Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority

Date: **December 3, 2020**

To: **Governing Board Members**

From: **Sally Gee, Project Manager**

Through: **Mark Stanley, Executive Officer**

Subject: **Item 10: Consideration of a resolution approving the application for grant funds from the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy for the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for all Act of 2018 (Proposition 68) for the Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Restoration Planning and Permitting Project**

RECOMMENDATION: That the Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority (LCWA) approve the application for grant funds from the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) for the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for all Act of 2018 (Proposition 68) for the Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Restoration Planning and Permitting Project

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) released a Proposition 68 Call for Projects in September 2020. Over $20 Million is available for RMC's Prop 68 (Round 2) Call for Projects. Regionwide RMC Grants are available throughout RMC's territory. RMC has also released a Small Grants Program as a subset of RMC's Prop 68 allocations, and total funding will be limited to 15% of RMC's allocation. RMC's Small Grants Program are grants between $50,000 and $300,000. Project's evaluated under the Small Grants Evaluation Criteria that receive an average score of 70 percent or better (as opposed to 80 percent or better for the regular grant program) will be considered competitive. Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis, and applications will be evaluated quarterly or biannually. Approval of this resolution would allow LCWA to submit one application for $250,000 to be considered for the RMC Proposition 68 Small Grants Program.

Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Restoration Planning and Permitting Project is the next phase in the restoration of the Los Cerritos Wetlands (LCW) (Exhibit A Project Area). It will build off conceptual designs for the 100-acre LCWA owned Hellman site and 5-acre State Lands Commission Parcel developed as part of the LCW Restoration Plan Program EIR, which a recommendation to certify was heard at the board meeting today. This project will complete 65% restoration designs, compliance with CEQA, and preparation of permit applications for the project area.

The project area is primarily owned by the LCWA. The project area is the highest priority in the wetlands complex for detailed planning because no additional land needs to be acquired to implement restoration. Conceptual restoration designs call for preserving and enhancing existing wetlands and special status plant species habitat, while restoring additional tidal marsh, transition zone, and upland on the site (Exhibit B). Restoration and enhancement will provide critical fish and wildlife habitat for a wide variety of species, including rare, threatened, and endangered

species. Planning for public trails would also be included. The LCWA will continue to engage with the Technical Advisory Committee, our stewards, and the public in the development of the restoration design.

The proposed project includes preparation of a biological resources study, cultural resources study, hazardous materials study, and a wetland delineation. The project also includes preparation of documents for California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance, which may tier off the existing PEIR, if it is certified by the LCWA. In addition, LCWA will prepare permit applications to the US Army Corps of Engineers (Clean Water Act Section 404), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Streambed Alteration Agreement), California Coastal Commission (Coastal Development Permit), Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board (Clean Water Act Section 401 Permit), and City of Seal Beach (Grading permit, Tree removal permit). LCWA will also conduct outreach to stakeholders, tribal governments, and the public, holding at least six outreach events and meetings, including at least two tribal advisory group meetings, two Technical Advisory Committee meetings, and two community meetings, to solicit input on restoration designs.

Project outreach will build off the extensive outreach that has been conducted by LCWA in the past in the preparation of the Conceptual Restoration Plan (CRP) and the PEIR. Six community workshops and eight technical advisory committee meetings were held to work with the public, tribes, scientists, and public agencies on the preparation of the CRP. Four public meetings and three technical advisory committee meetings were held during the preparation of the PEIR, in addition to multiple targeted meetings with interested stakeholder groups such as the Los Cerritos Wetlands Land Trust, El Dorado Audubon, tribal representatives, and the Sierra Club Los Cerritos Wetlands Task Force.

During these meetings, in general, tribal representatives expressed the need for care, respect, and tribal monitoring given the potential for tribal artifacts and possibly human remains to occur in the LCW Complex overall, as well as support for overall restoration goals and a desire to remain informed and involved. Tribal representatives specifically made the following requests which were incorporated into the PEIR as mitigation measures:

- Tribal input on the proposed program's ecological design and the selection of plants/native plants;
- Remaining informed of the proposed program as it progresses;
- Participation in surveys;
- Native American monitoring;
- Communicating the history and cultural connection of the program area for generations to come; and
- Preservation of tribal access.

LCWA has reached out the tribes who requested consultation on the PEIR to invite them to participate in a tribal advisory group, to provide input on and review of technical studies and restoration designs for the project.

