



bay restoration commission

STEWARDS OF SANTA MONICA BAY

santa monica bay restoration commission / 320 west 4th street, ste 200; los angeles, california 90013
213/576-6615 phone / 213/576-6646 fax / santamonicabay.org

October 14, 2010

Agenda Item #7

To: Governing Board

From: Shelley Luce, Executive Director

Re: Support for Ballona Wetlands Restoration Process

Action Requested of the Governing Board:

- Approve Resolution Supporting the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Process

Executive Summary

At the August 19, 2010 Governing Board meeting, the Coastal Conservancy's Mary Small reported on the progress of the Ballona Wetlands restoration effort. In particular, she noted the extent to which the SMBRC was working with the Coastal Conservancy and the California State Department of Fish and Game (DFG), which are the project proponents of record. She noted that restoration planning has been underway since 2006 and there have been more than 40 public meetings in over three years, many of which were coordinated by SMBRC staff.

Small further noted that the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process of determining potential environmental impacts is about to begin and that the SMBRC has hired a new staff person (Diana Hurlbert) to help facilitate this effort.

Upon completion of her report, SMBRC Chair Bloom directed staff (without objection from the Governing Board) to prepare a report on the Ballona Wetlands restoration process in order for the Governing Board to consider support of the process.

Background

The Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve (Ballona) is a 600-acre area representing the largest opportunity for coastal wetland restoration in Los Angeles County. Located between Playa del Rey and Venice, it is owned by the State of California and managed by DFG. The Ballona restoration project includes the State Coastal Conservancy, State Lands Commission and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) as planning partners.

The Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project is a long-term, science-based plan to return the Ballona Wetlands into a thriving ecological reserve. Currently, Ballona is highly degraded from Marina del Rey dredge spoil and the severing of its freshwater creek and ocean connection by the Ballona Creek Flood Control Channel. This has resulted in the loss of ecological and hydrological functions, such as the loss of historic native species.





The goal is for restoration to support healthy, natural ecosystems and maintain freshwater circulation. The effects of restoration include an increase in native species, providing migratory refuge for birds, and serving as an educational resource. Long term benefits of restoration include flood control, improved fish nursery habitat, creation of a safe haven for endangered and threatened species, improved regional air and water quality, and improved public recreational opportunities.

Long term restoration goals include ecosystem restoration (including habitat, biodiversity, physical/chemical processes, and sustainability, as well as social and socioeconomic values (including access, cultural preservation, and recreation).

SMBRC staff and our previously mentioned partners have conducted a baseline assessment, which included physical, chemical, biological, and human activity.

Final decisions on the methods and scope of preservation will be made by the State Coastal Conservancy, DFG, State Lands Commission and the SMBRC. The alternatives informing these decisions were developed by a consultant team (led by Phillip Williams and Associates) with input from the Science Advisory Committee, local stakeholder groups, and the public, wherein alternatives were evaluated against the project's goals. Input for these alternatives came from 20 public meetings and six science advisory meetings.

The Ballona restoration effort is now entering the CEQA/NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) Phase which requires participating agencies to identify environmental impacts and, if possible to avoid or mitigate those impacts. A multi-disciplinary team lead by the ICF International consulting firm will begin this process. Restoration is anticipated to begin in 2012 depending on permitting and the CEQA/NEPA requirement fulfillment.

Budget/Financial Impact

None

Requested Governing Board Action

Consider supporting the process, as described above, to be memorialized by a resolution of the board.

SEE ATTACHED: Draft Resolution



--DRAFT--

**SANTA MONICA BAY RESTORATION COMMISSION
October 21, 2010**

Resolution No. xx-xx

Resolution to Support the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Process

WHEREAS, Restoration of the Ballona Wetlands is the best and largest remaining opportunity to restore coastal wetland habitat in the Santa Monica Bay and is a key objective of the Bay Restoration Plan; and

WHEREAS, The existing wetland habitats are highly degraded with the loss of many ecological and hydrological functions due to historical dredge spoil, channelization, and other human impacts; and

WHEREAS, The restored Ballona Wetlands will support a healthy, natural ecosystem by increasing habitat for native species, enhancing migratory refuge for birds, improving aquatic habitat, and creating a safe haven for endangered and threatened species, and

WHEREAS, The restoration will also help to improve regional air and water quality, enhance flood control capability, improve public recreational opportunities, and generate new educational resources; and

WHEREAS, The Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve was established in 2004 after the property was acquired by the State of California for the specific purpose of restoration and conservation of this ecological resource and public amenity; and

WHEREAS, since the establishment of the Reserve, the California State Coastal Conservancy and the California Department of Fish and Game have been working with the SMBRC to plan and implement the restoration of the wetlands; and

WHEREAS, Since initiation of the restoration planning process, the SMBRC has worked closely with other state, federal, and local agencies and facilitated local stakeholder participation, coordinated technical studies and scientific review, and conducted a comprehensive field survey and baseline assessment; and

WHEREAS, As part of the restoration planning process, the agencies and stakeholders established restoration goals, developed an interim Stewardship and Access Management Plan, completed a restoration feasibility report, refined several restoration alternatives, and conducted comprehensive, site-wide, scientific monitoring of the existing resources; and

WHEREAS, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) require that agencies identify and analyze the potential environmental impacts of a project and, if possible, avoid and/or mitigate those impacts to the greatest extent feasible when determining and implementing the preferred restoration alternative; and



WHEREAS, the California Department of Fish and Game and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are the lead agencies under CEQA and NEPA, respectively, and
WHEREAS, the SMBRC, with the cooperation of other local and regional stakeholders, is providing assistance to lead agencies by coordinating the necessary environmental review of the project under NEPA and CEQA.;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Governing Board of the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission hereby supports the process that has been established and that is ongoing for the restoration of the Ballona Wetlands; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Governing Board of the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission continues its participation with the restoration process lead agencies and other participating agencies and stakeholders until the restoration process is completed.

Richard Bloom,
Chair, Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission