

San Diego River Conservancy's 2026 Work Plan



The San Diego River Conservancy (Conservancy) continues to advance its mission by strengthening partnerships and implementing projects focused on conserving wildlife and native habitats, supporting state plans and priorities, and assisting historically underfunded communities. These achievements are possible thanks to the support of dedicated volunteers, non-profit entities, tribal and local governments. With a staff of three, the Conservancy and its Governing Board prioritize land acquisition, expanding recreational opportunities, preserving natural and cultural resources, and improving water quality, as outlined in the strategic plan. The Conservancy's grant programs focus on multi-benefit projects that maximize public value and leverage additional funding.

In partnership with other organizations, the Conservancy is working to complete the San Diego River Trail while supporting conservation projects that restore native habitats, address climate change, and enhance forest and fire resilience.

On November 5, 2024, the voters approved Proposition 4 (Prop 4) "The Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024." The San Diego River Conservancy received an allocation of \$73.5 million distributed as follows:

- Wildfire funding: \$25.5 million for wildfire prevention, including reducing community wildfire risk and restoring the health and resilience of forests and landscapes. (Public Resources Code section 91520 (m))
- Nature-Based Solutions funding: \$48 million to reduce the risks of climate change impacts upon communities, fish and wildlife, natural resources, and increase public access. (Public Resources Code section 93020(a)(5))

In the wildfire category, the Conservancy received 25 concept proposals requesting \$40 million in funding and leveraging an additional \$10 million. To date, the Conservancy has awarded three projects and plans to recommend seven more by May 2026, totaling approximately \$8 million. These projects will target flammable fuel loads and help decrease the likelihood of property damage and loss of life, while enhancing firefighter safety and effectiveness during wildfires.

Additionally, on December 30, 2025, the Conservancy received 39 concept proposals for the Prop 4 Nature-Based Solutions grant program, totaling \$51 million in requests with approximately \$79 million in leveraged funds. Full applications will be due in June 2026 with plans to bring projects before the Conservancy's Governing Board for consideration in fall of 2026.

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SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN: PROGRAM SUMMARY

Program 1: Conserve Land within the San Diego River Watershed

Conserving land and open space protects natural habitats, improves biodiversity, promotes ecosystem health, and supports diverse plant and wildlife species. This program also aligns with the Natural Resources Agency's initiative, established by Governor Newsom's 2020 Executive Order N-82-20.

Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation

Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation is in the process of acquiring approximately 61 acres of land in the East Elliott area. This land will be conserved in perpetuity and will offer several benefits such as preserving native habitats, protecting wildlife corridors, providing public access to outdoor recreation, and safeguarding the watershed.

Program 2: Support and Encourage Recreation and Education

The Conservancy supports public access and outdoor recreation by helping provide trail facilities access along the San Diego River Trail, multi-lingual interpretive panels, and engagement for local and regional parks and open spaces in San Diego County.

County of San Diego, Department of Parks and Recreation

The County of San Diego, Department of Parks and Recreation, continues to implement three park projects:

- (1) The Historic Flume Trail segment (Section 60A) of the San Diego River Trail improvements allow users to experience the outdoors, natural resources, and viewshed along the San Diego River.
- (2) Cactus County Park replacement of old restroom with an ADA-compliant prefabricated restroom and installation of new LED lighting and poles for the ballfields.
- (3) Lindo Lake recreation enhancements and native habitat restoration in the west basin. The project will provide a healthy habitat for multiple wildlife species along this migration corridor, improve trail access, and install fishing piers, bird-watching stations, and site hardscape.

Campo Band of Mission Indians

The Campo Band of Mission Indians will install a new 2-unit prefabricated vault restroom with solar power, parking spaces, erosion control including site preparation, and one shade structure for the playground at Ralph Goff Community Park on the Campo Reservation.

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Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation

Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation will install interpretive panels throughout Mission Trails Regional Park. The project aims to educate and interpret the park's valuable natural, cultural and historical resources.

Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation

In partnership with the City of San Diego's Open Space Division, enhance public access and the visitor experience at Mission Trails Regional Park. Planned improvements include facility upgrades, expanded parking, an accessible route from the parking lot to the Visitor Center, a new trailhead and loop trail, and the planting of native trees.

Program 3: Preserve and Restore Natural Resources

Despite San Diego County having the highest number of threatened plant and animal species in the continental United States, its biodiversity faces threats from invasive species, extreme weather, fire disturbances, and habitat fragmentation. The Conservancy is committed to protecting the region's biodiversity.