BACKGROUND: The project area is in the City of Seal Beach, in the highly developed and densely populated Los Angeles region. The Los Cerritos Wetlands are one of two large wetland complexes remaining in this region that offer restoration opportunities. The area was historically tidal salt marsh that was filled in the early- to mid-20th century and used first as a beet farm and cattle ranch, and then for oil exploration and production. The site contains former sumps, landfills, and contaminated areas from prior oil operations, and is now managed by the LCWA as open space. Some areas of tidal southern coastal salt marsh persist on the site. Other areas consist of

ruderal uplands. These areas were converted by previous landowners from coastal salt marsh habitat by extensive filling using dredged material from the excavation of the adjacent Haynes Cooling Channel in the 1960s. Former access roads still bisect the site. Remnant geomorphic features indicate historic southern coastal bluffs.

The existing tidal channel is narrow and has a muted connection to the San Gabriel River via a culvert. This tidal connection has created conditions that support ~27 acres of degraded salt marsh, which provides habitat for several special status species that have been documented in the project area, including the Belding's savannah sparrow, California least tern, loggerhead shrike, Northern harrier, yellow-breasted chat, salt marsh wandering skipper, California boxthorn, Coulter's goldfields, Lewis' evening primrose, and southern tarplant. Conceptual designs call for enhancing these existing wetlands by increasing tidal exchange but avoiding grading this area to preserve these resources.

The project area is adjacent to ~70 acres of existing public or conserved lands, including the San Gabriel River and Gum Grove Park. Restoration of the project area will improve landscape scale ecosystem functions such as landscape connectivity and habitat patch size by offering expanded wildlife corridors and habitat sinks for both terrestrial and aquatic organisms.

The loss of wetlands in the project area reflects the regional loss of over 62% of Southern California's historic coastal wetlands and the more severe loss of 93% of coastal wetlands in the San Pedro Bay subregion. While the highly developed context of the project area makes it impossible to restore the dynamic wetlands and uplands complex that was once found there, the topography and soils offer a unique opportunity to restore and enhance multiple wetland and upland habitat types that were once found in the Los Cerritos Wetlands Complex, along with the tidal exchange that helped support them. The project will further key goals of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project's 2018 Regional Strategy, helping ensure that we will still have healthy coastal wetlands in Southern California in 2100.

The LCWA will work with the JPA member agencies (the Conservancy, Lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, cities of Long Beach and Seal Beach) and its consultant team to conduct technical studies and prepare restoration designs. Draft restoration designs will be developed by the consultant team, and reviewed by LCWA, a Technical Advisory Committee, a tribal committee, and the community. The consultant team will incorporate this input into the 65% restoration design, which will include engineering design plans and a Basis of Design report. The designs will build on the existing conceptual designs and hydrologic modeling developed for the PEIR. Additional hydrologic modeling will be required to incorporate the design topography and tidal connections.

While the details of the restoration actions will be developed as part of the project, the conceptual restoration plan has identified an overall approach. The restoration approach includes the following actions (Exhibit B):

1) Remediating soils impacted by oil operations.

2) Grading to remove fill that was placed on the historical wetlands to restore those wetlands and the tidal channel network that will connect those wetlands through an existing culvert to the San Gabriel River, and eventually through the Haynes Cooling Channel as well. Grading would be avoided in existing tidal areas and some other portions of the project area to preserve existing habitats and populations of special status species, as well as to avoid hazardous materials.

3) Constructing a new earthen berm or flood wall to mitigate the project's potential flooding impacts where the property adjoins the Hellman Property, which is an active oil field.

4) Improving the tidal connection by removing or replacing two of the existing culverts along the existing Hellman Channel. These improved tidal connections will allow the restoration and enhancement of tidal marshes on the site, as well as improving fish passage to valuable nursery habitat. Existing salt flats, formed by unnatural compaction of saline fill soils, would be enhanced to restore more productive salt pannes that could support the characteristic invertebrate communities associated with these features. Salt pannes in the area were used by the Tongva for salt harvesting, and this traditional use by indigenous people could potentially be restored.

5) Restoring and enhancing wetland-upland transition zones and adjacent uplands.

The project would also include planning for a mid-term improvement of the tidal connection via the Haynes Cooling Channel. This would not occur until 2029, when the Cooling Channel would no longer be used by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power generating plant. In addition, the project will plan for public access trails, which will benefit the park-poor Los Angeles area. Trails will be incorporated into the engineering design plans.

