and Historical Resources, and Program 6 Expand the Organization's Capacity and Public Outreach

The Proposed Project is also aligned with 3 state and local plans. Additional information is located in the staff report, and if approved, funding would be provided through Proposition 4. Conservancy staff recommends approval of Resolution 25-07 to the Barona Band of Mission Indians in the amount of \$1 million.

Julia introduced Ken Kreminsky, Fire Chief for the Barona Fire Department, to provide a presentation on the proposal and answer any questions.

**Ken Kreminsky** thanked the Board. In 1998, the Fire Department was established to provide dedicated services to the tribal community citizens, San Diego County and California state. They have 24 employees in three shifts that staff equipment 24/7. They have a great mutual aid program participating in the state's master aid mutual program as well as the County's automatic and mutual aid agreements. This is his 49<sup>th</sup> year in service. There is no place like San Diego County which works collaboratively with partners.

The Barona Fire Department comes together and trains in the spring to provide the best services. Responding to over 1,300 fires, two of the biggest fires, Cedar and Witch, impacted the Barona Reservation. They have a structure fire engine staffed daily. They also have a backup ambulance and Type 1 Engine. The Type 3 was funded by the Conservancy. The apparatus they are seeking to replace is 23 years old. Currently the life of a fire engine is 25 years. In the past, they staffed up to 3 engines throughout the state or county.

The scope of work is to duplicate the engine they have now. They have worked with Pierce and put in time and effort so it will access the backcountry and make maneuvers around tight corners. The estimated cost is \$1,258,000. With the Conservancy's \$1,000,000 recommendation, Barona would contribute the remaining \$258,224.59.

He added post Covid engines are expected to take a long time; up to 50-52 months to receive the apparatus. Fire chiefs across the nation are working with legislatures to speed up the process and make them more affordable.

**Dr. Jennifer Campbell** asked if the delay is a result of parts from overseas.

**Ken Kreminsky** responded, since Covid, the workforce has shrunk resulting in delays.

**Dr. Jennifer Campbell** moved for approval of Resolution 25-07, and **Dustin Trotter** seconded. Roll Call: Ayes: Ben Clay, Andrea Scharffer, Nicole Van Doren, Ray Lennox, Glen Lubcke, Cody Petterson, Dr. Jennifer Campbell, Ruth Hayward, Emily Burgueno, Dustin Trotter, Elsa Saxod (11-0-0)

#### **Item 10. Alpine Fire Protection District Proposal for Hazardous Fuel Reduction, Phase 2 (ACTION)**

**Julia Richards** stated the Alpine Fire Protection District has proposed a project to reduce hazardous vegetation on approximately 47 acres along Alpine Creek, which flows into the El Capitan Reservoir. The project's activities will enhance defensible space by establishing a shaded fuel break. The Conservancy staff met with the applicant, reviewed the proposal and conducted a site visit.

The proposed project is consistent with the San Diego River Conservancy's enabling legislation, and the Directed Grant Program. It is also supported by 2 Conservancy program areas: Program 3 Preserve and Restore Natural Resources, and Program 5 Enhance Water Quality and Natural Flood Conveyance. It is aligned with 6 state and local plans. Additional information is located in the staff report, and if approved, funding would be provided through Proposition 4.

Conservancy staff recommends approval of Resolution 25-08 to the Alpine Fire Protection District in the amount of \$525,000. Julia introduced Jason McBroom, Fire Marshal, Alpine Fire Protection District.

**Jason McBroom** thanked the Board for this opportunity. This proposal will serve a community of 18,000 residents covering 37 square miles. Steve Taylor is the Governing Board president for the Alpine/Viejas Fire Safe Council. Alpine is not a stranger to wildfires. He showed a map of the footprint of the Cedar Fire and a map of the proposed project.

He explained dense overgrown riparian areas, homeless encampments and large invasive species located in the creek and drainage areas. Specifically Mexican fan palms, Arundo, castor bean and tamarisk. They are targeting the continuation of the project before wrapping up. Large stands of Arundo are choking the waterways acting as a fire wick. The untreated palms with large beards pose a significant threat to the urban community.

The fuels reduction activities includes ladder fuels, invasives and increased water productivity to allow natural flood conveyance. Poison oak is throughout the project site. Fifteen homeless encampments have been identified thus far. At night, homeless encampments have warming fires which could ignite and spread to neighborhoods. Working with the sheriff's department, they have notice of trespass signs posted.

Under this proposal, Anton's Tree Service, the contractors, will remove all homeless encampments. They are working on private parcels within 100 feet of structures. This project would serve an additional

23 parcels towards Puetz Valley Road. They cut 6 inches above ground, so there will be no ground disturbance. The request is for \$525,000. Right of entries are secured. They will keep the large oaks, cottonwoods and willows intact for a successful fuel break.

**Emily Burgueno** asked about goats controlling poison oak. Does Anton's crew wear PPE when removing trash from encampments? Will herbicide be applied?

**Jason McBroom** responded Anton's has about 24 crew members on rotating schedules. Law enforcement helps with cleanups. Now that that creek is visible from Alpine Boulevard, encampments aren't as prevalent. Herbicide will only be applied to invasive non-native plants.

**Dustin Trotter** moved for approval of Resolution 25-08, and **Emily Burgueno** seconded. Roll Call: Ayes: Ben Clay, Andrea Scharffer, Nicole Van Doren, Ray Lennox, Glen Lubcke, Cody Petterson, Dr. Jennifer Campbell, Ruth Hayward, Emily Burgueno, Dustin Trotter, Elsa Saxod (11-0-0)

**Item 11. Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation Grant for Land Acquisition to Update Acreage (ACTION)**

**Julia Richards** stated on March 28, 2024, the Governing Board of the San Diego River Conservancy approved Resolution 24-17, for Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation to acquire approximately 55 acres of inholdings in the East Elliott area of Mission Trails Regional Park. However, since that time, two landowners have withdrawn their "willing seller" letters, leading the Foundation to seek alternative parcels.

To bolster local and state conservation goals, the proposed Project aims to expand the total land acquisition to approximately 61.73 acres and update the relevant parcel numbers. The attached map identifies the targeted parcels in yellow, while the two parcels that have been removed are outlined in red.

Conservancy staff recommends approval of Resolution 25-09 to update and refine the list of parcels intended for acquisition, ensuring continued protection and preservation of these areas and their natural and cultural resources. Julia introduced Jennifer Morrissey, Executive Director of Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation, to answer any questions the Board may have.

**Emily Burgueno** asked why the acreage is being increased.

**Jennifer Morrissey** responded that parcels from the original grant application are no longer available so they would like to acquire different parcels under the same grant.

**Julia Richards** added the total grant amount does not change.

**Dr. Jennifer Campbell** moved for approval of Resolution 25-09, and **Dustin Trotter** seconded. Roll Call: Ayes: Ben Clay, Andrea Scharffer, Nicole Van Doren, Ray Lennox, Glen Lubcke, Cody Petterson, Dr. Jennifer Campbell, Ruth Hayward, Emily Burgueno, Dustin Trotter, Elsa Saxod (11-0-0)

**Item 12. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL/ACTION)**

**Julia Richards** the proposed 2026 Board Meeting dates are January 21, March 18, May 20, September 16 and November 18 with the meeting times still to be determined.

Proposition 4 – Nature-Based Solutions allocation are still being worked through internal administrative procedures. The Conservancy anticipates additional guidance in the coming months.

**Ray Lennox** introduced Danny McCamish.

**Danny McCamish** introduced himself as the Senior Environmental Scientist for the Colorado Desert District of the California Department of Parks and Recreation. In 2021, the grant from SDRC began a local Native American Conservation Team. Today he presented the California State Parks Director's Recognition Award for inspiration to the San Diego River Conservancy. The inspiration award is one of the highest honors amongst the program in State Parks and is presented to individuals or teams that have achieved a major public objective. The recipients must also have resolved a substantial problem through sustained long-range planning with a strong emphasis on community involvement and participation.

This award carries with it the legacy of Andrew P. Hill, whose determination and passion led to the establishment of California's first Redwood State Park at Big Basin in the early 1900's. The vision, persistence and ability to rally public support for conservation remain the foundation of what this award stands for today.

In 2024, the Director of State Parks and Governor recognize the San Diego River Conservancy for the creation and distinction for the Native American Conservation Corp within the Colorado Desert District. This effort was brought together by State Parks staff, local native American tribes, volunteers, traditional ecologic educators, knowledge educators and partners. He thanked everyone.

**Ben Clay** likes the working relationship with the state, local and federal partners and Native American communities. He thanked Ray for the award.

### **Item 13. Next Meeting**

The next regularly scheduled Board meeting will be held Wednesday, November 12, 2025, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

### **Item 14. Adjournment**

**Ben Clay** adjourned the meeting at 11:36 am

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 21, 2026**

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 21, 2026**

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 21, 2026**

ITEM: 5

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

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 21, 2026**

ITEM: 6

SUBJECT: HEALTH AND SAFETY (*INFORMATIONAL*)

**Meeting of January 21, 2026**

ITEM: 7

SUBJECT: **RENOVATIONS FOR THE CITY OF EL CAJON'S  
FIRE STATION NO. 7 (ACTION)**

The City of El Cajon Fire Department is proposing a project to renovate Fire Station No. 7 to ensure compliance with building and fire codes while improving the design and functionality. This renovation will include the construction of a new apparatus bay, utility upgrades, the installation of energy-efficient systems, and enhancements to the facility's size. These upgrades will increase the station's capacity for staffing, equipment and improve response times. The total cost for the renovations is \$5,500,000. Conservancy staff recommends funding in the amount of \$1,500,000 from Proposition 4.

**Presentation:**

Senan Kachi, PE, Associate Engineer, City of El Cajon  
Bent Koch, Fire Chief, Heartland Fire & Rescue

Recommendation: Approve Resolution No. 26-01

**Resolution No: 26-01**

**RESOLUTION OF THE GOVERNING BOARD OF  
THE SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

**AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER TO GRANT \$1,500,000  
FROM PROPOSITION 4 TO THE CITY OF EL CAJON TO RENOVATE FIRE  
STATION NO. 7 TO COMPLY WITH BUILDING AND FIRE CODES,  
IMPROVE BUILDING DESIGN, FUNCTIONALITY, SIZE AND ADD  
A SECOND APPARATUS BAY**

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WHEREAS, the mission of the San Diego River Conservancy is to further the goals of its enabling legislation by conserving and restoring the lands and waters of the San Diego River watershed; and

WHEREAS, Proposition 4 was approved by voters on November 5, 2024, for the purposes of helping communities avoid and recover from the impacts of wildfire, flood, drought, or other extreme weather events, and help restore and protect natural systems; and

WHEREAS, the San Diego River Conservancy was allocated \$25,000,000 under Proposition 4, "Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024" with funds made available by Public Resources Code section 91520, subdivision (m), to improve forest health and protect communities from wildfire; and

WHEREAS, the San Diego River Conservancy has been delegated the responsibility for the administration of this grant program, establishing necessary procedures and guidelines in accordance with statewide priorities and plans; and

WHEREAS, the City of El Cajon applied to the San Diego River Conservancy for a grant to renovate a 63-year-old fire station to increase size to approximately 5,000 square feet, add a second apparatus bay, comply with current building codes, upgrade utility infrastructure and improvements to the interior space to accommodate additional staff and equipment (Project); and

WHEREAS, the San Diego River Conservancy staff have reviewed the grant application, met with applicant, conducted a site visit and recommends the Project for approval.

