



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

LAND USE AGENDA ITEM

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DATE: May 21, 2025

02

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

AUTHORITY TO ADVERTISE AND AWARD A CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT, ESTABLISH APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES NAVY-FUNDED TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECT AND RELATED CEQA ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW UPDATE CHECKLIST (DISTRICT: 1)

OVERVIEW

The County of San Diego's (County) Tijuana River Valley Regional Park (TRVRP) is located near the United States/Mexico border, adjacent to the Nestor community in the City of San Diego and the City of Imperial Beach. The TRVRP encompasses approximately 1,800 acres of land west of Interstate 5. The park includes 22.5 miles of multi-use trails, a bird and butterfly garden, the County's largest community garden, baseball fields, soccer fields, and natural open space. The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) manages the recreation spaces and actively works to restore habitat and wetland areas within the TRVRP. The park is part of the South County Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP), a long-term, regional habitat conservation program focused on balancing the protection of plant and animal species with recreation, development, and agriculture activities within the San Diego region.

In 2024, DPR received \$2,350,000 in grant funding from the United States Navy, Naval Base Coronado Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program for habitat restoration and monitoring at approximately 20 acres across three sites within the TRVRP with mutual benefits to the Naval Base and DPR. These sites, all of which are County-owned and managed by DPR, currently contain dilapidated structures, debris, and non-native plants. The proposed project will remove the structures and debris and restore the habitat to support the County's MSCP. The restoration activities and addition of vegetation will have a positive impact on the community by reducing urban heat island effects, improving air quality, and increasing infiltration during rain events. Additionally, in terms of a benefit to the Navy, the project also involves development of off-base natural infrastructure solutions to protect critical military infrastructure from climate change impacts. By improving habitat and other conditions in the TRVRP, the project will help to support climate resilience and natural resource management adjacent to the Naval Base.

The REPI Program requires these funds to be captured in an interest-bearing trust fund to maximize the funding. Therefore, while the funding has already been received by DPR, the creation of a trust

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fund is needed to meet grant requirements. Additionally, the proposed habitat restoration project is a new capital project, and therefore, a new capital project needs to be created, and appropriations established to allow DPR to complete work with the funding provided from the REPI Program.

Today's proposed actions are to: authorize DPR to establish a trust fund with the grant funding received from the United States, Naval Base Coronado and enter into necessary agreements regarding use of grant funding; establish a capital project and associated appropriations; and authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to advertise and award a construction contract for the Capital Project 1027586, Tijuana River Valley REPI Habitat Restoration Plan. The planning phase for the proposed project is complete and was funded with a \$520,168 grant from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Construction costs are estimated at \$2,350,000, including contingency. If approved, construction is expected to begin in Fall 2025 and is anticipated to be complete in Summer 2026. Maintenance and monitoring of restored areas would continue for up to four years following restoration installation. Funding for this maintenance and monitoring is included in the construction costs, funded by the Navy through the grant-required trust fund.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Find that the Initial Study (IS)/Mitigated Negative Declarations (MND) for the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park Habitat Restoration Plan (State Clearinghouse No. 2023110494) on file with the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), has been completed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and State and County CEQA Guidelines, that the DPR Director has reviewed and considered the information contained therein prior to approving the project, and that reflects the independent judgement and analysis of the Director; and

Find that there are no changes in the project, or, in the circumstances under which the project is undertaken, that involve significant new impacts which were not considered in the previously adopted MND dated March 1, 2024. Furthermore, find that there is no substantial increase in the severity of the previously identified significant effects, and that no new information of substantial importance has become available since the MND was adopted, as explained in the Environmental Review Update Checklist Form (March 17, 2025).

2. Adopt the "Statement of Location and Custodian of Record of Proceedings."
3. Direct the Auditor and Controller to establish a separate interest-bearing trust fund for a habitat restoration and monitoring fund received by the DPR, with interest earnings allocated and distributed to the new fund.
4. Establish appropriations of \$2,350,000 in the Capital Outlay Fund, for Capital Project 1027586, Tijuana River Valley REPI Habitat Restoration Project, based on existing

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funding received from United States Navy, Naval Base Coronado (\$2,350,000). **(4 VOTES)**