Invasive Non-native Plant Removal and Control Program

The Conservancy and its partners have been implementing this invasive non-native plant control and restoration program for 16 years. These activities provide multi-benefits including weed abatement, hazardous fuels reduction, reduced flood and fire risk, as well as native habitat restoration.

San Diego State University Research Foundation

The project is restoring two sections of Alvarado Creek, a tributary to the San Diego River, in partnership with San Diego State University's Soil Ecology and Restoration Group.

Wildfire and Forest Resilience

The Conservancy awarded over \$35 million in General Funds for wildfire resilience, specifically to fund hazardous fuel removal to further reduce the risk and intensity of wildfires in San Diego County. Partners and local jurisdictions requested funds to procure personal protective equipment (PPE), fire engines, 4x4 trucks, brush removal tools, and other specialized fire equipment. The Conservancy staff will recommend approximately \$8 million for project funding in 2025-26 from the Prop 4 wildfire allocation.

Alpine Fire Protection District

The Fire District continues implementation of two projects:
(1) Procure one Type 6 Fire Engine and remove 16 acres hazardous fuels in Alpine Creek, a tributary to El Capitan Reservoir which separates the upper San Diego River.

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- (2) Hazardous fuel reduction on 52 acres to enhance defensible space by clearing understory vegetation, trimming tree branches, and establishing a shaded fuel break.

Alpine & Viejas Fire Safe Council *(Board will consider on March 18, 2026)*

Hazardous fuel reduction and community defensible space along a primary evacuation route.

Barona Band of Mission Indians

Partial funding to procure one Type 1 Fire Engine.

Campo Band of Mission Indians

Procure multi-agency interoperability hand-held radio equipment, PPE and partially fund a fire engine to better provide wildfire protection and emergency services to the Campo Reservation and neighboring communities.

City of El Cajon

Conduct outreach, create a Vegetation and Wildfire Management Plan including emergency evacuations, provide fire-rescue training and education, reduce flammable fuel loads, restore native habitat and procure one Type 1 fire engine, a skid steer, loaders and wildland PPE.

City of El Cajon *(Board will consider on January 21, 2026)*

Renovate Fire Station No. 7 to increase facility size, functionally, ensure compliance with building and fire codes and reduce response times.

City of Santee, Santee Fire Department

The Fire Department continues implementation of two projects:

- (1) Procure equipment and supplies for outfitting a fire engine, firefighter PPE and support wildland firefighting training for fire personnel.
- (2) The City of Santee received a grant through the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services to conduct fuel reduction activities across 415 acres. The Conservancy will provide partial funding for these activities.

Cleveland National Forest

Cleveland National Forest continues implementation of two projects:

- (1) Hazardous fuel reduction across approximately 1,855 acres

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including prescribed fires and pile burns, road brushing, road maintenance and procure wildfire equipment.

- (2) Implement emergency preparedness, fire prevention and safety through increased vegetation management, including procurement of PPE, fire hose appliances, hose tools, and fuels reduction equipment, including two utility task vehicles and one tracked chipper.

Girls Scouts of San Diego

Hazardous fuel reduction at Camp Winacka/Camp Whispering Oaks in Julian targeting 144 acres. Also included under this project is a new nursery with two greenhouses to propagate and plant native trees within the forested environment.

Lakeside's River Park Conservancy

Lakeside's River Park Conservancy will carry out fuel reduction activities on approximately 150 acres of land in the Wildland Urban Interface area that runs along the San Diego River and its tributaries, including Los Coches Creek.

Lakeside's River Park Conservancy *(Board will consider on March 18, 2026)*

Lakeside's River Park Conservancy is proposing a project to carry out fuel reduction activities on approximately 120 acres of land in the Wildland Urban Interface area that runs along the San Diego River and its tributaries, including Los Coches Creek.

Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation

Hazardous fuel reduction on approximately 270 acres in public parkland, including trails and staging areas in partnership with the City of San Diego, Department of Parks and Recreation.

National Forest Foundation *(Board will consider on January 21, 2026)*

The National Forest Foundation, in partnership with the Cleveland National Forest, is proposing a project to reduce hazardous fuels targeting approximately 246 acres within the Descanso District.

San Diego Bird Alliance (formerly San Diego Audubon Society)

Hazardous fuel removal on 65 acres and create 8 acres of defensible space at the Silverwood Wildlife Sanctuary in the Wildland-Urban Interface area of Lakeside along the San Diego River.

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San Diego Canyonlands *(Board will consider on January 21, 2026)*

San Diego Canyonlands proposed project targets approximately 60 acres of fuels treatment in the brush management zones of Shepherd and Rueda Canyons, in partnership with the City of San Diego's Open Space Division. These at-risk areas are very high-fire hazard severity zones; therefore, maintaining defensible space around homes and other buildings helps reduce wildfire risk and protects life and property.

San Diego Regional Fire Foundation

The Regional Fire Foundation continues implementation of four projects:

- (1) Procure three fire apparatuses, equipment, and supplies to help mitigate and suppress fires for ten fire stations located in the Conservancy's service area.
- (2) Hazardous fuel reduction in the City of Chula Vista.
- (3) Create a new evacuation route for Wynola Estates and improve defensible space on approximately 144 acres and support local Fire Safe Councils.
- (4) Hazardous fuel reduction and fire prevention and suppression through a partnership with six fire departments and over 20 Fire Safe Councils for specialty equipment, vehicles, one water tank, one HeliPod, PPE, hose, tools and supplies and support local Fire Safe Councils.

San Diego Fire-Rescue Foundation

In partnership with the City of San Diego's Fire-Rescue Department, the Foundation will reduce fuel loads, maintain and create firebreaks to help safeguard and protect vulnerable, at-risk, and underserved communities in the San Diego River watershed and procure one tow behind chipper, firefighting equipment, tools, and PPE.

Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians *(Board consideration on January 21, 2026)*

The proposed project seeks to procure one Type VI Fire Engine and build an additional structure next to the fire station for a new apparatus bay and training area.

Program 4: Protect and Preserve Cultural and Historical Resources

A grant was awarded to the Cleveland National Forest to engage qualified Kumeyaay cultural monitors with specialized traditional ecological knowledge of the San Diego and Tijuana Rivers watershed for Forest Service projects. This program protects sensitive cultural resources and strengthen tribal partnerships.

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Program 5: Enhance Water Quality and Natural Flood Conveyance

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

Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation Kumeyaay Lake Invasive Removal

Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation, in partnership with the City of San Diego's Open Space Division, will actively remove floating water primrose (*Ludwigia peploides*) from Kumeyaay Lake at Mission Trails Regional Park to improve native habitat, enhance water quality, support wildlife and bird foraging areas and enhance access to nature.

San Diego State University (SDSU) One Water Laboratory

SDSU will construct a 480-square-foot modular laboratory facility dedicated to research on sustainable water management, including an outdoor space that will provide hands-on experience with the technologies and systems shaping the future of water science in the San Diego region.

City of El Cajon – Water Quality Improvement Projects

The City of El Cajon is improving water quality in Forester Creek, a tributary to the San Diego River, by installing 232 full-capture trash devices at concrete curb inlets. These filters remove trash and debris from stormwater before it enters the creek. The city will operate and maintain these filters to ensure continued effectiveness benefiting local low-income and disadvantaged communities.

El Cajon will begin Phase B of the Broadway Creek Restoration Project to restore stream function, address erosion, and reestablish the earthen channel between residential areas. This work will increase the creek's stormwater capacity and reduce flooding in surrounding neighborhoods.

San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board

The Legislature appropriated \$175,000 for the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board to prepare a binational water quality report for the Tijuana River Basin.

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

The Conservancy seeks ways to assist its partners that align with their goals and mission.

San Diego Fire-Rescue Foundation

San Diego Fire-Rescue Foundation, in partnership with the City of San Diego's Fire-Rescue Department is proposing to procure updated PPE

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(helmets, boots, drysuits), rescue equipment, and Demaree Inflatable Boats. The San Diego Lifeguards use specialized rescue equipment for the Swiftwater Rescue Team (SRT). These resources are essential to carry out their mission. The SRT manages incidents involving water and floods through various methods. During rain/flood events, the SRT prevents vehicles from submerging in water through road closures and rescues people trapped by water. In addition, the SRT participates in river cleanup efforts in the San Diego River.

ADMINISTRATION/FISCAL DUTIES

- State Operations Budget \$441,000; Environmental License Plate Fund for FY 2025-26
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- Prepare agendas, board materials and hold public meetings
- Liaison to the Governing Board members
- Coordinate with other state agencies, grantees, partners and the public
- Review, respond and participate in various planning efforts in the San Diego River watershed
- Support state priorities and approved plans that align with Conservancy mission
- Provide Bond accountability updates to state departments and databases, reports, cash projections and other relevant information, as requested
- Prepare budgets, agreements, purchase documents, vendor payments, timesheets, accounting and various reports to control agencies
- Process bills, input purchase orders and pay invoices in the Fi\$Cal system
- The Conservancy contracts out its accounting, budget and human resources services to the Department of General Services - Office of Fiscal Services, Contracted Fiscal Services and Office of Human Resources.