The project focuses on restoring functioning tidal salt marsh that is as resilient as possible to future sea level rise (SLR). The project will plan for the restoration of medium- and high-elevation tidal marsh at this site, as well as transition zones and upland grassland and shrubland, to allow for upslope wetland migration with SLR. The restoration of transition zone wetlands was identified as a critical priority for the region by the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project.

After the project is completed, the next phase would be final design and implementation. While funding has not been secured for this future phase, it is anticipated that additional funding would be available from local, state, and federal funding programs, such as Los Angeles County Measure A and W funds, WCB, CNRA's EEM program, the Conservancy, the RMC, the USFWS National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program, and others.

FISCAL:
Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Restoration Planning Project
RMC Funding Request: $250,000
Matching Funds: California Department of Fish and Wildlife: $405,828.00
State Coastal Conservancy: $250,000.00

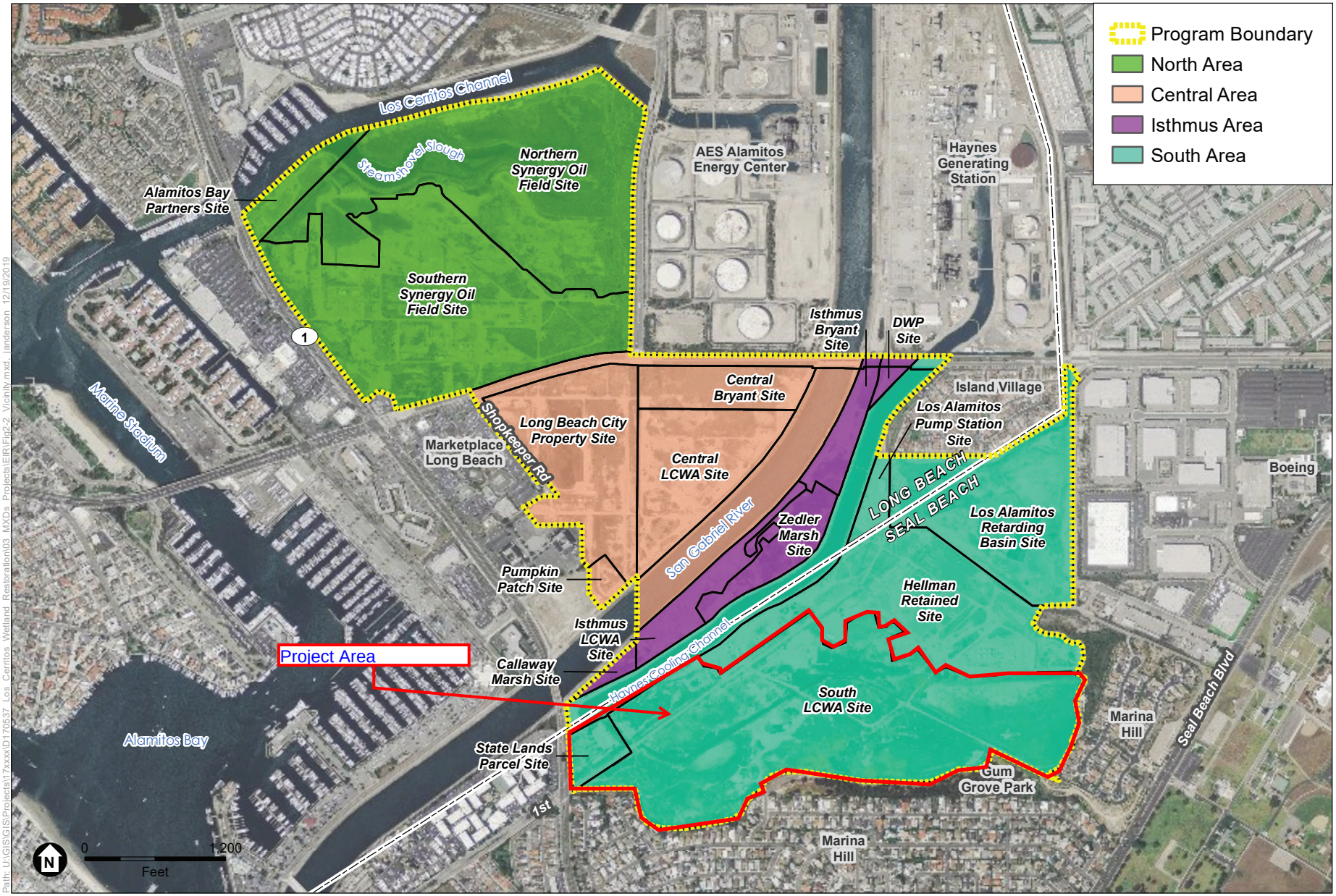
Path: U:\GIS\GIS\Projects\17xxxx\D170537_Los_Cerritos_Wetland_Restoration\03_MXDs_Projects\EIR\Fig2-1_RegLoc.mxd hmiller 3/12/2019