5. Authorize the Director, Department of Parks and Recreation, or designee, to execute all required grant documents, including the Cooperative Agreement and Encroachment Protection Agreement with the Navy and any annual extensions, amendments, and/or revisions thereto that do not materially impact or alter the services or funding level.
6. Authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting, to advertise and award a construction contract and take any other action authorized by Section 401 et seq. of the Administrative Code with respect to contracting for the construction of Capital Project 1027586, Tijuana River Valley REPI Habitat Restoration Project.
7. Designate the Director, Department of Parks and Recreation, as the County of San Diego Officer responsible for administering the construction contract for the construction of Tijuana River Valley REPI Habitat Restoration Project in accordance with Section 430.4 of the County Code of Administrative Ordinances and Board Policy F-41, Public Works Construction Projects.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The Tijuana River Valley Regional Park (TRVRP) is located near the communities of Imperial Beach, San Ysidro, and Otay Mesa. These communities are identified by Senate Bill 535 (2012) and on CalEnviroScreen 4.0 Environmental Justice communities as having high pollution burdens for impaired water bodies, elevated particulate matter pollution, elevated linguistic isolation, and high poverty rates. The proposed Tijuana River Valley Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Habitat Restoration Project will remove dilapidated structures and restore approximately 20 acres of the TRVRP to native habitat to support threatened and endangered plant and wildlife species. The addition of this vegetation will have a positive impact on the community by reducing urban heat island effects, improving air quality, and increasing infiltration during rain events. Urban heat island effect refers to the increase in temperature that results from the replacement of natural land cover with surfaces such as buildings, which retain heat. The proposed Tijuana River Valley REPI Habitat Restoration Project will remove buildings and increase vegetation cover, which will decrease temperatures on the property and benefit surrounding areas.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The proposed Tijuana River Valley Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Habitat Restoration Project contributes to many of the County of San Diego's Sustainability Goals: Goal No. 1 to engage the community; Goal No. 2 to provide just and equitable access; Goal No. 3 to transition to a green, carbon-free economy; Goal No. 4 to protect health and wellbeing; and Goal No. 6 to protect ecosystems, habitats, and biodiversity. This project will contribute to the health and wellbeing of the residents of the Tijuana River Valley, an underserved community that has limited access to recreational activities and green amenities. The project will increase the native vegetation in the area, thus protecting the ecosystem, habitat, and biodiversity of the region.

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The addition of these plantings will contribute to the County's sustainability goals by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reducing waste.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for the restoration project are not included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25 Operational Plan in the Capital Outlay Fund. If approved, this request would establish appropriations of \$2,350,000 in the Capital Outlay fund for Capital Project 1027586, Tijuana River Valley REPI Habitat Restoration in FY 2024-25. The funding source is existing grant funding received from the United States Navy, Naval Base Coronado (\$2,350,000). This funding has already been dedicated to the County Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). Prior planning work for the project has been completed and was funded by \$520,168 in grant funding from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

Current costs for annual operations and maintenance are included in the FY 2024-25 Operational Plan in DPR and are provided by existing DPR staff, funded by existing General Purpose Revenue (GPR) in DPR. Operations and maintenance costs are \$8,500, and there will be no additional ongoing costs associated with today's recommendation. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

The project is in the incorporated area of the City of San Diego, and therefore, no County Community Planning Group is assigned to this region. The Tijuana River Valley planning area is not recognized by any City of San Diego community planning groups.

BACKGROUND

The Tijuana River Valley Regional Park (TRVRP) is located near the border of the Tijuana River Valley and Nestor communities in the City of San Diego (City) on land owned by the County of San Diego (County). The TRVRP encompasses approximately 1,800 acres of land west of Interstate 5 and just north of the United States/Mexico international border, as shown in the Vicinity Map (Attachment A). The park includes 22.5 miles of multi-use trails, a bird and butterfly garden, the County's largest community garden, baseball fields, soccer fields, and natural open space. The County Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) manages the active and passive recreation sites and actively works to restore habitat and wetland areas. The sites are part of the South County Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP), a long-term, regional habitat conservation program focused on balancing the protection of plant and animal species with recreation, development, and agriculture activities within the San Diego region.

In 2020, the County completed the Tijuana River Valley Needs and Opportunities Assessment (NOA) to assess potential management strategies and projects to address transboundary flows of sewage, trash, and sediment entering the Tijuana River Valley from Mexico. As part of this effort,

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the County held public meetings and workshops and conducted targeted public and stakeholder outreach with over 30 stakeholder groups. In July 2019, DPR held a public meeting with the intention of educating the public on the purpose of the NOA and to receive input on the draft lists of projects. Approximately 80 members of the public attended the meeting, and an additional 35 comments were received after that meeting was completed. The feedback was incorporated into the final version of the NOA report. The proposed Tijuana River Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Habitat Restoration project was identified as one of the 27 projects within the NOA report.

