

Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority

Date: January 7, 2021

To: Governing Board Members

From: Sally Gee, Project Manager

Through: Mark Stanley, Executive Officer

Subject: Item 9: Consideration of a resolution authorizing acceptance of a grant from the State Coastal Conservancy for the Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Planning and Permitting Project

RECOMMENDATION: That the Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority (LCWA) authorize acceptance of a grant from the State Coastal Conservancy for the Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Planning and Permitting Project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: In August 2020, the LCWA submitted an application for the Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Planning and Permitting Project to the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) in the amount of \$250,000. On November 19, 2020, a recommendation to award the grant to the LCWA was approved by the SCC Governing Board.

The Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area 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.

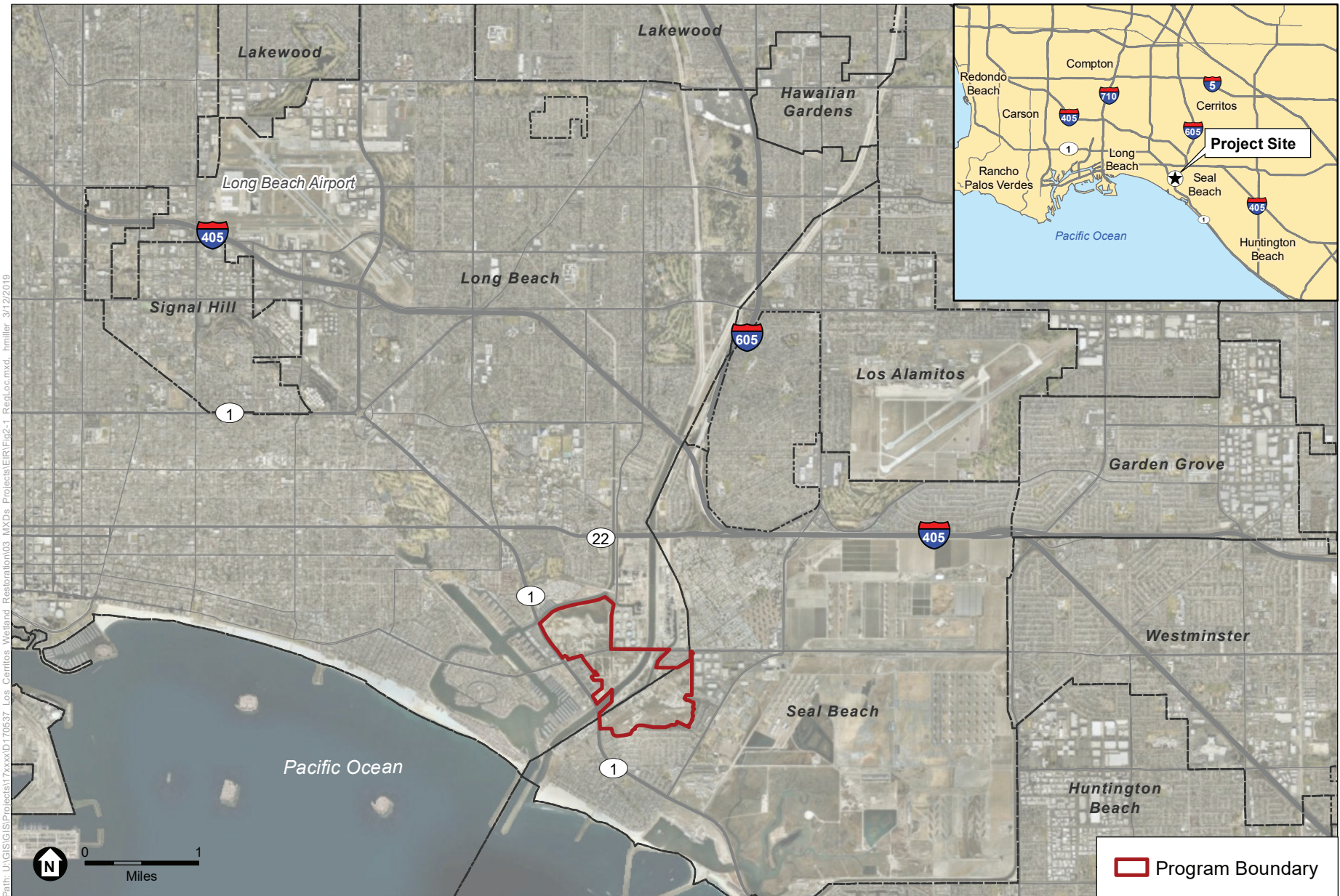
5) Restoring and enhancing wetland-upland transition zones and adjacent uplands.