WHEREAS, this Project is consistent with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, Program 3: Preserve and Restore Natural Resources, and Program 6: Expand the Organization's Capacity and Public Outreach; and

WHEREAS, San Diego River Conservancy staff recommends funding in the amount of \$1,500,000 to implement the Project; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the San Diego River Conservancy's Governing Board, based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the San Diego River Conservancy Act (Public Resources Code, Sections 32630-32659.9).
2. The proposed Project is consistent with the intent of Proposition 4.

3. The San Diego River Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to \$1,500,000 (One Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollars) to implement the Project.
4. Appoints the Executive Officer, or her designee, as an agent to execute all agreements, grants, sub-contracts, and other documents needed for the completion of the Project.
5. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a scope of work, budget, and schedule.

Approved and adopted on January 21, 2026. I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution Number 26-01 was duly adopted by the San Diego River Conservancy's Governing Board.

Roll Call Vote:

Yeas: \_\_\_\_\_

Nays: \_\_\_\_\_

Absent: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Julia L. Richards  
Executive Officer

#### San Diego River Conservancy's Governing Board Members Roll Call Vote

Name	Ayes	Noes	Abstained
CNRA: Bryan Cash			
DOF: Stephen Benson			
CADFW: Glen Lubcke			
Dr. Jennifer Campbell, SD Mayor Designee			
Joel Anderson, County Supervisor			
Raul Campillo, Vice Chair			
Ben Clay, Chair			
Ruth Hayward			
J. Cody Petterson			
Jamie La Brake			
Elsa Saxod			
DPR Designee, Ray Lennox			
DPR Designee, Adams/VanDoren			
Dustin Trotter			
Phil Ortiz			

# **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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## **Staff Recommendation SDRC Resolution 26-01**

January 21, 2026

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to provide up to \$1,500,000.00 to the City of El Cajon to renovate Fire Station No. 7 to comply with building and fire codes, improve design and functionality and increase capacity. Constructing a new apparatus bay, installing a new solar battery and energy storage system, and enhancing facility size and amenities will help increase the facility's capacity for staffing, equipment and reliability when responding to wildfires in San Diego County.

**LOCATION:** Fire Station No. 7 is located at 695 Tyrone Street adjacent to Hillside Park in the Fletcher Hills community of El Cajon, in San Diego County.

**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:** Staff recommends that the San Diego River Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to the San Diego River Conservancy Act (Public Resources Code, § 32630 et seq.):

The San Diego River Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of funding for projects focused on wildfire and forest resilience including fire prevention and suppression, specifically as follows:

**To the City of El Cajon, the sum of \$1,500,000.00 (One Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollars and Zero cents) to partially fund:**

- Renovations to El Cajon's Fire Station No. 7 to increase size to approximately 5,000 square feet, add a second apparatus bay, comply with current building codes, upgrade utility infrastructure and improvements to the interior space to accommodate additional staff and equipment (Project).

Before the disbursement of funds, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a scope of work, budget and schedule, and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

Based on the staff report and attached exhibits, the San Diego River Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the San Diego River Conservancy Act.
2. The proposed Project is consistent with the intent of Proposition 4 (2024 Climate Bond).

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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3. The proposed Project is consistent with the guidelines for the Conservancy's grant program.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Fire Station No. 7 was constructed in 1960, long before California unified its building and fire codes in 1978 (Title 24, CCR). This fire station is owned by the City of El Cajon and operated by the Heartland Fire & Rescue – El Cajon Fire Department (Heartland Fire & Rescue), serving disadvantaged communities and vulnerable populations. Heartland Fire & Rescue has been responding to emergencies in El Cajon since it was established as a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) in 2010 between the cities of El Cajon, La Mesa and Lemon Grove fire departments. Heartland Fire & Rescue manages fire protection, prevention, and emergency medical services across the cities of El Cajon, La Mesa and Lemon Grove.

In November 2004, voters approved Proposition O, which implemented a half-cent sales tax increase over ten years to improve public safety infrastructure, including the construction of a new public safety facility. This tax initiative also established the Public Safety Facility Oversight Committee (PSFOC) to monitor the use of these funds, ensuring that revenues are spent solely on the construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, or replacement of public safety facilities. Three of the four fire stations in El Cajon have been remodeled with funding from Proposition O.

As a result, the City of El Cajon staff and the PSFOC have determined that the remaining funds from Proposition O should be allocated to Fire Station No. 7 to complete upgrades to all four fire stations in the city. Fire Station No. 7 is the last facility that will be improved with these remaining funds.

### **PROJECT NEED:**

Fire Station No. 7 has not undergone renovations since its construction. In 2009, a Needs Assessment Study was conducted to identify deficiencies in the building and recommend necessary renovations. This study highlighted the need for a complete upgrade of existing structural systems to ensure compliance with current building codes and essential facility requirements. The total estimate for the renovation is \$5,500,000.

Significant changes have been made to building codes since then, particularly regarding safety, structural integrity, accessibility, and fire prevention. Modern codes now also emphasize better energy efficiency and comprehensive accessibility for individuals with disabilities. The facility is in urgent need of upgrades to meet these standards, which would enhance its capacity for staffing, equipment, and reliability.

Improvements to Fire Station No. 7 will enable a greater number of personnel to work at the facility. Additionally, the addition of a fire apparatus bay will allow for one more fire engine to be stationed there. This enhancement in staffing and fire resources will help reduce the risk of fire in San Diego.

## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

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### Photos 1-3: Fire Station No. 7 – Existing Conditions



### PROJECT SUMMARY:

The renovation of Fire Station 7 aims to enhance both the design and functionality of this 63-year-old building. The primary goal is to bring the facility up to current code while also preparing it for future needs.

The project will involve the installation of a new solar battery and energy storage system, alongside upgrades to outdated industrial systems, including lighting, sewer, ventilation, extraction, and laundry facilities. Additionally, improvements will be made to the building's amenities, which include remodeling the kitchen, dining area, dayroom, individual dormitories, restrooms, turn-out locker room, and laundry room for heavy gear. Other enhancements will consist of exterior painting, new sidewalks, and security fencing.

One of the most significant changes will be the expansion of the apparatus bay, transforming it from a single bay into a double-bay configuration. This upgrade will allow Heartland Fire & Rescue to commission a second engine from this location, greatly enhancing service capabilities and improving response times for public safety.

## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

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**Photo 4: Fire Station No. 7 with One Bay**



**Image 1: Fire Station No. 7 with Two Bays**



## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

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Moreover, the renovation aims to increase the size of the facility, which is currently 3,488 square feet. By today's standards, the smallest fire stations typically range from 8,000 to 10,000 square feet. The renovation will expand the facility to approximately 5,102 square feet, increasing the department's capacity and reach.

### **BENEFITS:**

The renovations at Fire Station No. 7 will enhance fire prevention and safety for the community. Improved accessibility to the two fire apparatus bays is expected to decrease response times and allow for an increased capacity to handle more calls, as additional personnel will be stationed at the facility. This will have a positive impact on disadvantaged communities and vulnerable populations served by Fire Station No. 7.

These renovations will expand the facility's capacity to support more personnel and firefighting equipment. The expansion will significantly improve the station's ability to safeguard both property and human lives.

Given the station's proximity to canyons, parks and open space, the improvements will also enhance response times to potential wildfires in the Fletcher Hills Open Space area. The fire department aims to meet specific response time goals: at least 90% of emergency incidents should be first responded to within 7 minutes, and at least 90% of working fire incidents should be responded to with a team of 17 personnel within 10 minutes and 30 seconds.

### **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:**

- Bring the facility up to current building/structural code.
- Expand the facility's capacity with an additional fire engine apparatus bay to accommodate additional staffing and equipment.
- Upgrade the utility infrastructure such as the battery energy storage system, solar panels and upsizing the electrical equipment's capacity.
- More service calls and faster response times.

### **DELIVERABLES:**

- Quarterly request for disbursements, progress reports with photo documentation of before, during, and after implementation
- Copy of environmental documentation and all permits
- Final Report

**Table 1. Estimated Budget and Anticipated Schedule**

<b>Task #</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Schedule</b>
1. Construction	Partial funding for renovations to Fire Station No. 7 to increase square footage, add updated utilities and amenities, and an additional apparatus bay.	\$1,500,000.00	Throughout 2-year grant period
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,500,000.00</b>	

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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**PROJECT FINANCING:** The total Project amount is \$5,500,000.00; the Conservancy staff recommends partial funding in the amount of \$1,500,000.00 for the implementation of the proposed Project. The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for this Project is Proposition 4 (2024 Climate Bond).

**LEVERAGED FUNDING:** The City of El Cajon will leverage \$3.25M of Proposition “O” funds and approximately \$1.25M City general reserve funds for the rehabilitation of Fire Station No. 7. The total construction costs are projected to be \$5.5M. The City of El Cajon engineering staff will review and manage the project with in-kind contributions and inspections estimated to be worth \$80,000.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:** This Project would be undertaken consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation (Public Resources Code, §§ 32630-32659.9).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):** The Project is consistent with Program 3 Preserve and Restore Natural Resources, and Program 6 Expand the Organization’s Capacity and Public Outreach from the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan Update 2024-2028.

**CONSISTENCY WITH THE PURPOSES OF THE FUNDING SOURCE:** Proposition 4 provides funding for environmental and climate projects, helping to conserve natural resources focusing on improving water quality, preventing wildfires, and protecting vulnerable communities.

**CONSISTENCY WITH THE CONSERVANCY’S DIRECTED GRANT PROGRAM:**

This Project achieves one or more of the purposes:

- Located in the San Diego River watershed.
- Protecting resources.

**PROPOSITION 4 - MEANINGFUL AND DIRECT BENEFITS**

- Helping regions build capacity to design and deliver strong, community-led projects.
- Benefits disadvantaged, severely disadvantaged, or vulnerable communities.
- Preventing wildfires and reducing the risk of wildfires.
- Reducing risk of communities to wildfires, floods, and other climate impacts.
- Wildfire Emergency Access.

**ALIGNMENT WITH PLANS AND PRIORITIES:**

**A. California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan**

Protect Wildfire-Prone Homes and Neighborhoods.

**B. California’s Fourth Climate Change Assessment**

Supports local adaptation strategy and resilience, and protection of the state’s most vulnerable populations and communities.

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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### **C. Natural and Working Lands 2030**

Supports Forest fuels reduction, understory clearing, restoration and activities to improve forest health.

### **D. Safeguarding California**

Promotes management activities to mitigate wildfires.

### **E. California Master Mutual Aid Agreement**

### **F. San Diego River Conservancy's Climate Change Policy**

- a. Collaboration to support adaptation strategies

### **G. Governor's Executive Orders – various**

### **H. Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan: City of El Cajon Annex**

- a. GOAL 1: Reduce the possibility of damage and losses to existing assets, including people and critical infrastructure, due to structure/wildland fire.