SOURCE: ESRI

Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Plan Program EIR

Regional Location

ESA



SOURCE: Mapbox, LCWA

Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Plan Program EIR

Figure 2

Project Site and Local Vicinity

SOURCE: Mapbox, LCWA

Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Plan Program EIR

Figure 2-4
South Area

Legend

Wetlands to be Enhanced (~20 Acres)

Minimal to No Grading Wetland Areas - South

Los Cerritos Wetlands Habitat Restoration Plan

Figure 7-1

750 feet

N

Photo Source: Google Earth May 2019

Coastal Restoration Consultants

Legend

- Sub-tidal
- Tidal Channel
- Cordgrass Marsh
- Mid Marsh
- High Marsh
- Transition Zone
- Upland
- Infrastructure

Phase 1 Short-Term LCWA South Site

Los Cerritos Wetlands Habitat Restoration Plan

Figure 8-2

750 feet

N

Photo Source: Google Earth May 2019

Coastal Restoration Consultants

Legend

- Sub-tidal
- Tidal Channel
- Cordgrass Marsh
- Mid Marsh
- High Marsh
- Transition Zone
- Salt Panne
- Upland
- Infrastructure
- C. lewisii Preservation
- C. lewisii Mitigation
- Upland on Fill
- Bioswale/Riparian
- Experimental Plot