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.

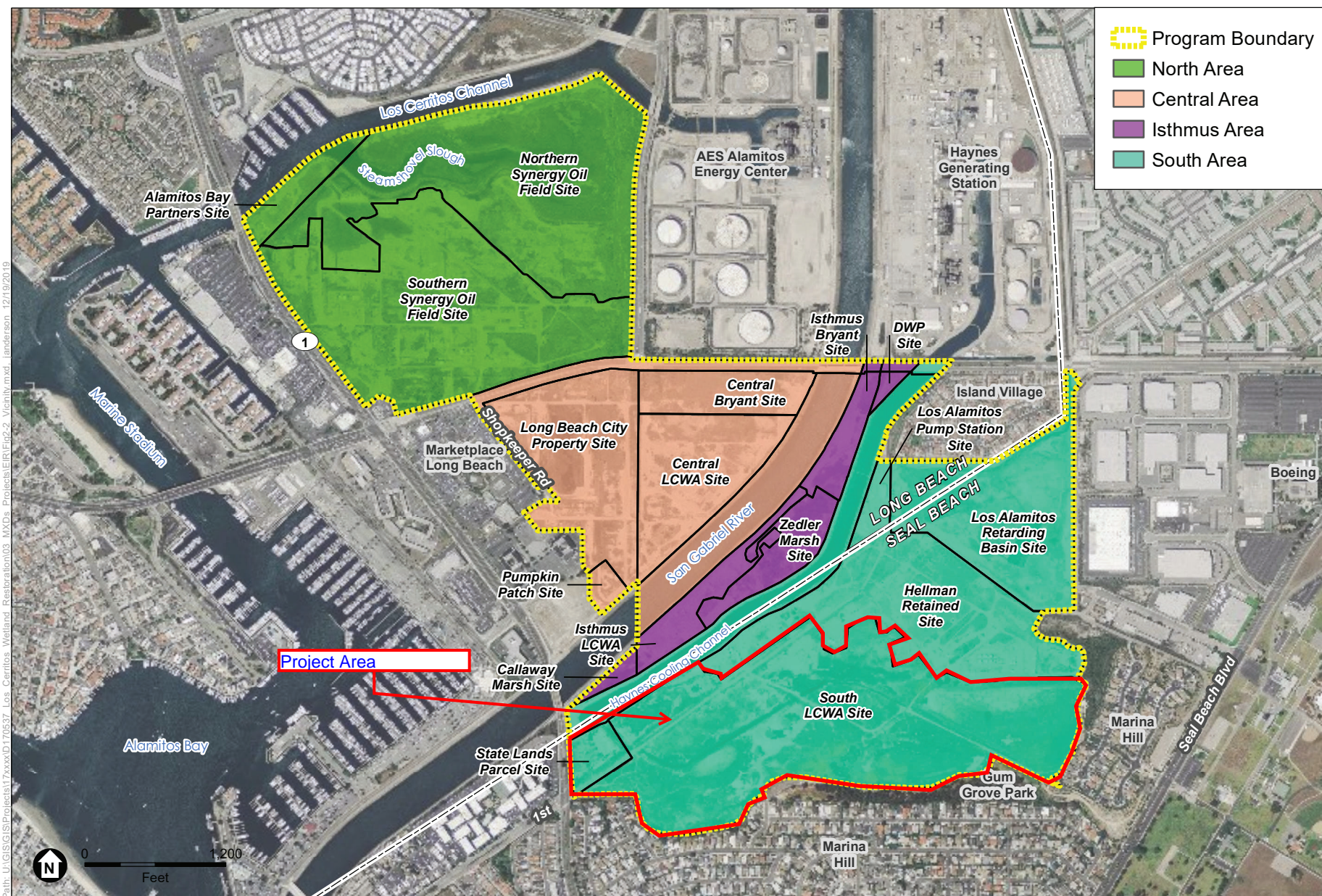
FISCAL: The FY 20/21 budget revisions will reflect the \$250,000 in grant funds from the State Coastal Conservancy. Roughly 5% of the grant will be budgeted toward project management, and a majority of the budget will be directed to the preparation of 65% designs. Funds for public outreach are included in this budget.



SOURCE: ESRI

Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Plan Program EIR

Regional Location



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



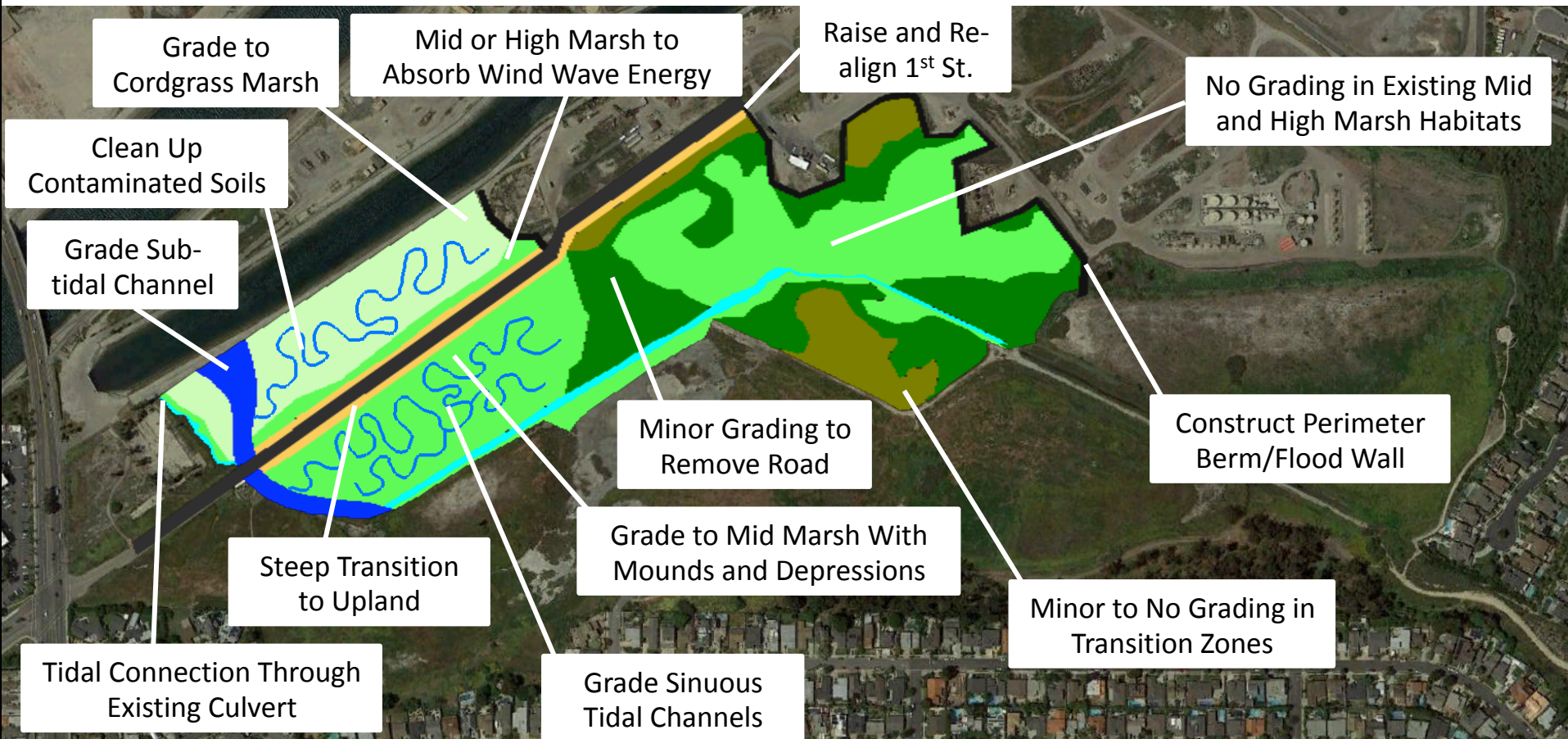
750 feet



Figure 7-1



Photo Source: Google Earth May 2019



Legend

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

Phase 1 Short-Term LCWA South Site

Los Cerritos Wetlands Habitat Restoration Plan

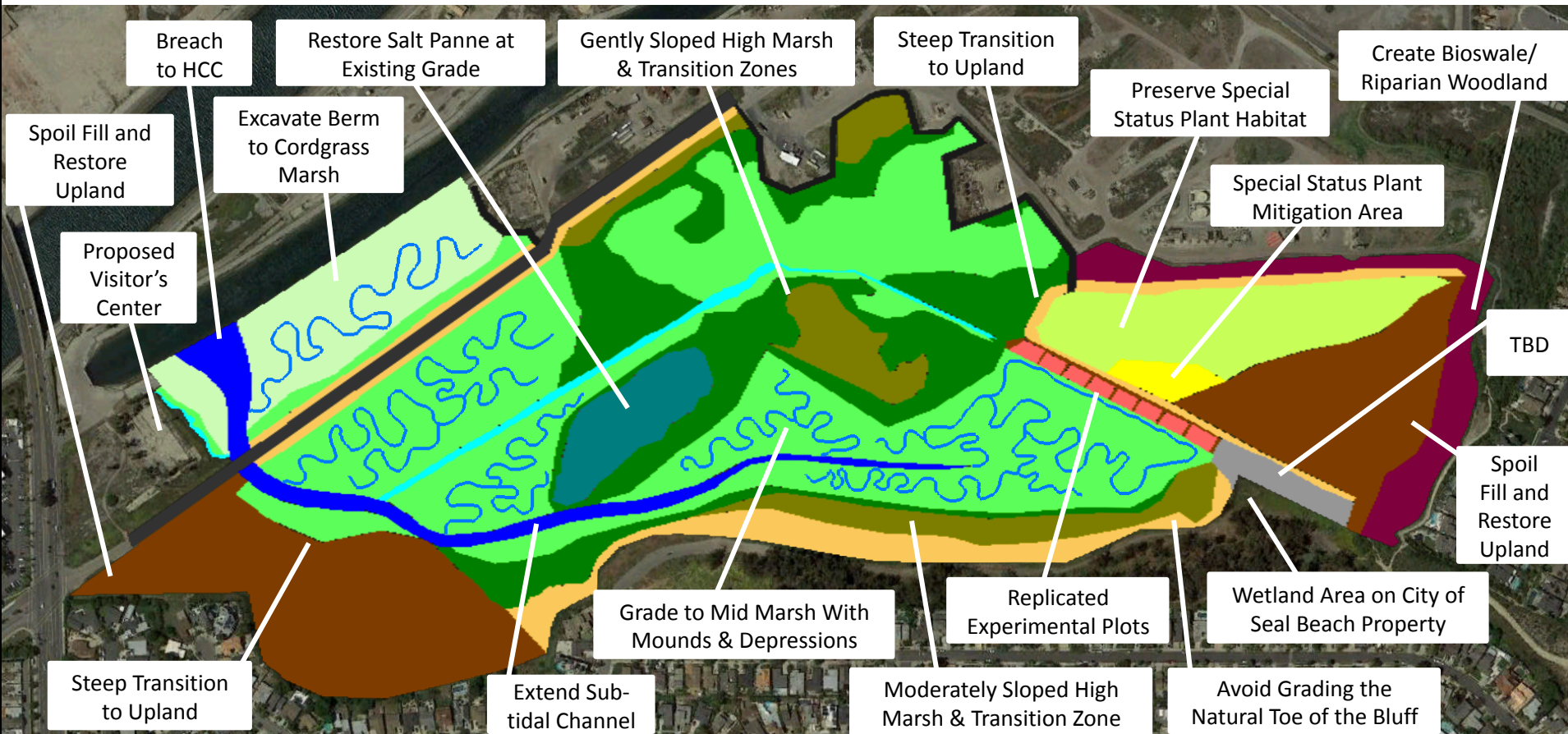
Figure 8-2

750 feet



Photo Source: Google Earth May 2019





Legend

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

Phase 1&2 Mid-Term LCWA South Site

Los Cerritos Wetlands Habitat Restoration Plan

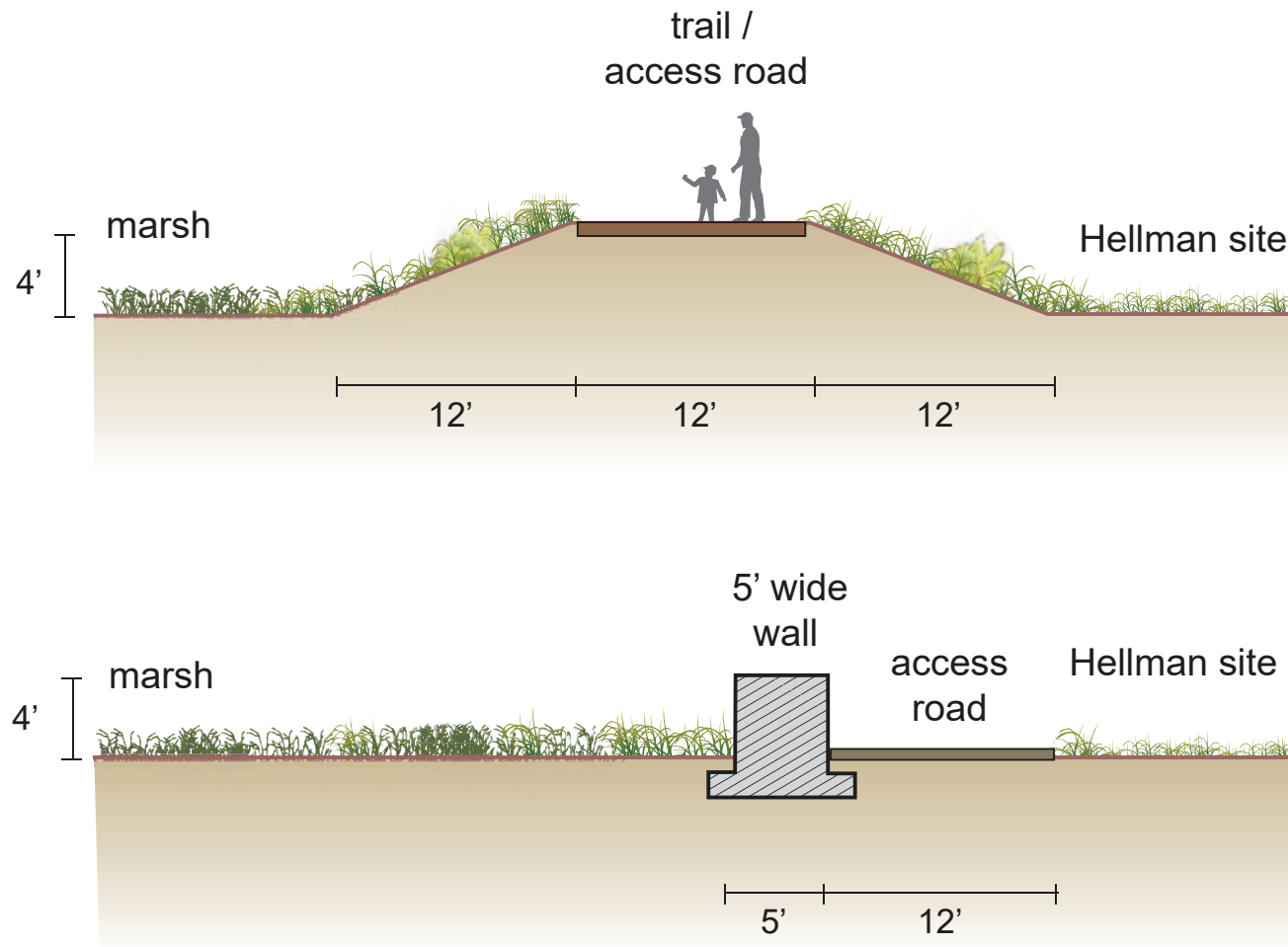
Figure 8-3

750 feet



Photo Source: Google Earth May 2019



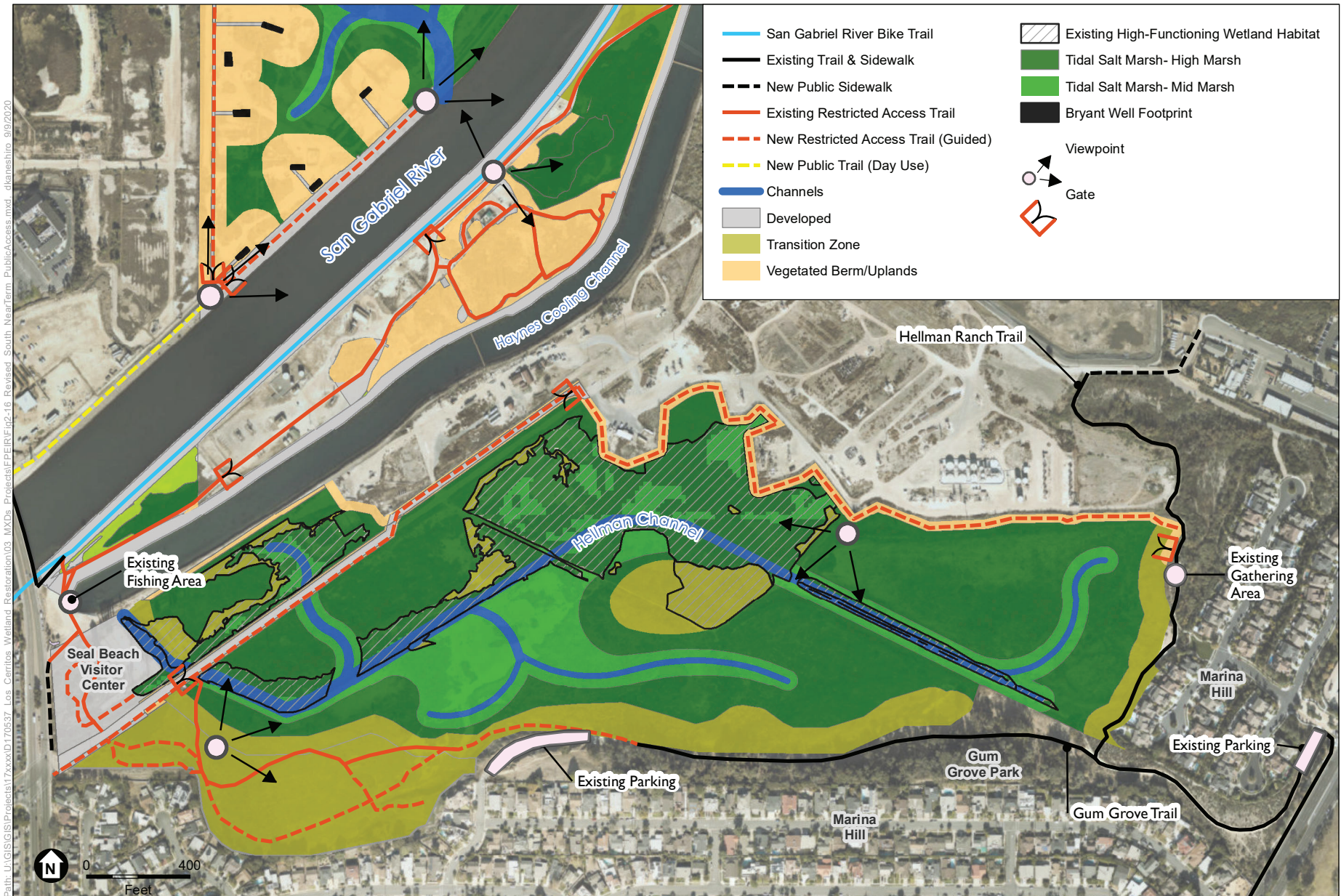


LAX/D170537.00 - Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Program EIR/05 Graphics-GIS Modeling/Illustrator

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

