

Restoration Proposals: Funding Recommendation

The EOC will review and consider approval of the draft restoration funding guidelines, which outlines the monitoring and reporting criteria for the restoration projects, and the recommendation to approve six restoration projects for program funding. The guidelines and recommended properties will be presented to the OCTA Transportation 2020 Committee and Board of Directors for their approval in September 2010.

The draft restoration funding guidelines outline the mitigation requirements for restoration including success criteria, species protection, restoration site preparation, maintenance and monitoring, and status reporting and documentation. Restoration project sponsors will need to submit a restoration plan to OCTA for review and approval prior to being granted funding and commencing restoration activities.

A total of 25 restoration proposals were evaluated and considered for the first round of funding that totals approximately \$5.5 million. In conjunction with Caltrans and the wildlife agencies, which include the California Department of Fish and Game and United States Fish and Wildlife Service, all restoration proposals have been evaluated based on biological merits. The evaluation of these restoration properties resulted in four hierarchical groups. Group 1 restoration proposals typically possess the highest potential to support similar vegetative communities lost to freeway projects, restore habitat for species that are considered sensitive, and provide connectivity/contiguity opportunities. Group 2 restoration proposals typically possess good potential for the same criteria.

Through preliminary discussions with the wildlife agencies, restoration proposals within the first two groups (11 total proposals) possess the necessary biological value that would enable OCTA to obtain mitigation assurances for the M2 freeway projects. **EOC will consider the approval of six primary restoration projects and three secondary restoration projects for contingency purposes.**

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Following the May 24, 2010 Board approval of the list of restoration projects, staff worked with Caltrans, CDFG, and USFWS to identify restoration projects that best fit the needs of the Mitigation Program. Of the 11 restoration projects from Groups 1 and 2, six restoration projects are recommended for funding, with four projects from Group 1 and two from Group 2. In addition to the primary group of six restoration projects identified for funding, it is recommended that three additional projects (two from Group 1 and one from Group 2) be included as contingency projects, should any of the projects fall out of contention from the primary group. Each project in the secondary group has a restoration cost similar to that of at least one of the primary group projects to facilitate simple replacement, if necessary, without the need for additional funds.

The restoration projects were considered to focus on impacts which can be tied back to the 13 M2 freeway projects. Benefits to watersheds were considered to address the needs of the Regional Water Quality Control Boards (Santa Ana and San Diego) and the Army Corps of Engineers. In accordance to the project sponsors, the recommended restoration projects will be “shovel ready” by spring 2011. This timeline aligns with the anticipated availability of the first tranche of funding. In addition, the project sponsors have indicated they would have a complete project with independent utility if OCTA provides funding that is slightly different than the requested amount.

The other restoration projects were not recommended for one or more of the following reasons: the project will not be ready to commence by spring 2011, the project scope is not clearly defined, the project requires further planning development and engineering, and/or the proposed restoration components are not considered as high priority as those of the primary group.

The table below shows the primary and secondary groups of restoration projects recommended for funding as well as the biological justifications and the proposed

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restoration cost for each project. The information below has been shared with the EOC members.

Restoration Project	Biological Justification	Proposed Cost	
Big Bend	Laguna Canyon Channel watershed; Habitats: upland coastal sage scrub (CSS), riparian woodland	\$87,500	Primary Group
City Parcel	San Juan Creek watershed; Habitats: riparian, upland CSS, oak woodland and native grassland	\$1,500,000	
Fairview Park	Talbert Channel/Greenville Banning Watershed; Habitats: wetlands, native grassland, CSS, willow scrub, oak woodland	\$2,000,000	
Imperial/SR-91 Proposal (Pelanconi Park)	Santa Ana River watershed; Habitats: riparian sycamore/willow, upland native plant communities	\$100,000	
Irvine Ranch Conservancy (Agua Chinon and Bee Flat Canyon)	Santa Ana River watershed; Habitats: chaparral, CSS, coast live oak/sycamore, oak woodland, native grassland, riparian	\$1,450,000	
UCI Ecological Reserve	San Diego Creek watershed; Habitat: cactus scrub	\$325,000	
Total for Primary Group		\$5,462,500	
Chino Hills State Park	Lower Santa Ana River watershed; Habitats: CSS, cactus scrub, sycamore/willow riparian	\$2,000,000	Secondary Group
Irvine Ranch Conservancy (Agua Chinon and Loma Ridge)	Santa Ana River watershed; Habitats: CSS, oak woodland, native grassland, riparian	\$1,500,000	
Upper Buck Gully	Los Trancos/Muddy Creek watershed; Habitats: CSS, riparian corridor	\$350,000	

Next Steps

Upon approval of the draft requisition funding guidelines and the suite of restoration projects proposed for funding, staff will continue to move forward with the restoration process by requesting restoration plans from the primary group projects sponsor(s). Prior to the issuance of funds, project sponsors will be required to provide a complete restoration plan per the restoration funding guidelines, which will be reviewed and approved by OCTA, CDFG and USFWS.