



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## LAND USE AGENDA ITEM

### BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

PALOMA AGUIRRE  
First District

JOEL ANDERSON  
Second District

TERRA LAWSON-REMER  
Third District

MONICA MONTGOMERY STEPPE  
Fourth District

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Fifth District

**DATE:** January 28, 2026

**06**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

### **SUBJECT**

**ADOPT RESOLUTION TO ACCEPT GRANT FUNDS FROM LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM AND ESTABLISH APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE HABITAT ENHANCEMENT TO BENEFIT TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD PROJECT AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICT: 2)**

### **OVERVIEW**

The State of California's Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) Local Assistance Grant Program was created to assist local public and non-profit entities in implementing NCCPs throughout California. The Local Assistance Grant Program, administered by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), allocates funds for projects associated with the planning and implementation of established conservation programs such as the County of San Diego's (County) Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP). The MSCP is a long-term, regional habitat conservation program focused on balancing the protection of plant and animal species with recreation, development, and agricultural activities within the San Diego region. On October 22, 1997 (1), the County Board of Supervisors (Board) adopted the 50-year MSCP South County Subarea Plan, which includes the unincorporated areas in the southwestern portion of the region. In total, there are three Plan Areas within the County's MSCP, including the adopted South County Subarea, the draft North County, and the proposed East County MSCP Plan Areas.

The County Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) evaluated eligible projects that are part of the MSCP in conjunction with the requirements of the Local Assistance Grant Program and determined that the Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Tricolored Blackbird Project (Project) would meet a known conservation need and be competitive for available grant funding. Previous Local Assistance Grant-funded projects have been performed on multiple County Preserves, including Lakeside Linkage Preserve and Otay Ranch Preserve, and benefited MSCP-covered species, including coastal cactus wren and federally endangered Quino checkerspot butterfly. The Project includes managing the existing old-growth bulrush and installing cattails and nettle species to diversify the plant species and removing invasive non-native plant species at an on-site pond in Boulder Oaks Preserve (Preserve). Enhancing the pond vegetation would improve habitat for wildlife species, particularly the tricolored blackbird, a rare species that contributes to local biodiversity and is found year-round in the Ramona area. On July 17, 2025, DPR submitted an NCCP Local Assistance Grant Program (LAG) application to CDFW for the Project and received notification from CDFW on October 7, 2025, that the Project was awarded \$79,989 in grant

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funding. The awarded LAG funding will fully fund the Project's activities with nominal County staff time for project administration.

Today's requested action is to adopt a resolution authorizing DPR to accept up to \$79,989 of Local Assistance Grant funds from CDFW that will be expended through the term of the Project, April 2026 through March 2028. Although the County Board delegated general authority to pursue and accept grant funding on October 23, 2024 (7), a requirement of the grant application is that applicants must provide a project-specific resolution from the governing body that identifies the project to be implemented with the grant funds. In addition, today's actions will establish appropriations in DPR and authorize the Director of DPR, or designee, to conduct all negotiations and to execute and submit all documents that may be necessary to accept the grant funds.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**  
**CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

1. Find that the proposed Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Tricolored Blackbird Project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15304 because the project involves minor alterations in the condition of vegetation, which does not involve the removal of healthy, mature, or scenic trees.
2. Adopt the Resolution entitled: RESOLUTION OF THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AUTHORIZING THE ACCEPTANCE OF GRANT FUNDS FROM THE LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM FOR HABITAT ENHANCEMENT TO BENEFIT TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD PROJECT.
3. Establish appropriations of \$79,989 in the Department of Parks and Recreation, Services and Supplies, for the Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Tricolored Blackbird Project, based on funding from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. **(4 VOTES)**
4. Authorize the Director, Department of Parks and Recreation, or designee, as agent of the County of San Diego, to conduct all negotiations and submit all documents necessary to accept grant funds, including but not limited to, grant contracts, payment requests, and to execute the grant agreements, including any extensions or amendments thereof that do not materially impact or alter the grant programs or funding levels.

**EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The Department of Parks and Recreation's proposed efforts to accept grant funds through the Local Assistance Grant Program to enhance natural habitat in Boulder Oaks Preserve, through the enhancement activities of the Project, will benefit threatened animal species, reduce fuel loads, and enhance fire resiliency of the vegetation in the Preserve. The Project is anticipated to have a positive impact on all residents and visitors by improving water and air quality and providing wildfire protection.

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### **SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The proposed action of the Department of Parks and Recreation to accept grant funds through the Local Assistance Grant Program to enhance natural habitat in Boulder Oaks Preserve (Preserve) contributes to the County of San Diego Sustainability Goal No. 6 to protect ecosystems, habitats, and biodiversity. The Project will enhance the native vegetation in the area, thus expanding available nesting habitat for a threatened animal species and increasing the biodiversity in the Preserve.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

Funds for this request are not included in the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operational Plan in the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). If approved, this request will result in costs and revenue of \$79,989 related to Recommendation 3. The funding source is grant funds from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). If approved, the proposed action will also adopt a resolution authorizing DPR to accept \$79,989 of Local Assistance Grant (LAG) funding from CDFW for the Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Tricolored Blackbird Project related to Recommendation 2.

The Local Assistance Grant program strongly encourages matching funds for all project proposals. Matching funds will be provided through in-kind services in the form of County staff time up to the amount of \$4,838 for the Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Tricolored Blackbird Project. The funding source is existing General Purpose Revenue in DPR. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

With the \$79,989 of LAG funding and \$4,838 of County matching funds for DPR staff time, the total budget for the Project will be \$84,827 if approved.