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RESOLUTION 2021 – 04

RESOLUTION OF THE LOS CERRITOS WETLANDS AUTHORITY
AUTHORIZING ACCEPTANCE OF A GRANT FROM THE STATE
COASTAL CONSERVANCY FOR THE LOS CERRITOS WETLANDS
SOUTHERN AREA PLANNING AND PERMITTING PROJECT

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

WHEREAS, the Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority has further been established to focus on projects which will provide open space, habitat restoration, and watershed improvement projects within the Los Cerritos Wetlands; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature of the State of California has established the State Coastal Conservancy (“Conservancy”) under Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code, and has authorized the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to implement the provisions of Division 21; and

WHEREAS, the Conservancy awards grants for projects that it determines are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code and with the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan and that best achieve the Conservancy’s statutory objectives, in light of limited funding.

WHEREAS, Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority (“applicant”) has applied for Conservancy grant funding for the Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Planning and Permitting Project (“the project”).

WHEREAS, the Conservancy encourages applicants for grant funding to certify through a resolution the applicant’s approval of the application at the time of submission of an application to the Conservancy for an award of grant funds.

WHEREAS, the Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority desires to accept grant funds from, and enter into an agreement with, the State Coastal Conservancy for the Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Planning and Permitting Project; and

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 this resolution is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act.
2. FINDS that this action is consistent with the purposes and objectives of the LCWA.

3. RATIFYING the filing of an application for funding by the Conservancy.
4. AUTHORIZES acceptance of grant funds from the State Coastal Conservancy for the Los Cerritos Wetlands Southern Area Planning and Permitting Project and amends the LCWA Budget as necessary.
5. APPOINTS the Executive Officer, or designee, to execute and submit all documents including, but not limited to, applications, agreements, amendments, payment requests and so forth, which may be necessary for the completion of the aforementioned grant agreement.
6. ADOPTS the staff report dated January 7, 2021.

~ End of Resolution ~

Passed and Adopted by the Board of the LOS CERRITOS WETLANDS AUTHORITY on January 7, 2021.

Sam Schuchat, LCWA Chair

ATTEST: _____
David Edsall, Jr.
Deputy Attorney General