Phase 1&2 Mid-Term LCWA South Site

Los Cerritos Wetlands Habitat Restoration Plan

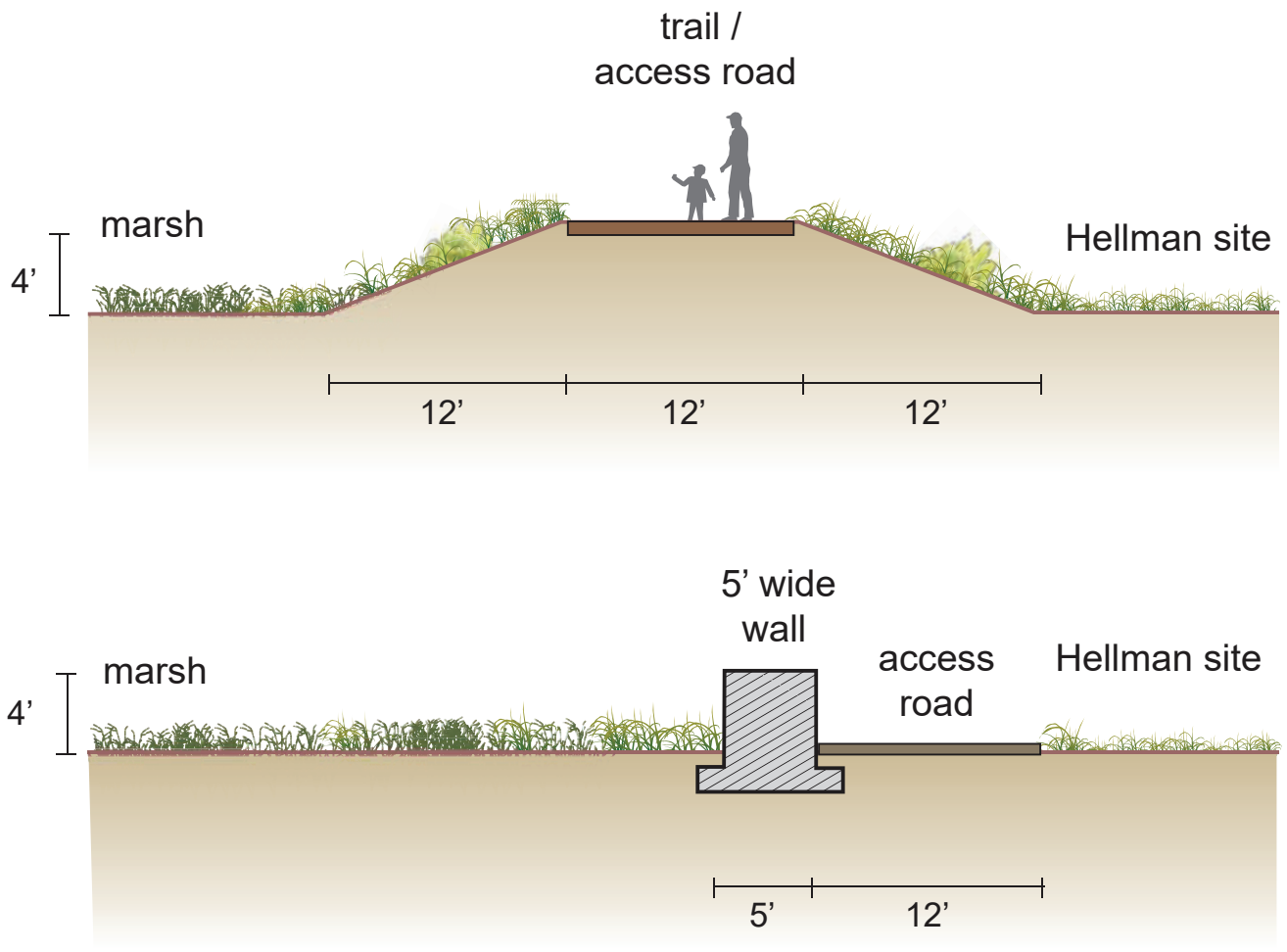
750 feet

N

Figure 8-3

Photo Source: Google Earth May 2019

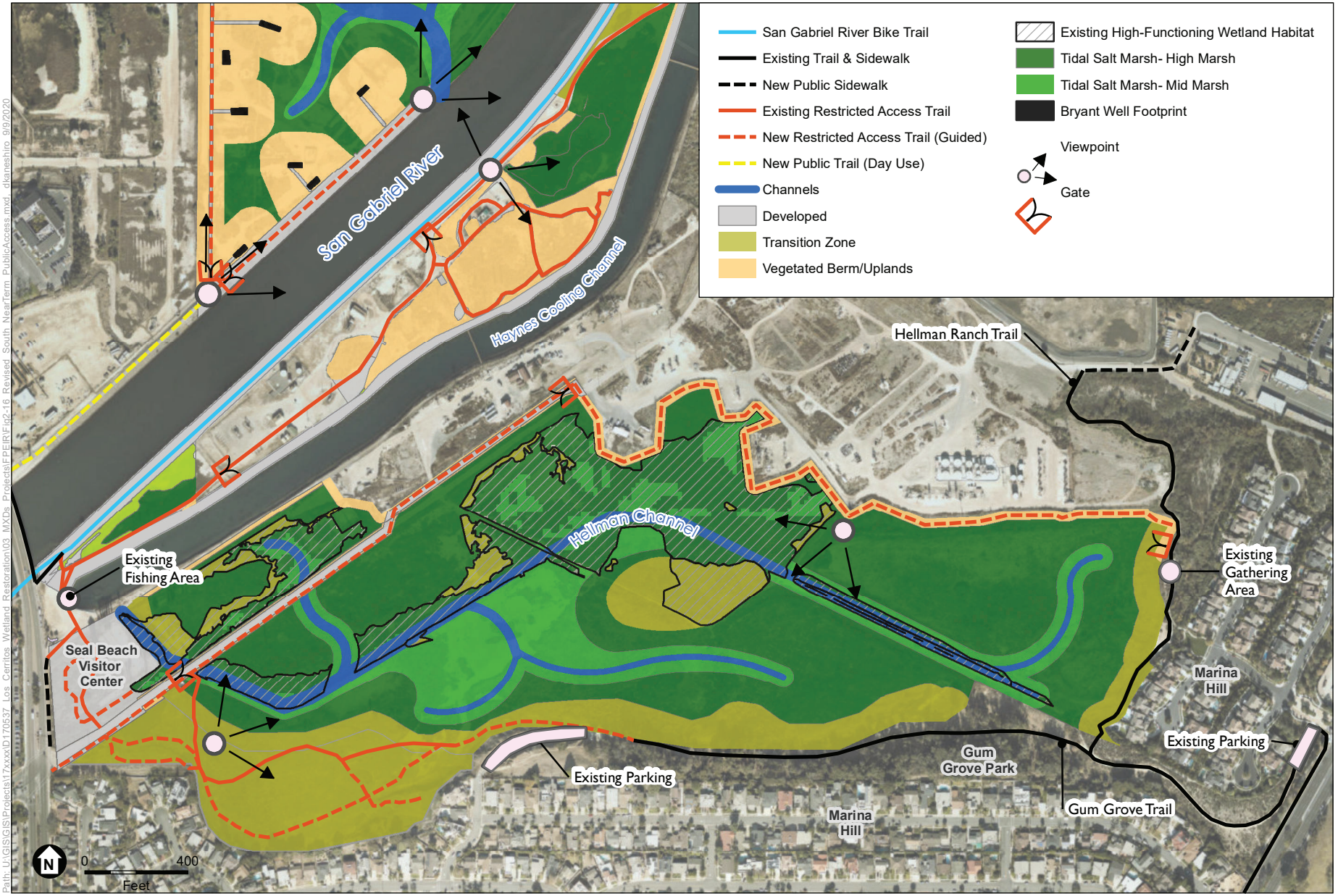
Coastal Restoration Consultants



SOURCE: ESA, 2019

Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Plan Draft Program EIR

Figure 2-15
Artistic Rendering Berms



SOURCE: ESRI,LCWA, ESA

Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Plan Draft Program EIR

Figure 2-16

Revised Proposed South Area Near-Term Public Access

December 3, 2020 – Item 10

RESOLUTION 2020 – 09

RESOLUTION OF THE LOS CERRITOS WETLANDS AUTHORITY APPROVING THE APPLICATION FOR GRANT FUNDS FROM THE SAN GABRIEL AND LOWER LOS ANGELES RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY FOR THE CALIFORNIA DROUGHT, WATER, PARKS, CLIMATE, COASTAL PROTECTION, AND OUTDOOR ACCESS FOR ALL ACT OF 2018 (PROPOSITION 68) FOR THE LOS CERRITOS WETLANDS SOUTHERN AREA RESTORATION PLANNING AND PERMITTING PROJECT

WHEREAS, the Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority (Authority) has been established between the Coastal Conservancy, the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, the City of Seal Beach and the City of Long Beach to facilitate the acquisition, protection, conservation, restoration, maintenance and operation an environmental enhancement of the Los Cerritos Wetlands; and

WHEREAS, The people of the State of California have enacted the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access For All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68), which provides funds for the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) Grant Program; and

WHEREAS, The RMC has been delegated the responsibility for the administration of the grant program in its jurisdiction, setting up necessary procedures; and

WHEREAS, said procedures established by the RMC require the Applicant's Governing Body to certify by resolution the approval of the Application before submission of said Application to the State; and