### **I. City of El Cajon General Plan – Safety Element**

- a. Policy 3.3: Implement programs and standards to mitigate wildfire risk in high wildfire hazard severity zones.  
Require all development to meet the minimum standards for adequate fire protection.
- b. Policy 3.4: Ensure that public facilities and infrastructure have adequate capacity to respond to wildfires and other relevant hazard events. Action 3.4a: Performance Standards. Apply fire unit deployment performance measures with future planning of fire stations. Action 3.4b: Emergency Equipment. Consider the long-term maintenance needs of emergency equipment and facilities when developing the annual budget.
- c. Action 3.5d: Renovations. Continue to require seismic retrofits for major renovations in accordance with Historic and Building Code provisions.
- d. Action 3.6b: Retrofitting of Essential Facilities. When feasible, seismic retrofit essential facilities to minimize damage in the event of seismic or geologic hazards

### **PROJECT READINESS:**

The Project is currently at the 100% design phase as of December 2025. The City of El Cajon Building Department recently provided a second round of plan check corrections, which are currently being addressed by the design team. The final construction documents will be completed by February 2026 with competitive bidding for the construction phase to follow in March of this year. Anticipated construction will start in November 2026 with an estimated completion date of October 2027.

### **PERMIT COMPLIANCE:**

City of El Cajon staff will file a Notice of Exemption and will provide copies of approved environmental documents and permits as deliverables for the Project.

**Meeting of January 21, 2026**

ITEM: 8

SUBJECT: **VIEJA'S PROPOSAL FOR A WILDLAND TYPE VI  
FIRE ENGINE AND CONSTRUCT A FIRE ENGINE  
BAY AND TRAINING ROOM (*ACTION*)**

The Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians is in a remote area of San Diego's east county, which contains wetlands, riparian, meadow, upland, and oak woodland habitats in a wildland urban interface area. The Viejas Fire Department is seeking funding to purchase a Type VI Fire Engine and to build an additional structure next to the fire station. This new building will include an apparatus bay and a training room. Conservancy staff recommends funding in the amount of \$650,000 from Proposition 4.

**Presentation:**

Ray Teran, Resource Management Director, Viejas Tribal  
Government

Bob Pfohl, Fire Chief, Viejas Fire Department

John Sengebusch, Fire Division Chief, Viejas Fire Department

**Recommendation: Approve Resolution No. 26-02**

**Resolution No: 26-02**

**RESOLUTION OF THE GOVERNING BOARD OF  
THE SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

**AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER TO GRANT \$650,000 FROM  
PROPOSITION 4 TO THE VIEJAS BAND OF KUMEYAAY INDIANS TO PURCHASE  
A NEW TYPE VI ALL-TERRAIN FIRE ENGINE AND CONSTRUCT AN APPARATUS BAY  
INCLUDING TRAINING ROOM AND ADDITIONAL STORAGE**

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WHEREAS, the mission of the San Diego River Conservancy is to further the goals of its enabling legislation by conserving and restoring the lands and waters of the San Diego River watershed and Consortium Program areas; and

WHEREAS, Proposition 4 was approved by voters on November 5, 2024, for the purposes of helping communities avoid and recover from the impacts of wildfire, flood, drought, or other extreme weather events, and help restore and protect natural systems; and

WHEREAS, the San Diego River Conservancy was allocated \$25,000,000 under Proposition 4, "Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024" with funds made available by Public Resources Code section 91520, subdivision (m), to improve forest health and protect communities from wildfire; and

WHEREAS, the San Diego River Conservancy has been delegated the responsibility for the administration of this grant program, establishing necessary procedures and guidelines in accordance with statewide priorities and plans; and

WHEREAS, the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians applied to the San Diego River Conservancy for a grant to procure a new Type VI All-Terrain Fire Engine and construct a new apparatus bay to include training room and additional storage (Project); and

WHEREAS, the San Diego River Conservancy staff have reviewed the grant application, met with applicant, conducted a site visit and recommends the Project for approval.

WHEREAS, this Project is consistent with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, Program 3: Preserve and Restore Natural Resources, and Program 6: Expand the Organization's Capacity and Public Outreach; and

WHEREAS, San Diego River Conservancy staff recommends funding in the amount of \$650,000 to implement the Project; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the San Diego River Conservancy's Governing Board, based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the San Diego River Conservancy Act (Public Resources Code, Sections 32630-32659.9).
2. The proposed Project is consistent with the intent of Proposition 4.
3. The San Diego River Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to \$650,000 (Six Hundred

Fifty Thousand Dollars) to implement the Project.

4. Appoints the Executive Officer, or her designee, as an agent to execute all agreements, grants, sub-contracts, and other documents needed for the completion of the Project.
5. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a scope of work, budget, and schedule.

Approved and adopted on January 21, 2026. I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution Number 26-02 was duly adopted by the San Diego River Conservancy's Governing Board.

Roll Call Vote:

Yeas: \_\_\_\_\_

Nays: \_\_\_\_\_

Absent: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Julia L. Richards

Executive Officer

#### San Diego River Conservancy's Governing Board Members Roll Call Vote

Name	Ayes	Noes	Abstained
CNRA: Bryan Cash			
DOF: Stephen Benson			
CADFW: Glen Lubcke			
Dr. Jennifer Campbell, SD Mayor Designee			
Joel Anderson, County Supervisor			
Raul Campillo, Vice Chair			
Ben Clay, Chair			
Ruth Hayward			
J. Cody Petterson			
Jamie La Brake			
Elsa Saxod			
DPR Designee, Ray Lennox			
DPR Designee, Adams/VanDoren			
Dustin Trotter			
Phil Ortiz			

# **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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## **Staff Recommendation SDRC Resolution 26-02**

January 21, 2026

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to provide up to \$650,000 to Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians (Viejas) to purchase a Type VI All-Terrain Fire Engine and construct a building to store the new apparatus, to include a training room and provide additional storage.

**LOCATION:** The Viejas Indian Reservation comprises over 1,600 acres of scrub oak, chaparral and oak woodland habitats in the Viejas Valley. They are approximately 5 miles east of Alpine, 30 miles north of the Mexican border and surrounded by the Cleveland National Forest north of Interstate 8, within the Sweetwater River watershed.

**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:** Staff recommends that the San Diego River Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to the San Diego River Conservancy Act (Public Resources Code, § 32630 et seq.):

The San Diego River Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of funding for projects focused on providing public access, enhancing river parkways, protecting resources, restoration and wildfire resilience projects, specifically as follows:

**To Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians, the sum of \$650,000.00 (Six Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars) to use as follows:**

- To purchase a new Type VI All-Terrain Fire Apparatus and construct a new building for the apparatus, to include training and storage areas (Project).

Before the disbursement of funds, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a scope of work, budget and schedule, and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the San Diego River Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the San Diego River Conservancy Act.
2. The proposed Project is consistent with the intent of Proposition 4.
3. The proposed Project is consistent with the guidelines for the Conservancy's grant program.

**KUMEYAAY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

The Kumeyaay, referred to as Diegueño by the Spanish, were the original native inhabitants of San Diego County. The Kumeyaay, Yuman-speaking people of Hokan

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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stock, have lived in this region for more than 10,000 years. Historically, the Kumeyaay were horticulturists and hunters and gatherers. They were the only Yuman group in the area, the first people who greeted the Spanish when they first sailed into San Diego Harbor with the Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo expedition of 1542. Their history is buried under the sea, eroded as sites and villages were abandoned and erased by modern development. Yet evidence of their existence is found in many areas of San Diego County, recorded in archeological artifacts, and in the bedrock, deep holes called mortars (used for pounding and grinding acorns) and the shallower metates (used for milling seeds and grains).

The boundaries of the Kumeyaay lands changed with the arrival of the Europeans. It once extended from the Pacific Ocean, south to Ensenada in Baja Norte, Mexico, east to the sand dunes of the Colorado River in Imperial Valley, and north to Warner Springs Valley. North to northeast, their territory was bounded by other Indian nations—the San Luiseño, Cupeño, and Cahuilla.

Today, Kumeyaay tribal members are divided into 12 separate bands: Barona, Campo, Ewiiapaayp, Inaja-Cosmit, Jamul, LaPosta, Manzanita, Mesa Grande, San Pasqual, Santa Ysabel, Sycuan, and Viejas. One of the largest owners of land in San Diego County, Kumeyaay governments have jurisdiction over approximately 70,000 acres concentrated in east county from El Cajon, Lakeside, Poway and Ramona, to the desert. Of the total acreage, more than 15,000 acres are unusable to the Kumeyaay because the El Capitan Reservoir was removed from Indian Government ownership. The reservoir feeds the San Diego River east of Lakeside and is located within the Capitan Grande Indian Reservation.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Formally known as the Viejas Group of Capitan Grande Band of Mission Indians, they are recognized as a sovereign government by the United States. They own and operate the Viejas Casino and the Viejas Outlet Mall. In addition, they share a joint-trust patent with the Barona Band of Mission Indians to management the Capitan Grande Reservation. Both reservations are adjacent to vast amounts of open space and the Cleveland National Forest (**Map 1**).

The Viejas Fire Department (Department) was established in 2006 to protect life, property, and culturally sensitive sites and artifacts throughout the Reservation. The Department also provides emergency services to residents, visitors and structures, including the Viejas Casino and Outlet Mall. This emergency response agency is prepared to mitigate high-risk wildland fires on the reservations and adjacent rural communities. The Department operates a fuels management program to provide fire defense for citizens, structures, the environment and cultural resources.

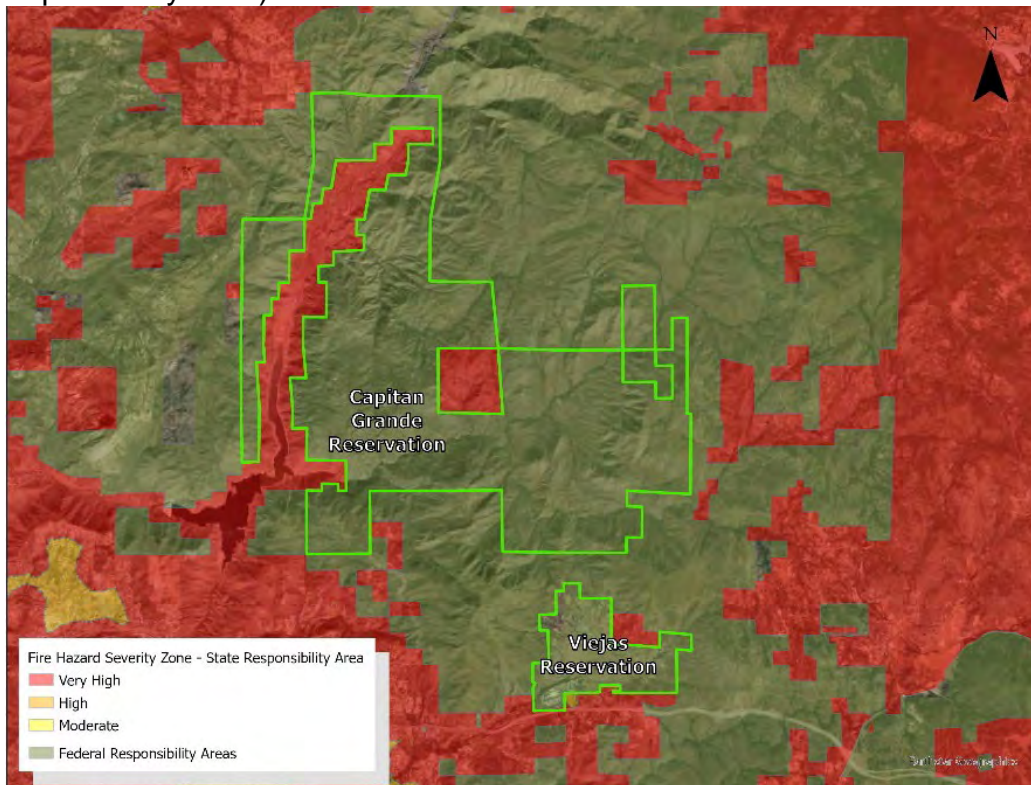
These communities experience frequent extreme weather conditions since the Viejas Valley lines up with mountain passes that funnel some of the County's strongest Santa Ana winds which can reach up to 70 miles per hour. Temperatures in the summer and autumn frequently exceed 90 degrees with low humidity levels resulting in very high fire risk categories developed by CAL FIRE's Fire Hazard Severity Zones. The Department

## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

faces numerous wildland-urban interface challenges; for example, three fires burned 280,000 acres in the vicinity since 2000 with the Viejas Fire and Cedar Fire being two destructive instances that impacted the Reservation.

Viejas has a cultural obligation to the general community, the Tribal community, and the Tribal Council to protect the undeveloped environment and the development community from manmade and natural fires. Viejas will increase fire safety by procuring a Type VI Fire Engine and utilizing all available fire apparatus and personnel to reduce flammable fuel loads.

**Map 1.** Capitan Grande and Viejas Reservation (CAL FIRE's Fire Hazard Severity Zone – State Responsibility Area)



To meet National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710 requirements (2016 edition), Viejas Fire Department receives and reciprocates Mutual and Auto Aid on a regional and statewide level. Auto Aid is a contractual agreement between neighboring fire departments to respond to each other's incidents. This allows first responders to utilize nearby resources, improve response times, and supplement personnel when local resources are exhausted. In this capacity, the Department has agreements with the Cleveland National Forest, the Central Zone of the San Diego Operational Area, and the California Master Mutual Aid Agreement.

### PROJECT NEED:

The Department consists of 22 professionally trained firefighters using one structural fire engine, one brush engine, one ambulance, one patrol and other emergency equipment.

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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The life hazard within Viejas jurisdiction is significant, as the resort casino is visited by over 3,000,000 guests annually. There are just under 400 hotel rooms on the property, 1,400,000 shoppers visit the outlet center per year, and there are two RV parks visited by over 3,500 tourists during the months of May through September. Furthermore, Viejas has 500 permanent residents, approximately 220 Tribal Government employees, and 1,900 Casino and outlet mall employees.

The high risk to life and infrastructure from wildland fire and limited resources is why funding is needed. This request will improve Viejas' ability to keep wildland fires small and as minimal as possible. The Project would support the Viejas Fire Department efforts to reduce the risks and intensity of wildfire.

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The proposed Project's main goal is to acquire a Type VI Fire Engine and construct a protected storage garage and training facility. Type VI is a smaller, versatile engine with quick attack capability that can be effectively staffed by two firefighters and can access narrow roads, trails, and off-road areas where wildfires often ignite. This enables firefighters to quickly reach small fires before they grow into large, destructive wildfire incidents. These engines carry water tanks (usually ISD-400 gallons) and high-pressure pumps ideal for wildland firefighting, providing immediate suppression capability even in areas without hydrants. The fire engine would be built and equipped with an inventory of equipment for wildland fire suppression, emergency medical services (EMS) and wildland fuel management.

The Type VI Fire Engine is a four-wheel drive (4x4) all-terrain vehicle specifically adapted for fire suppression, equipped with complementary tools to perform structure defense in WUI neighborhoods, protecting homes and critical infrastructure during wildfire events. The fire apparatus and staff will perform fuel management directly within the San Diego River and Sweetwater River watersheds. These activities will preserve and protect land, water quality, cultural sites, and wildlife habitat. This request is in line with the Viejas Tribal Government's land conservation and environmental programs.

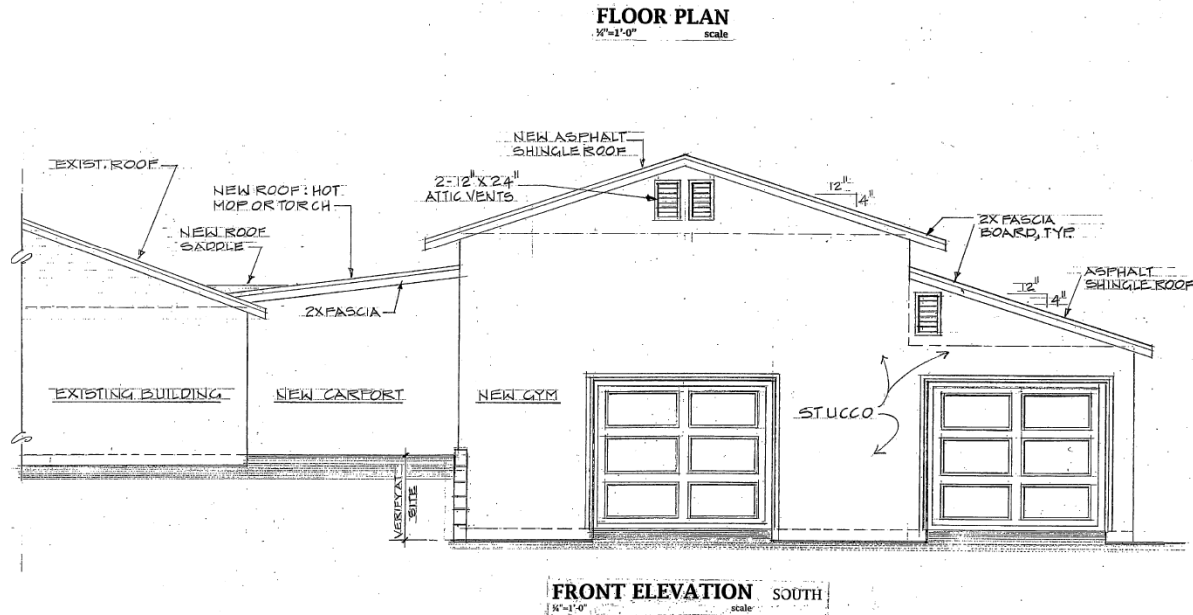
**Image 1: Type VI Fire Engine (San Diego County Fire)**



## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

The proposed Project also includes construction of an 1,850 square foot storage garage. The new building will include a bay to house the fire engine along with a training room with gym space. Approval of this Project will provide a safe and secure area for Viejas Firefighters to train, store equipment, and house a Type VI All-Terrain Fire Engine in an enclosed protected environment.

**Image 2: Architectural drawings of the new Building**



### BENEFITS

This Project will directly benefit disadvantaged, low-income and vulnerable communities on the Viejas Reservation and surrounding communities. Many residents in these areas live in older, substandard housing or mobile homes and have limited resources to recover from wildfire disasters.

With Viejas Firefighters staffing and operating the requested Type VI All-Terrain Fire Engine, Viejas' ability to transport firefighters with a pump and water to remote off-road areas for both rescue and fire suppression operations will improve.

### MEASURABLE RESULTS

The procurement of a new fire engine will enhance mobility in rugged terrain and facilitate the transportation of water to fire sites. This improvement will significantly increase community safety for elders, tribal members, residents, and visitors to the Viejas Reservation. Additionally, staffing a Type VI fire engine 7-days a week, 24 hours a day will allow the fire department to respond more quickly to emergencies, resulting in faster fire containment, reduced risk of regional fire spread and improved readiness throughout the year—especially during extreme weather events such as droughts and Santa Ana winds. The new building will house the new fire engine, protecting it from environmental elements, and will also include a training room and gym for fire department personnel.

## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

### DELIVERABLES:

- Quarterly invoices, request for disbursements and progress reports with photo documentation
- Final Project Report

**Table 1. Estimated Budget and Anticipated Schedule**

Task #	Description	Amount	Schedule
1.	Procure Type VI All-Terrain Fire Engine	\$415,000.00	Throughout the grant term
2.	Construct a new building with one fire engine bay and a training room/gym	\$235,000.00	Throughout the grant term
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$650,000.00</b>	

**PROJECT FINANCING:** The total Project amount is \$704,360.00; the Conservancy staff recommends funding in the amount of \$650,000.00 for the implementation of the Project. The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for this Project is Proposition 4.

**LEVERAGED FUNDING:** Matching funds of \$54,360 will be provided by Viejas, \$30,000 for outfitting the fire engine and \$24,360 to cover an increase in cost for new building. In-kind contributions are estimated at \$7,500 for the Viejas Fire Chief and Resource Management Director to administer the grant agreement and provide management oversight.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:** This Project would be undertaken consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation (Public Resources Code, §§ 32630-32659.9).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):** Consistent with Program 3 Preserve and Restore Natural Resources and Program 6, Expand the Organization's Capacity and Public Outreach from the Conservancy's Strategic Plan Update 2024-2028.

**CONSISTENCY WITH THE PURPOSES OF THE FUNDING SOURCE:** Proposition 4 is for wildfire and climate resilience, watershed protection, natural and cultural resource protection, and community access projects. The funding is immediately available for shovel-ready projects.

### PROPOSITION 4 - MEANINGFUL AND DIRECT BENEFITS

This Project achieves one or more of the purposes:

- Reducing flood and fire risk
- Benefits disadvantaged, severely disadvantaged, or underserved communities

### ALIGNMENT WITH PLANS AND PRIORITIES

#### A. California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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Supports local adaptation strategy and resilience, fuels reduction to mitigate risk of fire and improve forest health, and protection of the state's most vulnerable populations and communities.

### **B. State Wildlife Action Plan**

Coordinate with partners to prevent intense wildfires to protect wildlife habitat, water quality, and recreation opportunities.

### **C. California 2030 Natural and Working Lands Climate Change Implementation Plan**

Expand the use of natural and working lands for climate mitigation and adaptation by integrating climate goals into State-funded natural and working land conservation restoration, and management programs.

### **D. California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan**

Goal 2: Strengthen Protection of Communities.

### **E. Safeguarding California – California's Climate Adaption Strategy**

Promotes management activities to reduce the risk of fire.

### **F. San Diego River Conservancy's Climate Change Policy**

Collaborate with other agencies and entities to develop, support, and implement climate change adaptation plans, strategies and projects that minimize or offset impacts to natural and cultural resources, public access, and other matters specified in the Conservancy's enabling legislation.

### **G. 2018 Strategic Fire Plan for California**

Support and participate in the collaborative development and implementation of local, county and regional plans that address fire protection and landowner objectives.

