

## Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority

**Date:** November 2, 2023

**To:** Governing Board Members

**From:** Mark Stanley, Executive Officer

**Subject:** Item 07: Consideration of resolutions authorizing acceptance of grants, totaling \$31,852,000, from the State Coastal Conservancy and Ocean Protection Council for the Southern Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Project.

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**RECOMMENDATION:** That the Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority (LCWA) authorize acceptance of grants, totaling \$31,852,000, from the State Coastal Conservancy and Ocean Protection Council for the Southern Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Project.

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

Exhibit A: Project Site Map

Exhibit B: Project Phasing Designs

On September 14, 2023, the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) Governing Board approved a grant award of up to \$31,852,000 for the LCWA's Southern Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Project (SLCWR Project). The funding was awarded to conduct planning and permitting for restoration and construction of Phase 1 which is inclusive of 54 acres of site. The plan includes management of the wetlands for providing public access on the 103.5-acre site (Exhibit A).

The Ocean Protection Council (OPC) anticipates consideration of a grant of up to \$6,000,000 for the SLCWR Project at their next Council Meeting in December, utilizing funds collected through the Once Through Cooling Mitigation Policy. The OPC grant award would offset the funding award from SCC by that amount for planning and permitting of the SLCWR Project, and construction of Phase 1.

Planning and permitting for the SLCWRP will include technical studies, permitting, developing construction documents, and competitive contractor bidding. Phase 1 implementation activities will focus on restoration of 54 acres, enhancing existing habitat areas currently supported by a muted tidal channel connection via a culvert connected to the San Gabriel River. These activities include remediating contaminated soils, grading of fill dirt to return areas to wetland elevations, revegetation with wetland and upland plants, construction of flood management facilities (including earthen berms), and modification of existing infrastructure and utilities (Exhibit B).

Phase 1 of the public access improvements will create a trail connection from the San Gabriel River in the west through the State Lands Parcel and follow an existing trail on the project site, install access gates and interpretive signage along the trail, and develop a formal gathering site on the State Lands parcel that may include signage, shade, equipment storage, and seating. In addition, a new restricted trail will be constructed along the top of the new perimeter berm with a viewpoint that will be restricted to docent-led tours and maintenance access. Tribal specific access will also be implemented Phase 1. A Tribal Access Plan will be developed during planning

in consultation with a Tribal Advisory Group, and such features may include a story porch, special access areas, and tribal cultural interpretive signage.

Funding will also support construction management, environmental compliance (including the biological, cultural, paleontological, and tribal monitoring), and pre- and post-restoration ecological monitoring in conformance with permit and CEQA requirements. Project management, wetland management, and stakeholder engagement will take place throughout the design and construction phases and after construction is complete. Long-term management of the wetlands will employ adaptive management efforts informed by annual monitoring program reports, as well as facilitate administration of the management funds and public stewardship activities.

**BACKGROUND:** The SLCWR Project is the first large scale restoration effort to be implemented in the Los Cerritos Wetlands after more than a decade of planning and stakeholder engagement. The SLCWR Project will restore degraded uplands and tidal salt marsh, increasing coastal resilience to climate change by creating new areas for coastal salt marsh migration in the face of sea level rise. This will additionally offer opportunities for Tribal access and co-management and will result in open space access for communities in Seal Beach, Long Beach, and inland along the San Gabriel River bike trail.

The SLCWR Project is located in the City of Seal Beach, in a the highly developed and densely populated 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.

Past planning efforts conducted by the LCWA include the Los Cerritos Wetlands Conceptual Restoration Plan (CRP), the Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Plan Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR), and the Southern Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration Project Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND). The SLCWR Project MND was certified by the LCWA Governing Board on August 24, 2023 (LCWA Resolution 2023-03). The MND can be access on the LCWA's website here: <https://intoloscerritoswetlands.org/southern-los-cerritos-wetlands-restoration-project/>.

**FISCAL:** The anticipated term of the grants awarded are from Winter 2023 – Spring 2029. The annual budget will be updated throughout the terms of the grants to reflect the total grant funds of \$31,852,000 from the State Coastal Conservancy and Ocean Protection Council for the SLCWR Project. The total grant budget is broken down roughly as 25% for administration, planning, permitting, and monitoring, and 75% for construction related hard and soft costs.