WHEREAS, the LCWA will enter into a contract with the State of California for the Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Restoration Planning and Permitting Project;

WHEREAS, this action is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); and NOW

Therefore be it resolved that the Board of the LCWA hereby:

1. FINDS that the actions contemplated by the resolution is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act.

2. APPROVES the filing of an Application for local assistance funds from the RMC Proposition 68 Grant Program for the Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Restoration Planning and Permitting Project under the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access For All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68).

3. CERTIFIES that the Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Restoration Planning and Permitting Project is consistent with local or regional land use plans or Programs.

4. CERTIFIES that Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Restoration Planning and Permitting Project is consistent with the goals of Proposition 68 developing urban

recreation projects and habitat protection or restoration projects in accordance with statewide priorities.

5. CERTIFIES that the LCWA has sufficient funds to operate and maintain the Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Restoration Planning and Permitting Project that is being submitted for funding consideration.

6. CERTIFIES that the LCWA has reviewed and understands the General Requirements and General Policies of the RMC Proposition 68 Grant Program Guidelines.

7. APPOINTS the LCWA Chair as the authorized signatory and the LCWA Project Manager as the representative to conduct all negotiations, execute, and submit all documents including, but not limited to applications, agreements, and payment requests and so on, which may be necessary for the completion of the Project.

8. ADOPTS the staff report dated December 3, 2020.

~ End of Resolution ~

Passed and Adopted by the Board of the LOS CERRITOS WETLANDS AUTHORITY on December 3, 2020.

_____
Sam Schuchat, LCWA Chair

ATTEST: _____
Christina Bull Arndt
Deputy Attorney General