### **H. The San Diego Unit 2022 Strategic Fire Plan**

## **PROJECT READINESS**

The Viejas Fire Department is staffed to immediately place 2 personnel on the new Type VI Fire Engine. The Department is also prepared to incorporate the new vehicle, tools and equipment into their standard operating procedures and established training program. Architectural plans are complete and construction of the new building is shovel ready.

## **PERMIT COMPLIANCE**

Viejas Fire Department has completed the architectural drawings which include details, sketches, elevation, floor plans, and specifications. They will work directly with Viejas Tribal Government and file a CEQA Notice of Exemption, if applicable.

**Meeting of January 21, 2026**

ITEM: 9

SUBJECT: **DESCANSO RANGER DISTRICT WILDFIRE  
RESILIENCE AND COMMUNITY DEFENSE  
(ACTION)**

The National Forest Foundation has proposed a project in partnership with the Cleveland National Forest to reduce hazardous vegetation targeting approximately 246 acres within the Descanso District. The proposed activities include increasing defensible space, clearing understory vegetation, trimming tree branches, and establishing a shaded fuel break. The Conservancy staff recommends funding in the amount of \$538,496 from Proposition 4.

**Presentation:**

**Brain Robey, Southern California Program Manager, National  
Forest Foundation**

**Kyle Smith, Descanso District Ranger, Cleveland National Forest**

**Recommendation: Approve Resolution No. 26-03**

**Resolution No: 26-03**

**RESOLUTION OF THE GOVERNING BOARD OF  
THE SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

**AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER TO GRANT \$538,496 FROM  
PROPOSITION 4 TO THE NATIONAL FOREST FOUNDATION TO CONDUCT ROAD  
BRUSHING, HAZARDOUS FUELS REDUCTION, TO MAINTAIN  
FUEL BREAKS AND PROVIDE DEFENSIBLE SPACE ACROSS 246 ACRES  
IN THE DESCANSO RANGER DISTRICT**

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WHEREAS, the mission of the San Diego River Conservancy is to further the goals of its enabling legislation by conserving and restoring the lands and waters of the San Diego River watershed and the Consortium Program areas; and

WHEREAS, Proposition 4 was approved by voters on November 5, 2024, for the purposes of helping communities avoid and recover from the impacts of wildfire, flood, drought, or other extreme weather events, and help restore and protect natural systems; and

WHEREAS, the San Diego River Conservancy was allocated \$25,000,000 under Proposition 4, "Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024" with funds made available by Public Resources Code section 91520, subdivision (m), to improve forest health and protect communities from wildfire; and

WHEREAS, the San Diego River Conservancy has been delegated the responsibility for the administration of this grant program, establishing necessary procedures and guidelines in accordance with statewide priorities and plans; and

WHEREAS, the National Forest Foundation, in partnership with Cleveland National Forest applied to the San Diego River Conservancy for a grant to conduct road brushing, hazardous fuels reduction, to maintain fuel breaks and provide defensible space across 246 acres in the Descanso District of the Cleveland National Forest (Project); and

WHEREAS, this Project is consistent with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, The Project is consistent with Program 2: Support and Encourage Recreation and Education, Program 3: Preserve and Restore Natural Resources, Program 4: Protect and Preserve Cultural and Historical Resources, Program 5: Enhance Water Quality and Natural Flood Conveyance and Program 6: Expand the Organization's Capacity and Public Outreach of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan Update; and

WHEREAS, the San Diego River Conservancy staff have reviewed the grant application, met with applicant, conducted a site visit and recommends the Project for approval.

WHEREAS, San Diego River Conservancy staff recommends funding in the amount of \$538,496 to implement the Project; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the San Diego River Conservancy's Governing Board, based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the San Diego River Conservancy Act (Public Resources Code, Sections 32630-32659.9).

2. The proposed Project is consistent with the intent of Proposition 4.
3. The San Diego River Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to \$538,496 (Five Hundred Thirty-Eight Thousand Four Hundred Ninety-Six Dollars) to implement the Project.
4. Appoints the Executive Officer, or her designee, as an agent to execute all agreements, grants, sub-contracts, and other documents needed for the completion of the Project.
5. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a scope of work, budget, and schedule.

Approved and adopted on January 21, 2026. I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution Number 26-03 was duly adopted by the San Diego River Conservancy's Governing Board.

Roll Call Vote:

Yeas: \_\_\_\_\_

Nays: \_\_\_\_\_

Absent: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Julia L. Richards  
Executive Officer

#### San Diego River Conservancy's Governing Board Members Roll Call Vote

Name	Ayes	Noes	Abstained
CNRA: Bryan Cash			
DOF: Stephen Benson			
CADFW: Glen Lubcke			
Dr. Jennifer Campbell, SD Mayor Designee			
Joel Anderson, County Supervisor			
Raul Campillo, Vice Chair			
Ben Clay, Chair			
Ruth Hayward			
J. Cody Petterson			
Jamie La Brake			
Elsa Saxod			
DPR Designee, Ray Lennox			
DPR Designee, Adams/VanDoren			
Dustin Trotter			
Phil Ortiz			

# **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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## **Staff Recommendation SDRC Resolution 26-03**

January 21, 2026

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to provide up to \$538,496 to the National Forest Foundation, in partnership with the United States Forest Service (USFS), for road brushing, hazardous fuels reduction, to maintain fuel breaks and provide defensible space across 246 acres in the Descanso Ranger District of the Cleveland National Forest (CNF).

**LOCATION:** Alpine and Pine Valley are two rural communities in the Cuyamaca Mountains of the Cleveland National Forest. The Descanso Ranger District is the southernmost national forest in California located approximately 30 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean along Interstate 8 in the headwaters of the San Diego and Sweetwater River watersheds, San Diego County.

**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:** Staff recommends that the San Diego River Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to the San Diego River Conservancy Act (Public Resources Code, § 32630 et seq.):

The San Diego River Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of funding for projects focused on wildfire and forest resilience including fire prevention and suppression, specifically as follows:

**To National Forest Foundation, the sum of \$538,496.00 (Five Hundred Thirty-Eight Thousand Four Hundred and Ninety-Six Dollars and Zero Cents) as follows:**

- To implement fuel reduction activities across approximately 246 acres of CNF land to reduce the risk and intensity of wildfires in the wildland urban interface areas (Project).

Before the disbursement of funds, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a scope of work, budget and schedule, and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

Based on the staff report and attached exhibits, the San Diego River Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the San Diego River Conservancy Act.
2. The proposed Project is consistent with the intent of Proposition 4.
3. The proposed Project is consistent with the guidelines for the Conservancy's grant program.

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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### **KUMEYAAY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

The Kumeyaay ancestral land stretches seventy-five miles north and south of today's international border, encompassing much of California's San Diego and Imperial counties, as well as parts of Baja California. Before the arrival of Spanish and American colonizers, the Kumeyaay governed their lands through a complex system of alliances and overlapping territories, guided by their shamull (clan) system. They established extensive trading trails that connected their territory to neighboring groups, including the Cahuilla, Cupeño, Quechan, Cocopah, Chemehuevi, Pai Pai, and Kiliwa.

The Kumeyaay people possess deep ecological knowledge of their environment and utilize engineered wetland structures, fire management, and agricultural practices since time immemorial. This intricate understanding of their surroundings supported a population of over 80,000 people before 1770. A shamull would travel seasonally through their clan territories to gather resources. During social and religious events, these clans would come together to celebrate at designated locations.

However, contact with Spanish and American colonizers brought diseases, warfare, and social upheaval that severely impacted the Kumeyaay. By 1910, fewer than 3,000 Kumeyaay remained, with their identity preserved in isolated populations.

Direct political control of the Kumeyaay lands has been reduced to twelve small reservations in the U.S. and four Ejidos in Mexico. However, Kumeyaay continue to live throughout the traditional territory and exercise direct involvement in land use issues, environmental management, and cultural and repatriation concerns.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Wildfire has always been a part of southern California's ecosystem, but the frequency and intensity have increased because of land use and extreme weather events. Prior to the formation of the United States, and before the Cleveland National Forest was established in 1908, the original Kumeyaay, Luiseños, Cahuilla and Cupeño inhabitants understood how to utilize natural resources from these lands. In fact, many of today's trails follow the same routes used by these first people where they would harvest native plants for food and medicine. They even managed cultural burns to reduce fuel loads. Today, the CNF Fire Management Department is responsible for managing fire threat and potential fire hazards, conducting risk assessments, and maintaining fuel levels to mitigate fire risk on national forest and surrounding areas. CNF works with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and numerous other fire control organizations to keep fire related damage to a minimum.

In 1992, Congress chartered the National Forest Foundation (NFF) which was created to engage Americans to restore and enhance national forests and grasslands. They value collaboration and encourage capacity building to maintain land stewardship. As a key nonprofit partner of the U.S. Forest Service, NFF adds value by working with local organizations to add capacity, funding, and community connections that promote the health and public enjoyment of the National Forest System. They are the only conservation organization solely focused on National Forests.

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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Although much of the CNF is open space it is surrounded by “high” or “very high” fire hazard severity (CAL FIRE Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps) areas in the San Diego region. Reducing wildfire risk in the wildland urban interface (WUI) extends benefits to adjacent tribal reservations, State parks, County open space and trail networks. These rural and WUI communities are particularly vulnerable due to limited evacuation routes, fire hydrants, resources, and property protection in the event of wildfire.

### **Photo 1: Descanso Ranger District Current Conditions**



### **PROJECT NEED:**

Wildfires happen frequently in this area and often spread to neighboring communities because of volatile chaparral, steep terrain and local weather patterns. The region has experienced increasingly severe wildfires fueled by a combination of prolonged drought, dense fuel loads, and human activities. Surrounding communities are located within high-risk WUI zones, where the threat to life, property, and critical infrastructure is especially high. The Descanso Ranger District of the CNF faces an urgent and growing demand for wildfire resilience and prevention measures. Without intervention, the risk of catastrophic wildfire will continue to escalate, threatening both public safety and ecological health.

Fuel breaks are critical for wildfire mitigation, serving as strategically placed zones where vegetation is reduced or removed to slow the spread of fire and provide safe, defensible space for firefighting operations. When properly maintained, fuel breaks can significantly reduce fire intensity and create opportunities for suppression crews to safely defend against wildfire before reaching homes or critical infrastructure.

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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**Photo 2: Descanso Ranger District Fuel Break in Alpine**



### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The Descanso Ranger District Wildfire Resilience and Community Defense Project goals are to reduce wildfire risk to life, property, and natural resources while enhancing forest health and biodiversity. Project activities include manual and mechanical fuel reduction activities, fuel break maintenance, and prescribed fire. These efforts are designed to manage defensible space in WUI zones, rural areas and restore natural fire regimes.