In late 2020, the County received \$520,168 in grant funding from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to develop a habitat restoration plan and complete environmental review and permitting for restoration of open space areas throughout the TRVRP. This work, which included stakeholder outreach and engagement and a public comment period, was completed in 2024, allowing DPR to apply for grant funding for implementation of habitat restoration activities.

In 2020, the County entered into an Encroachment Protection Agreement (EPA) with United States Navy, Naval Base Coronado to collaborate on the management of natural resources in the Tijuana River Valley. As part of this partnership, the County and Naval Base Coronado have been able to successfully partner on property acquisitions and natural resources management on several properties with funding provided by the Navy's REPI Program. The funding allows military partners to develop off-base natural infrastructure solutions to protect critical military infrastructure from climate change impacts. Conservation of open spaces and habitat restoration have been a critical component of this partnership.

In 2024, DPR received \$2,350,000 in grant funding through the REPI Program for habitat restoration and monitoring of approximately 20 acres across three sites within the TRVRP with mutual benefits to the Naval Base and DPR. These sites, which are County-owned and managed by DPR, currently contain dilapidated structures, underground utilities, foundations, debris, and non-native plants. The proposed project will remove those structures and debris and restore the habitat to support the County's MSCP and improve conditions in the TRVRP that will help to support resilience and natural resource management adjacent to the Naval Base. The REPI Program requires these funds to be captured in an interest-bearing trust fund to maximize the funding. Therefore, while the funding has already been received by DPR, the creation of a trust fund is needed to meet grant requirements. Additionally, the proposed habitat restoration project is a new capital project, and therefore, a new capital project needs to be created, and appropriations established to allow DPR to complete work with the funding provided from the REPI Program.

Specifically, the proposed Tijuana River Valley REPI Habitat Restoration project will include the removal of debris and dilapidated structures, decommissioning of any wells or underground utilities that are not in use, soil preparation, installation of temporary irrigation, removal and treatment of non-native plants, and the planting of native seed and container plants that will ultimately mature into approximately 20 acres of native habitat within the TRVRP. The restoration activities will support the realignment of a trail within the TRVRP to provide a more enjoyable

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user experience. A major goal of the project is to provide habitat for special status species known to occur in the TRVRP, including least Bell's vireo, coastal California gnatcatcher, Cooper's hawk, red-shouldered hawk, and northern harrier, among others.

Today's proposed actions are to: authorize DPR to establish a trust fund with the existing grant funding from the United States, Naval Base Coronado and enter into necessary agreements regarding use of grant funding; establish a capital project and associated appropriations; and authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting, to advertise and award a construction contract for the Capital Project 1027586, Tijuana River Valley REPI Habitat Restoration Plan. Planning work for the proposed project is complete and was funded with a \$520,168 grant from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Construction costs are estimated at \$2,350,000, including contingency. If approved, construction is expected to begin in Fall 2025 and is anticipated to be complete in Summer 2026. Maintenance and monitoring of restored areas would continue for up to four years following restoration installation, which will ensure that restoration activities are successful and meet the criteria associated with the REPI grant. Following this four-year establishment period, each site would be preserved, managed, and maintained in perpetuity by existing DPR staff.

ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

A Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) was prepared by the Department of Parks and Recreation for the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park REPI Habitat Restoration Plan (State Clearinghouse No. 2023110494) and was adopted by the County of San Diego Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation on March 1, 2024. The MND determined that there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment.

An Environmental Review Update Checklist Form was prepared on March 17, 2025 for action pursuant to the State of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15162 et seq. and the project has been found to be consistent with the previous MND and there are no substantial changes in the project or in the circumstances under which the project is undertaken, and that no new information of substantial importance has become available since the MND was adopted. Therefore, no subsequent environmental document needs to be prepared for this action.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed actions support the Sustainability and Community Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan by cultivating a natural environment for residents, visitors, and future generations to enjoy.

Respectfully submitted,



DAHVIA LYNCH

Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

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ATTACHMENT(S)

ATTACHMENT A – Vicinity Map

ATTACHMENT B – California Environmental Quality Act Environmental Review Update Checklist Form

ATTACHMENT C – Statement of Location and Custodian of Record of Proceedings