### **BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

### **ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

### **BACKGROUND**

The State of California's Natural Community Conservation Planning Local Assistance Grant (NCCP LAG) Program was established in 1996 to assist local public and non-profit entities with implementing Natural Community Conservation Plans throughout California, as authorized under Fish and Game Code section 2800 et seq. A Natural Community Conservation Plan is the State counterpart to the federal Habitat Conservation Plan. It provides a means of complying with the Natural Community Conservation Planning Act and securing take authorization of California Endangered Species Act species. Legal authority for the NCCP LAG Program is provided by Fish and Game Code section 1501.5(b), which allows the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to grant funds for fish and wildlife habitat preservation, restoration, and enhancement. CDFW offers NCCP LAGs to eligible applicants on an annual basis for the highest priority tasks

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needed to implement Natural Community Conservation Plans. The highest priority tasks are identified by NCCP implementing partners along with CDFW, United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff throughout the preceding year.

Up to \$576,000 is available through the NCCP LAG program for the current (2025-2026) grant cycle, dependent on the availability of State funds and approval of the Budget Act, for projects associated with the planning and implementation of Natural Community Conservation Plans, such as the County of San Diego's (County) Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP), which includes the adopted South County Subarea, draft North County, and proposed East County MSCP Plans. The MSCP is a long-term, regional habitat conservation program focused on balancing the protection of plant and animal species with recreation, development, and agricultural activities within the San Diego region. On October 22, 1997 (1), the County Board of Supervisors (Board) adopted the 50-year MSCP South County Subarea Plan, which includes the unincorporated areas in the southwestern portion of the region.

The County Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) evaluated existing conserved lands that are part of the MSCP and meet the eligibility and scoring criteria established by CDFW as part of the Local Assistance Grant Program to determine eligible projects that meet known conservation needs in the county and would be competitive for available grant funding. After reviewing available projects and grant eligibility criteria, DPR selected the Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Tricolored Blackbird Project (Project) because the Project is in the County's South County MSCP Subarea Plan Area and would benefit multiple MSCP-covered animal species. On October 7, 2025, DPR was notified by CDFW that the application was awarded \$79,989 in grant funding for the Project.

The Boulder Oaks Preserve (Preserve), located about three miles south of the unincorporated community of Ramona, consists of approximately 1,964 acres, and on-site land uses are generally limited to the conservation of plant and wildlife habitats. The Preserve currently contains access roads for maintenance activities. The Project involves enhancing habitat in a pond in the Preserve to provide nesting habitat to benefit the tricolored blackbird. The northernmost pond at the Preserve currently contains marginal suitable marsh habitat, including old-growth bulrush with few cattails. The species' preferred nesting habitat includes freshwater marsh with a mixture of bulrush and cattail in their first or second year of growth. The species' basic requirements for selecting breeding sites are open, accessible water; a protected nesting area, including either flooded or thorny or spiny vegetation; and a suitable foraging space providing prey near the nesting colony. The Project involves trimming old-growth bulrush plants along the western shoreline of the pond and adding cattail and nettle species to provide varied nesting habitat. An invasive non-native plant, Italian thistle, present directly adjacent to the pond, will also be treated to provide wildfire protection. Trimming of the bulrush and cattail will occur during the term of the Project to promote new growth. Proposed enhancement activities during the first and second years of the Project will consist of mechanical methods, including string trimmers, performed over one month. During the second year of the Project, tricolored blackbird nesting monitoring will occur to

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determine nesting presence at the pond. By restoring habitat in the Preserve, the Project will also benefit other wildlife species such as the western bluebird, small-footed myotis, Yuma myotis, pocketed free-tailed bat, and western mastiff bat. The total Project cost is estimated at \$84,827, of which \$79,989 will be provided by Local Assistance Grant Program funds and \$4,838 will be provided by County staff time. If approved, DPR will expend the grant funds from April 2026 through March 2028.

Although the County Board of Supervisors delegated general authority to pursue and accept grant funding on October 23, 2024 (7), the grant application requires applicants to provide a project-specific resolution from the governing body that identifies the project to be implemented with the grant funds. Today's requested action is to adopt a resolution authorizing DPR to accept up to \$79,989 of Local Assistance grant funding from CDFW. In addition, today's actions will authorize the Director of DPR, or their designee, to conduct all negotiations and execute and submit all necessary documents to accept the grant funds.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT**

The proposed Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Tricolored Blackbird Project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15304 because the project involves minor alterations in the condition of vegetation which does not involve removal of healthy, mature, or scenic trees. Thinning of old-growth bulrush, installation of cattail and nettle species, and treatment of invasive non-native plant species will result in improvement of habitat for wildlife resources, particularly tricolored blackbird, western bluebird, small-footed myotis, Yuma myotis, pocketed free-tailed bat, and western mastiff bat. There will be no significant adverse impacts on endangered, rare, or threatened species or their habitat, there are no hazardous materials at or around the project site and there are no significant cumulative conditions.

#### **LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today's proposed action to authorize the acceptance of Local Assistance Grant funding for the Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Tricolored Blackbird Project supports the Sustainability Initiative in the County of San Diego's 2026-2031 Strategic Plan by providing funding to protect and promote San Diego County's natural resources, diverse habitats, and sensitive species; and to cultivate a natural environment for residents, visitors, and future generations to enjoy.

Respectfully submitted,



DAHVIA LYNCH

Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

#### **ATTACHMENT(S)**

ATTACHMENT A - RESOLUTION OF THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AUTHORIZING THE ACCEPTANCE OF GRANT FUNDS FROM THE

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LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM FOR HABITAT ENHANCEMENT TO BENEFIT TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD PROJECT