The Project will treat 246 acres of high-priority areas, with all activities guided by a commitment to protecting sensitive species, cultural resources, and water quality. Specific Project components include:

### **Road Brushing**

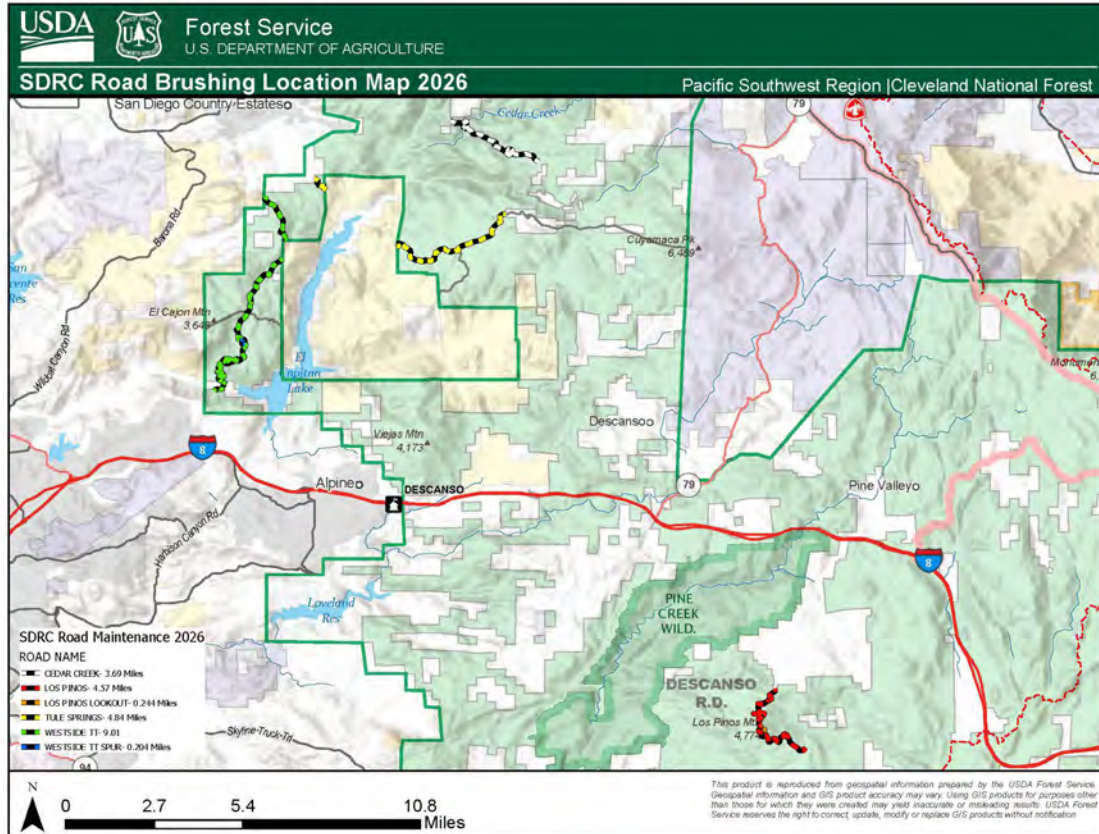
This Project component will target approximately 55 acres and clear overgrown vegetation along critical ingress and egress routes to improve emergency response times, enhance firefighter mobility, and promote evacuation safety for nearby communities during a wildfire event. Vegetation treatments on the access roads will improve visibility and maneuverability for emergency vehicles, particularly in steep or narrow segments.

This work is essential for both public safety and operational effectiveness during fire suppression efforts and maintains safe and reliable access for both proactive forest management and emergency wildfire response. Targeted roads include Cedar Creek, Los

# SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

Pinos, Los Pinos Lookout, Tule Springs, Westside, and Westside Spur.

## Map 1: Descanso Ranger District Road Brushing Map



### Alpine Community Defense

This Project component will maintain a 300-foot fuel break initially created in 2015 strategically located to protect the Alpine and Viejas Indian Reservation communities from wildfire. Approximately 105 acres were identified. The fuel break is on a 5-year maintenance rotation schedule. Treatments include hand cutting shrubs, pile burning, herbicide application and potentially a broadcast burn to maintain fine fuel loading. Anticipated work is planned for various treatments in 2026 and 2027. Following NFF-led manual and mechanical treatments, the CNF will implement broadcast and/or pile burning activities, according to their 5-year maintenance schedule. Creating community defensible space in Alpine is part of an ongoing collaborative effort with the local fire department, Fire Safe Councils and CAL FIRE. If the Project is approved, CNF will maintain the portion of the fuel break on Forest Service land while partners coordinate treatments on adjacent private lands through grants and programs to ensure continuity and maximize strategic effectiveness for this remote area.

### Pine Valley Community Defense

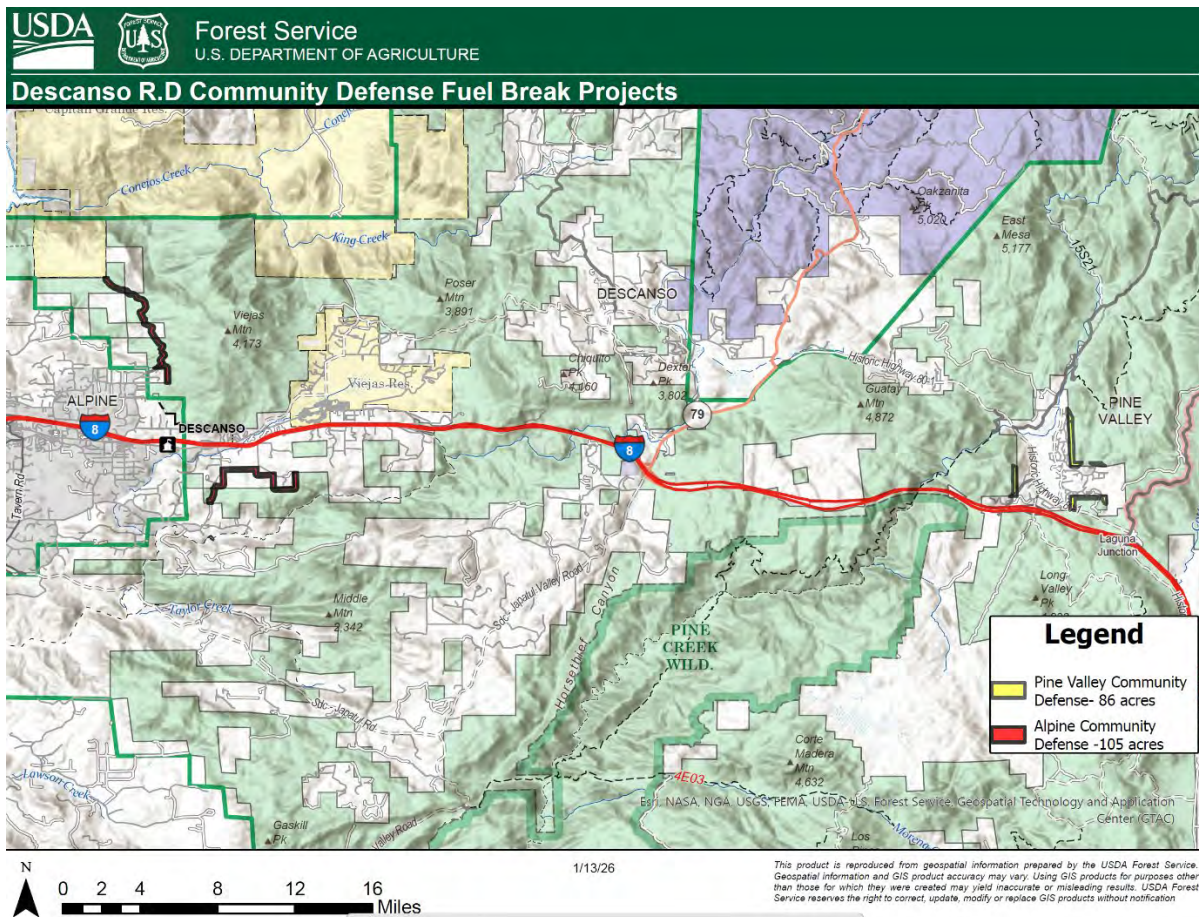
This Project component will maintain a 300-foot fuel break across approximately 86 acres

## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

that strategically surrounds Pine Valley. The fuel break is maintained on a five-year rotation. Treatments include hand cutting, piling of shrubs, mastication, pile burning, and a broadcast burn to manage fine fuel loads. Anticipated work is planned for 2026. The Project reduces wildfire risk in the San Diego region through targeted fuel reduction and community protection measures. Following NFF-led manual and mechanical treatments, the CNF will implement broadcast and/or pile burning activities, according to their 5-year maintenance schedule. In this area of the WUI, the homes and other infrastructure are very close to hazardous fuel loads.

On the northern end, the fuel break connects to the Pine Valley USFS-owned cabin tract, where hazardous fuels reduction treatments are also maintained to protect recreational cabins and infrastructure.

**Map 2: Alpine and Pine Valley Community Defense Fuel Breaks Map**



### **BENEFITS:**

By implementing strategic hazardous fuel reduction, this Project will enhance public safety and protect critical infrastructure. Many residents in rural areas experience economic and geographic barriers that increase their vulnerability to wildfires. This Project addresses those risks by creating fuel breaks and defensible space.

## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

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Additional benefits include promoting long-term community resilience by restoring natural fire regimes and improving forest health. This approach helps safeguard water quality, biodiversity, and cultural resources that are essential for the well-being of local communities.

Other multi benefits include improved habitat connectivity for species protection, enhanced outdoor recreation opportunities, increased public access, and the preservation of cultural and tribal resources. All treatments are designed with protective measures for sensitive species in mind. This project aims to protect and enhance access to trails, campgrounds, and open spaces by reducing fire risks and maintaining safe conditions for recreation. Resource specialists will be consulted during project planning to ensure the protection of cultural and historical sites.

### BUDGET:

**Table 1.** Budget Estimate and Anticipated Schedule

Task #	Description	Amount	Schedule
1.	Project Administration and Financial Management	\$38,000.00	Throughout grant period
2.	Project Implementation: Road brushing, improve community defense, reduce hazardous fuels for Alpine and Pine Valley communities	\$442,800.00	Throughout grant period
3.	Indirect rate/overhead (12%)	\$57,696.00	Throughout grant period
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$538,496.00</b>	

### DELIVERABLES:

- Itemized request for disbursements, progress reports with photo documentation of before and after treatment
- Acres fuels/vegetation treated
- Map locations (including shapefiles) of vegetation management activities
- Final Report

**PROJECT FINANCING:** The total Project amount is \$578,996.00; the Conservancy staff recommends funding in the amount of \$538,496.00 for the implementation of the proposed Project. The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for this Project is Proposition 4.

**LEVERAGED FUNDING:** National Forest Foundation has committed \$40,500 in matching or “in-kind” contributions to help support staff time, mileage and community defense.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:** This Project would be undertaken consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation (Public Resources Code, §§ 32630-32659.9).

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) &**

**OBJECTIVE(S):** The Project is consistent with Program 2: Support and Encourage Recreation and Education, Program 3 Preserve and Restore Natural Resources, Program 4 Protect and Preserve Cultural and Historical Resources, Program 5 Enhance Water Quality and Natural Flood Conveyance and Program 6 Expand the Organization's Capacity and Public Outreach of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan Update.

