



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

LAND USE AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

VACANT
First District

JOEL ANDERSON
Second District

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Third District

MONICA MONTGOMERY STEPPE
Fourth District

JIM DESMOND
Fifth District

DATE: January 29, 2025

03

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

ADOPT RESOLUTION TO ACCEPT GRANT FUNDS FROM LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM AND ESTABLISH APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE CACTUS HABITAT ENHANCEMENT TO BENEFIT COASTAL CACTUS WREN 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 implement NCCPs throughout California. The Local Assistance Grant Program, administered by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), allocates funds for projects associated with 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. The three Plan Areas of the County's MSCP include the adopted South County Subarea, the draft North County, and the proposed East County MSCP Plan Areas. 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 eligible projects that are part of the MSCP in conjunction with the requirements of the Local Assistance Grant Program and determined that the Cactus Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Coastal Cactus Wren Project (Project) would meet a known conservation need and be competitive for available grant funding. The Project includes efforts to remove native and invasive non-native plant species within and adjacent to restored cactus patches within Lakeside Linkage County Preserve (Preserve). Removing these native and invasive non-native plant species would improve habitat for wildlife species, particularly coastal cactus wren, a rare species that contributes to local biodiversity and exists within the Preserve. On July 22, 2024, DPR submitted an NCCP Local Assistance Grant Program application to CDFW for the Project and received notification from CDFW on September 25, 2024, that the project was awarded \$50,000 in grant funding.

Today's requested action is to adopt a resolution authorizing DPR to accept up to \$50,000 of Local Assistance grant funds from CDFW. Although the County Board of Supervisors delegated general

SUBJECT: ADOPT RESOLUTION TO ACCEPT GRANT FUNDS FROM LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM AND ESTABLISH APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE CACTUS HABITAT ENHANCEMENT TO BENEFIT COASTAL CACTUS WREN PROJECT AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICT: 2)

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, Services & Supplies 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 Cactus Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Coastal Cactus Wren Project is categorically exempt from 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.
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 CACTUS HABITAT ENHANCEMENT TO BENEFIT COASTAL CACTUS WREN PROJECT (Attachment A).
3. Establish appropriations of \$50,000 in the Department of Parks and Recreation, Services and Supplies, for the Cactus Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Coastal Cactus Wren 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, if awarded, including but not limited to, grant contracts, payment requests, and if funds are awarded, 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 Lakeside Linkage County Preserve is anticipated to result in a positive impact on all residents and visitors by improving water and air quality and providing opportunities to engage in passive recreational experiences in the County of San Diego's parks and preserve lands.

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 Lakeside Linkage County Preserve supports two County of San Diego Sustainability Goals including County Sustainability Goal No.

SUBJECT: ADOPT RESOLUTION TO ACCEPT GRANT FUNDS FROM LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM AND ESTABLISH APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE CACTUS HABITAT ENHANCEMENT TO BENEFIT COASTAL CACTUS WREN PROJECT AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICT: 2)

4 by expanding opportunities for community members to access outdoor recreation and nature and County Sustainability Goal No. 6 by protecting native ecosystems and habitats.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are not included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Operational Plan in the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). If approved, this request would result in costs and revenue of \$50,000 related to Recommendation 3. The funding source is grant funding from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). If approved, the proposed action would also include adopting a resolution authorizing DPR to accept up to \$50,000 of Local Assistance grant funding from CDFW for the Cactus Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Coastal Cactus Wren 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 \$3,000 for the Cactus Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Coastal Cactus Wren Project. The funding source is existing General Purpose Revenue in DPR. There is no net change to General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

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 in the implementation of 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 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 (2024-2025) 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

SUBJECT: ADOPT RESOLUTION TO ACCEPT GRANT FUNDS FROM LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM AND ESTABLISH APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE CACTUS HABITAT ENHANCEMENT TO BENEFIT COASTAL CACTUS WREN PROJECT AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICT: 2)

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 Cactus Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Coastal Cactus Wren 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 September 25, 2024, DPR was notified by CDFW that its application was awarded \$50,000 in grant funding for the Project.

The Lakeside Linkage County Preserve (Preserve) consists of about 210 acres with on-site land uses generally limited to the conservation of plant and wildlife habitats and passive recreation. The Preserve currently contains publicly accessible multi-use trails and access roads. The Project will involve the removal of native and invasive non-native plant species growing within and adjacent to restored cactus patches in about five acres of the Preserve. Removal and control of priority native and invasive non-native plant species will consist of mechanical methods performed over a four-month period. The cactus patches within the restored areas are suitable for coastal cactus wren nesting. However, many of the cactus patches have native plant species growing within them, which allows predators access to nest sites. Native and invasive non-native plant species are also covering the cactus patches, causing the cactus patches to be vulnerable to wildfires and limiting foraging opportunities for coastal cactus wren. Invasive non-native plant species will also be removed from around the restored cactus patches to ensure protection from wildfires. The created open areas around the cactus patches will also increase areas available for coastal cactus wren foraging. By restoring habitat in the Preserve, the Project will also benefit other wildlife species such as the coastal California gnatcatcher. The total project cost is estimated at \$53,000, of which \$50,000 will be provided by Local Assistance Grant Program grant funds and \$3,000 will be provided by County staff time. If approved, DPR will expend the grant funds from September through December 2025.

Although the County Board of Supervisors 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. Today's requested action is to adopt a resolution authorizing DPR to accept up to \$50,000 of Local Assistance grant funding from CDFW. In addition, today's

SUBJECT: ADOPT RESOLUTION TO ACCEPT GRANT FUNDS FROM LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM AND ESTABLISH APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE CACTUS HABITAT ENHANCEMENT TO BENEFIT COASTAL CACTUS WREN PROJECT AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICT: 2)

actions will 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.

ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

The proposed Cactus Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Coastal Cactus Wren Project is exempt from 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. Removal and thinning of native and invasive non-native plant species in and around restored cactus patches will result in improvement of habitat for wildlife resources, particularly coastal cactus wren and coastal California gnatcatcher. 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 Cactus Habitat Enhancement to Benefit Coastal Cactus Wren Project supports the Sustainability Initiative in the County of San Diego's 2025-2030 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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dahvia Lynch', is written over a horizontal line.

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 LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM FOR CACTUS HABITAT ENHANCEMENT TO BENEFIT COASTAL CACTUS WREN PROJECT