**CONSISTENCY WITH THE PURPOSES OF THE FUNDING SOURCE:** Proposition 4 is for wildfire and climate resilience, watershed protection, natural and cultural resource protection, and community access projects. The funding is immediately available for shovel-ready projects.

### **PROPOSITION 4 - MEANINGFUL AND DIRECT BENEFITS**

This Project achieves one or more of the purposes:

- Located in the San Diego River watershed.
- Resource protection.
- Reducing flood and fire risk.
- Protecting the natural and scenic beauty of the San Diego River watershed.

### **ALIGNMENT WITH PLANS AND PRIORITIES**

#### **A. California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan**

Supports activities such as fuels reduction, forest thinning, vegetation management, prescribed fire, shaded fuel breaks, defensible space, and enhancement of fire-prone habitats to reduce fire risk.

#### **B. Safeguarding California Plan: 2018 Update California's Climate Adaptation Strategy**

Supports public education on the link between fire risk and the elevated importance of preventative fuels treatment projects and supports California's most vulnerable populations to increase equity and resilience through investments, planning, research, and education.

#### **C. California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment**

Supports local adaptation strategy and resilience, and protection of the state's most vulnerable populations and communities.

#### **D. San Diego River Conservancy's Climate Change Policy**

Leverages partnerships and resources with local communities, including government entities and non-profits.

#### **E. Strategic Fire Plan for California**

Goal 5: Integrate fire and fuels management practices with landowner/land manager priorities across all ownerships and jurisdictions.

#### **F. California Natural Resources Agency's Initiatives**

This project advances the initiative to restore and maintain forest ecosystem

## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

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health and wildfire resilience.

**G. Governors Executive Orders B-52-18** Support the state's resilience to wildfire and other climate impacts, and **N-05-19** Government will take all possible actions to protect life, property, and forests from deadly megafires, and will do so with an urgency that matches the scope of the threat.

**H. San Diego Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Plan**

Supports healthy ecosystems and improve or restore the condition of landscapes and biological communities. Such practices may include brush/forest management for wildfire risk reduction.

**I. The California Forest Carbon Plan (2018)**

Calls for restoration of natural fire regime and forest composition through a multitude of approaches including thinning, prescribed burns, invasive vegetation management, and shaded fuel breaks.

**J. The Community Wildfire Prevention & Mitigation Report (CAL FIRE, 2019)**

Urges state and local agencies to implement the goals of the Carbon Forest Plan and lays out recommendations to agencies to increase the scale and pace of management and mitigation actions to improve forest health and resiliency.

**K. The Cleveland National Forest Land Management Plan**

Calls for community protection from wildfire and healthy forest restoration as primary goals.

**L. The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy**

Guides an all-lands approach to coordinated preparation for wildfires.

**M. US Forest Service's 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy and the National Cohesive Strategy**

Strategic fuels management projects can reduce wildfire impacts not only on homes and communities, but also on-air quality, municipal watersheds, wildlife habitat, and other values at risk.

- (1) restoring fire-adapted ecosystems on a landscape scale;
- (2) building fire-adapted human communities; and
- (3) responding safely and effectively to wildland fire.

### PROJECT READINESS:

The proposed Project is ready and adjacent non-federal lands have been treated in collaboration with CAL FIRE to ensure fuel breaks remain continuous and effective across jurisdictional boundaries.

If the Project is approved, funds will be used to support Project implementation (hand cutting, piling and other activities) while the NFF will work closely with the CNF to engage its network of experienced contractors through a competitive procurement process. Selected contractors will work under CNF oversight and in coordination with NFF staff to

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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ensure all project specifications are met. The NFF also has strong partnerships with the State of California's Wildfire Resilience Task Force, local Fire Safe Councils, Southern California-based Conservation Corps, and the Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County leveraging these partners for additional technical expertise, if needed.

### **PERMIT COMPLIANCE:**

The Project will take place on federal land and is subject to the National Environmental Policy Act and CEQA. For CEQA, NFF applied for a Secretarial Determination for Suspension for critical fuels reduction project. If that is not approved, NFF will file a Notice of Exemption for CEQA, under a statutory exemption under Public Resources Code Section 4799.05(d)(1), prior to commencement of work.

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 21, 2026**

ITEM: 10

SUBJECT: **SAN DIEGO RIVER WATERSHED – CANYON  
WILDFIRE RESILIENCE PROJECT (*ACTION*)**

San Diego Canyonlands proposes a 59.5-acre fuel treatment project in Zone 2 of the Shepherd and Rueda Canyons brush management zones, in partnership with the City of San Diego's Open Space Division. These high-risk areas require defensible space around homes and buildings to reduce wildfire impacts and protect life and property. Conservancy staff recommends \$649,875 in funding from Proposition 4.

**Presentation:**

Clayton Tschudy, Executive Director, San Diego Canyonlands

Recommendation: Approve Resolution No. 26-04

**Resolution No: 26-04**

**RESOLUTION OF THE GOVERNING BOARD OF  
THE SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

**AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER TO GRANT \$649,875 FROM  
PROPOSITION 4 TO SAN DIEGO CANYONLANDS TO TREAT 59.5 ACRES OF FUELS  
WITHIN THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO'S BRUSH MANAGEMENT ZONE 2 OF  
SHEPHERD AND RUEDA CANYONS**

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WHEREAS, the mission of the San Diego River Conservancy is to further the goals of its enabling legislation by conserving and restoring the lands and waters of the San Diego River watershed; and

WHEREAS, Proposition 4 was approved by voters on November 5, 2024, for the purposes of helping communities avoid and recover from the impacts of wildfire, flood, drought, or other extreme weather events, and help restore and protect natural systems; and

WHEREAS, the San Diego River Conservancy was allocated \$25,000,000 under Proposition 4, "Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024" with funds made available by Public Resources Code section 91520, subdivision (m), to improve forest health and protect communities from wildfire; and

WHEREAS, the San Diego River Conservancy has been delegated the responsibility for the administration of this grant program, establishing necessary procedures and guidelines in accordance with statewide priorities and plans; and

WHEREAS, San Diego Canyonlands applied to the San Diego River Conservancy for a grant to treat 59.5 acres of hazardous fuels in Zone 2 of the brush management zone (BMZ) within Shepherd and Rueda Canyons (Project); and

WHEREAS, this Project is consistent with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, Program 2: Support and Encourage Recreation, Program 3: Preserve and Restore Natural Resources, and Program 6: Expand the Organizations Capacity and Public Outreach; and

WHEREAS, the San Diego River Conservancy staff have reviewed the grant application, met with applicant and recommends the Project for approval.

WHEREAS, San Diego River Conservancy staff recommends funding in the amount of \$649,875 to implement the Project; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the San Diego River Conservancy's Governing Board, based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the San Diego River Conservancy Act (Public Resources Code, Sections 32630-32659.9).
2. The proposed Project is consistent with the purposes and intent of Proposition 4.
3. The San Diego River Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to \$649,875 (Six Hundred Forty-Nine Thousand Eight Hundred and Seventy-Five Dollars) to implement the Project.

4. Appoints the Executive Officer, or her designee, as an agent to execute all agreements, grants, sub-contracts, and other documents needed for the completion of the Project.
5. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a scope of work, budget, and schedule.

Approved and adopted on January 21, 2026. I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution Number 26-04 was duly adopted by the San Diego River Conservancy's Governing Board.

Roll Call Vote:

Yeas: \_\_\_\_\_

Nays: \_\_\_\_\_

Absent: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Julia L. Richards  
Executive Officer

#### San Diego River Conservancy's Governing Board Members Roll Call Vote

Name	Ayes	Noes	Abstained
CNRA: Bryan Cash			
DOF: Stephen Benson			
CADFW: Glen Lubcke			
Dr. Jennifer Campbell, SD Mayor Designee			
Joel Anderson, County Supervisor			
Raul Campillo, Vice Chair			
Ben Clay, Chair			
Ruth Hayward			
J. Cody Petterson			
Jamie La Brake			
Elsa Saxod			
DPR Designee, Ray Lennox			
DPR Designee, Adams/VanDoren			
Dustin Trotter			
Phil Ortiz			

# **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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## **Staff Recommendation SDRC Resolution 26-04**

January 21, 2026

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to provide up to \$649,875 to San Diego Canyonlands (Canyonlands) for 59.5 acres of fuels treatment in Zone 2 of the brush management zones (BMZ) of Shepherd and Rueda Canyon open spaces, adjacent to residential properties in Tierrasanta to reduce the risk and severity of wildfires in the San Diego River Watershed.

**LOCATION:** Shepherd and Rueda Canyons are in the Tierrasanta neighborhood of the City of San Diego, west of Mission Trails Regional Park, north of Interstate 8, and east of the Interstate 805. City of San Diego, Parks and Recreation Department, Open Space Division (OSD) owns and manages this very high fire hazard severity zone which is also part of the city's Multiple Habitat Preserve Area (MHPA) of the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) in San Diego County, California.

**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:** Staff recommends that the San Diego River Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to the San Diego River Conservancy Act (Public Resources Code, § 32630 et seq.):

The San Diego River Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of funding for projects focused on projects focused on wildfire and forest resilience including fire prevention and suppression, specifically as follows:

**To San Diego Canyonlands, the sum of \$649,875 (Six Hundred Forty-Nine Thousand Eight Hundred and Seventy-Five Dollars) to use as follows:**

- Treatment of approximately 59.5 acres hazardous fuels within Zone 2 of the BMZ in Shepherd and Rueda Canyons (Project).

Before the disbursement of funds, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a scope of work, budget and schedule, and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

Based on the staff report and attached exhibits, the San Diego River Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the San Diego River Conservancy Act.
2. The proposed Project is consistent with the intent of Proposition 4 (2024 Climate Bond).
3. The proposed Project is consistent with the guidelines for the Conservancy's grant program.

# SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

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## BACKGROUND

The City of San Diego faces an escalating fire risk exacerbated by increased fuel loads and prolonged droughts. In the event of wildfire, seasonal winds intensify flames carrying embers from open space to nearby residential areas, making the wildland urban interface (WUI) vulnerable. This dangerous combination creates unpredictable urban wildfires that threaten lives, property and the environment.

To combat this, CAL FIRE and the County of San Diego Fire Code identify BMZ and defensible space as an essential community fuel break to slow the spread of fire and provide access for firefighters. These at-risk areas are very high-fire zones; therefore, maintaining defensible space around homes and other buildings helps reduce wildfire impacts and protects life and property.

Canyonlands is a nonprofit organization with experience revitalizing natural areas and empowering communities through education, volunteerism and equitable workforce development to mitigate wildfire impacts. Canyonlands' mission is to promote, protect and restore the natural habitats in San Diego canyons to ensure clean air, water and resiliency from floods and fires. Over the past five years, Canyonlands and the City of San Diego have built a robust partnership for fire resilience work. As a key partner for the City's OSD BMZ team, they conduct brush management, which includes pruning and thinning vegetation within 100 feet of structures in the BMZ.

**Photo 1.** Thick shrubs and overgrown trees surround residential properties in Shepherd Canyon, which are barely visible in the background.



## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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There are two designated zones in the BMZ. Zone 1 extends out 35 feet from structures, and Zone 2 extends 65 feet from the end of Zone 1.

### **PROJECT NEED**

Because the City of San Diego has recently come under scrutiny for under-resourcing these state and county fire code mandates, this proposed Project addresses the critical need to reduce fuel loads through BMZ treatment within City of San Diego open space. As outlined by the Proclamation of a State of Emergency, removal of vegetation for community defensible space, and maintenance of previously established fuel breaks or fuels modification projects will help protect thousands of residents that live adjacent to these natural areas.

This Project will reduce the risk of fire movement across the urbanized parts of the fireshed into Mission Trails Regional Park and vice versa. These communities are at increased risk of wildfire due to their proximity to open space, especially when non-native, fire-prone fuels have colonized the area. Compounding this threat is the chronic lack of financial resources for managing San Diego's canyons.

Funding for this Project will provide additional protection from wildfire for nearby severely/disadvantaged communities. As a community-benefit environmental organization, Canyonlands recognizes the challenges and opportunities to create equitable opportunities for low-income, underserved, and marginalized communities to help build purpose-driven environmental careers and climate resilience.

**Photo 2.** Flashy fuels in the foreground of Rueda Canyon and thick vegetation in the background.



# SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

## PROJECT SUMMARY:

Canyonlands proposes to conduct fire resilience work in the BMZ of two canyon complexes near Mission Trails Regional Park. Canyonlands will enhance fire resilience for lands and neighborhoods of the Tierrasanta community by providing proactive management to safeguard the areas against increasing wildfire severity.

Within the BMZ Zone 2, the Project will target 35.33-acres in Rueda Canyon and 24.17-acres in Shepard Canyon. The scope of work encompasses fuel reduction through removal of hazardous, dead, and/or dying trees, removal of vegetation for community defensible space, and maintenance of previously established fuel breaks. This Project protects thousands of residents, as well as properties and infrastructure adjacent to these canyons. All work will occur in City of San Diego's open space areas.

**Map 1.** Target work areas in Shepherd and Rueda Canyons.



This Project will provide a minimum of 25 workforce trainees with full-time/benefited employment and fire resilience training including specialized knowledge of BMZ thinning

## SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

requirements, electric-powered tool use, vegetation surveys, sensitive species identification, nesting bird surveys and GIS data collection in ArcGIS Field Maps.

Canyonlands will also engage the community in proactive wildfire preparedness education, including direct engagement with the newly formed Tierrasanta Fire Safe Council. As a community-benefit environmental organization focused on bringing people and nature together through equity-oriented programming, Canyonlands will conduct 12 community meetings and events to inform residents about the purpose and benefits of fire-resilient landscapes.

### GOALS/OBJECTIVES

- Conduct fuels treatments across 59.5 acres
- Remove dead, dying or diseased trees
- Remove vegetation for community defensible space
- Maintain previously established fuel breaks or fuel modification projects
- Selective thinning, spacing, and lifting of large shrubs
- Reduce community wildfire risk
- Retreatments with herbicide
- Expand Canyonlands' Conservation Workforce Development Initiative
- Increase community wildfire education
- Provide a minimum of 25 workforce trainees with full-time/benefited employment
- On-the-job natural resource management training and career opportunities

### DELIVERABLES

- Provide metrics to the Conservancy including acreage treated, species removed, treatment types, weight of vegetation removed and GIS data
- Copy of approved permits
- Biological monitoring/surveys
- Post-treatment maintenance and monitoring
- Conduct up to 12 outreach and community engagement events/meetings
- Quarterly progress reports with before and after photo documentation
- Final Report identifying any matching funds or in-kind contributions

**Table 1.** Estimated budget and Anticipated Schedule

Task	Description	Amount	Schedule
1.	Project Management and Administration	\$78,257.85	Throughout the grant Period
2.	Implementation: Fuels treatment in Rueda and Shepard Canyons including monitoring and maintenance	\$501,987.67	Throughout the grant Period
3.	Indirect rate/overhead (12%)	\$69,629.48	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$649,875.00</b>	

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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**PROJECT FINANCING:** The total Project amount is \$816,164.47; Conservancy staff recommends funding in the amount of \$649,875.00 for the implementation of the Project. The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for this project is Proposition 4.

**LEVERAGED FUNDING:** Matching funds from Citizens Energy Corporation and in-kind contributions from 6 California Climate Action Corps are estimated to be \$166,289.47 to carry out this project.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:** This project would be undertaken consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation (Public Resources Code, §§ 32630-32659.9).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) and OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with Program 2: Support and Encourage Recreation, Program 3: Preserve and Restore Natural Resources, and Program 6: Expand the Organization's Capacity and Public Outreach from the Conservancy's Strategic Plan Update 2024-2028.

**CONSISTENCY WITH PURPOSES OF THE FUNDING SOURCE:** Proposition 4 is for wildfire and climate resilience, watershed protection, natural and cultural resource protection, and community access projects. The funding is immediately available for shovel-ready projects.

**PROPOSITION 4 - MEANINGFUL AND DIRECT BENEFITS**

This Project achieves one or more of the purposes:

- Located in the San Diego River watershed;
- Resource protection;
- Reducing flood and fire risk;
- Protecting the natural and scenic beauty of the San Diego River watershed.

**ALIGNMENT WITH STATE PLANS AND PRIORITIES**

**A. California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan**

Provides numerous fuel reductions, vegetation management, defensible space, and fuel breaks to reduce fire risk throughout the watershed.

**B. Safeguarding California – California's Climate Adaptation Strategy**

Support fuel reduction and removal of highly flammable invasive species.

**C. Forest Carbon Plan**

Reduce fuel loads to lower the risk of fire in urban canyons, thus reducing potential carbon emissions.

**D. California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment**

Supports local adaptation strategy and resilience, and protection of the state's most vulnerable populations and communities.

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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### **E. State Wildlife Action Plan**

Goal 3 - Enhance Ecosystem Functions and Processes: Maintain and improve ecosystem functions and processes vital for sustaining ecosystems in California.

### **F. Strategic Fire Plan for California**

Goal 5: Integrate fire and fuels management practices with landowner/land manager priorities across all ownerships and jurisdictions.

### **G. 2017 Climate Change Scoping Plan**

Reduce air and water pollution and restore natural lands.

### **H. Wildlife Action Plan**

Supports protecting native species, controlling invasives and educating the public.

### **I. California Wildlife Action Plan - South Coast**

- i. Federal and state agencies and non-governmental partners should collaborate to institute appropriate fire management policies and practices to restore the ecological integrity of the region's ecosystems while minimizing loss of property and life.
- ii. Federal, state, and local agencies should provide greater resources and coordinate efforts to eradicate or control existing occurrences of invasive species and to prevent new introductions.

### **J. Governor's Executive Orders B-52-18** Support the state's resilience to wildfire and other climate impacts, and **N-05-19** Government will take all possible actions to protect life, property, and forests from deadly megafires, and will do so with an urgency that matches the scope of the threat

### **K. California Essential Habitat Connectivity Strategy for Conserving a Connected California**

Strategy #1: Protect connectivity while habitat is still intact, through permanent conservation and adaptive management.

### **L. City of San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Program**

### **M. San Diego Municipal Code, 142.0412, Landscape Standards**

Section III: Brush Management Fire safety in the landscape is achieved by reducing the readily flammable fuel adjacent to structures.

### **N. City of San Diego FPB Policy B-08-1**

Providing fuel discontinuity by the separation of the flammable plant cover (thinning) and reduction in fuel load.

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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### **BENEFITS:**

In addition to mitigating fire risk, this Project will also provide direct economic benefits to local vulnerable populations by recruiting field workers from underserved communities. Fire resilience and habitat restoration work will be structured to provide on-the-job training in environmental management and act as a pipeline to build career opportunities within the environmental sector.

Brush management will occur within 59.5 acres of City of San Diego's MHPA, which is part of the Multiple Species Conservation Plan. Conserved canyons throughout San Diego serve as a wildlife corridor that supports wildlife movement. Habitat-friendly practices include biological monitoring, nesting surveys, and minimizing disturbance to wildlife and other natural and cultural resources.

Invasive species management allows native vegetation to re-establish providing habitat for listed and sensitive species. Common invasive species found in BMZ-2 include *Brassica* spp., *Glebionis coronaria*, *Centaurea melitensis*, *Pennisetum setaceum*, *Acacia melanoxylon*, *Washingtonia robusta*, and *Eucalyptus* spp. Their in-house Qualified Applicator License holder will oversee herbicide applications to reduce recurrence of these flashy fuels.

Lastly, this Project increases access to urban open spaces, trails, and parks within canyons, facilitating safe outdoor recreation.

### **PROJECT READINESS:**

Canyonlands is shovel ready to begin this project. Canyonlands has collaborated directly with City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department staff to develop a 2-year scope to treat approximately 59.5 acres of BMZ-2. Canyonlands has a working relationship with them to maintain canyons in the City of San Diego through their active 5-year Master Right of Entry (signed 1/6/26).

Over the past five years, Canyonlands has developed expertise by conducting \$1.75 million of habitat-friendly BMZ management in the WUI, protecting lives and property while safeguarding habitat and sensitive species. Canyonlands has 13 years of experience implementing similar projects, including palm tree removal via helicopter.

Canyonlands is ready to scale operations to address the need for increased wildfire prevention in the region.

### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

Canyonlands filed a CEQA Categorical Exemption and holds a current Master Right of Entry with the City of San Diego to access these canyons. The City's OSD is the CEQA lead agency through their MSCP-Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and BMZ-EIR. An Environmental Memo and "CEQA Clearance for San Diego Canyonlands Brush Management Grant Program" is provided by the city.

## **SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY**

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The Senior Avian Biologist has experience and is permitted with a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recovery permit for California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*). Canyonlands will work closely with city biologists to ensure all required protocol surveys are completed.

**Meeting of January 21, 2026**

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:

- Proposition 4 – Nature Based Solutions update

Conservancy staff attended the following events & meetings:

2024 Climate Bond/ Proposition 4 meetings and site visits  
Climate Bond Program Coordination Team meeting  
San Diego State University's One Water Symposium: Indigenous  
Knowledge & Sustainable Watersheds  
Fall 2025 All State Conservancy meeting  
Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians event  
CA-MX Border Relations Council meeting  
CA Department of Fish and Wildlife meeting  
Assemblymember Christopher M. Ward's Environmental  
Roundtable  
City of Santee Station #5 fire engine push in event  
California Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force meeting  
Access Working Group - Natural Resources Agency meeting  
Department of General Services – Real Estate Services meeting  
Tijuana River Valley Recovery Team Steering Committee meeting  
County of San Diego Board of Supervisors Regular Meeting –  
Cottonwood Sand Mine  
San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board presentation  
Kumeyaay Community College meeting  
County Parks and Helix Water District meeting  
San Diego State University's One Water Lab event  
California Department of Transportation, District #11 meeting

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 21, 2026**

ITEM: 12

SUBJECT: **NEXT MEETING**

The next regularly scheduled Board meeting is anticipated to be held in person on Wednesday, March 18, 2026, from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm.

State of California  
San Diego River Conservancy

**Meeting of January 21, 2026**

ITEM: 13

SUBJECT: ADJOURNMENT