

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
DIRECTOR'S OFFICE
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**CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT STATUTORY EXEMPTION FOR
RESTORATION PROJECTS
CONCURRENCE NO. 21080.56-2024-057-R5**

Project: Santa Monica Beach Dunes Restoration Project – Phase 3
Location: Los Angeles County
Lead Agency: City of Santa Monica
Lead Agency Contact: Rachel Kwok; rachel.kwok@santamonica.gov

Background

Project Location: The Santa Monica Beach Dunes Restoration Project – Phase 3 (Project) is located within plots on Santa Monica Beach, with approximate northern coordinates of 34.026667, -118.5175 to approximate southern coordinates of 33.99611, -118.481944 in the City of Santa Monica.

Project Description: The Bay Foundation, in partnership with the Lead Agency, proposes to conserve, restore, protect, or enhance, and assist in the recovery of California native fish and wildlife, and the habitat upon which they depend and restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife. The Project is designed to create coastal dune habitat to benefit the El Segundo blue butterfly (*Euphilotes battoides allyni*; listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA)), the California legless lizard (*Anniella pulchra*), the globose dune beetle (*Coelus globosus*), the California least tern (*Sterna antillarum browni*; listed as endangered under the federal ESA, listed as endangered under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA), and listed as fully protected pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 3511), and western snowy plover (*Charadrius nivosus nivosus*; listed as threatened under the federal ESA). The Project will restore 46 acres of coastal sand dunes with native vegetation, through a checkerboard-type footprint of small polygonal plots ranging from one to two acres in size, forming a complex dune ecosystem with fore and back dunes. The Project's restoration measures will include: (1) area delineation and restoration, using a minimalist post-and-rope boundary approach and minimal use of sand fencing, followed by the introduction of native dune vegetation. Public access will remain outside of the restoration areas; (2) using standardized and regularly scheduled dune monitoring protocols to measure success and inform adaptive and regular maintenance, such as weeding and litter removal; (3) community outreach and engagement using signage, social media, scheduled volunteer/student events; and (4) educational opportunities that include basic and applied research to improve understanding of dune creation, sand accumulation, and the associated dynamism.

purpose; (3) the Project will result in long-term net benefits to climate resiliency, biodiversity, and sensitive species recovery; and includes procedures and ongoing management for the protection of the environment; and (4) Project construction activities are solely related to habitat restoration. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (g), CDFW will post this Concurrence on its CEQA Notices and Documents internet page: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Notices/CEQA>.

This Concurrence is based on best available science and supported, as described below, by substantial evidence in CDFW's administrative record of proceedings for the Project.

This Concurrence is also based on a finding that the Project is consistent with and that its implementation will further CDFW's mandate as California's trustee agency for fish and wildlife, including the responsibility to hold and manage these resources in trust for all the people of California.

Discussion

- A. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (a), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project will exclusively conserve, restore, protect, or enhance, and assist in the recovery of California native fish and wildlife, and the habitat upon which they depend; or restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife.

The Project will establish coastal dune, foredune, and back dune habitat for native plant communities and native wildlife. This habitat will support multiple native species including El Segundo blue butterfly, globose dune beetle, western snowy plover, California least tern, and California legless lizard.

- B. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (b), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project may have incidental public benefits, such as public access and recreation.

To avoid and protect sensitive habitat and allow passage to the shore and other recreational features, public access will remain outside and/or routed in between areas of delineation and restoration. Over time this may incidentally form a natural route system as native vegetation matures and dunes shift. Other incidental public benefits include beautification of the coastal area, birding and wildlife viewing which may enhance public recreation opportunities, and research and education opportunities. The Project will also include public education opportunities, where an educational program will be incorporated into the Project through local school districts to teach on the impacts of climate change. Restored dunes may also create a natural buffer zone that may result in protection of private and public property and infrastructure.

- C. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (c), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project will result in long-term net benefits to climate resiliency, biodiversity, and sensitive species recovery, and includes procedures and ongoing management for the protection of the environment.

Long-term Net Benefits to Climate Resiliency: The Project will address climate resiliency through the direct implementation of dune habitat. This dune habitat has been shown to increase areas of natural buffer zones that help to improve coastal resiliency as it relates to climate change and reduce direct impacts to coastal ecosystems. Through the implementation of dune restoration, long-term resiliency to climate change will be built into the coastal interface and may reduce the impacts of extreme storm events, flooding, and/or inundation.

Long-term Net Benefits to Biodiversity: The Project will increase biodiversity through the establishment of native dune vegetation. The current Project area is a highly groomed beach with little to no vegetation and no occurrences of species that would occur in a less disturbed ecosystem. These areas of natural flora will attract wildlife into the restored dunes, which may include native invertebrate, reptile, and bird species.

Long-term Net Benefits to Sensitive Species Recovery: The Project will benefit the recovery of listed species including El Segundo blue butterfly, globose dune beetle, western snowy plover, California least tern, and California legless lizard by increasing habitat availability. This habitat will provide higher quality roosting and nesting opportunities for these listed bird species within the dune habitat through the accumulation of sand and planting of vegetation. The plant palette includes sea cliff buckwheat, which is essential for El Segundo blue butterfly reproduction. The planting of this species will offer increased opportunities for butterfly reproduction.

Procedures for the Protection of the Environment: The Project includes avoidance and minimization measures for the protection of sensitive and listed species. These measures include: pre-project implementation surveys; nesting shore bird and El Segundo blue butterfly work windows if protected species are present; environmental awareness training; and biological monitoring of Project activities.

The Project will also implement protective measures as described in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Programmatic Biological and Conference Opinion on the Statewide Programmatic Biological Assessment for Restoration (USFWS 2022-0005149-S7) including General Bird Protection Measures, General Butterfly Protection Measures, and specific protective measures for California Least Tern and Western Snowy Plover where presence is confirmed or presumed to occur. USFWS and CDFW staff will be notified of observations of fully protected, federal ESA- and CESA-listed species in the Project area and consulted on whether further species-specific protective measures need to be implemented.

Ongoing Management for the Protection of the Environment: The Project includes annual post-implementation monitoring that will inform adaptive management as the dune habitat establishes and develops. This monitoring will include, but is not limited to, quantifying physical changes in the structure of the beach, native and non-native vegetation cover, seedling densities, and focused wildlife surveys. Additional planting

may occur where needed with seed and container stock following implementation, along with non-native plant species removal and trash pick-up.

- D. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (d), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project does not include any construction activities, except those solely related to habitat restoration.

Project activities include minimal use of heavy vehicles for delivery of driftwood to the Project areas. Furthermore, the Project is designed to use minimal materials to delineate the spaces (post and rope), and provide minimalist informational signage that is biodegradable, as well as easily and inexpensively replaced. Finally, the maintenance of these sites will be accomplished with hand weeding, trash pick-up, and hauling.

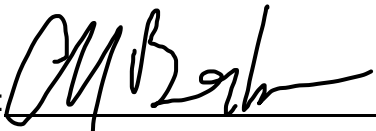
Scope and Reservation of Concurrence

This Concurrence is based on the proposed Project as described by the Lead Agency Determination and the Request. If there are any subsequent changes to the Project that affect or otherwise change the Lead Agency Determination, the Lead Agency, or any other public agency that proposes to carry out or approve the Project, shall submit a new lead agency determination and request for concurrence from CDFW pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56. If any other public agency proposes to carry out or approve the Project subsequent to the effective date of this Concurrence, this Concurrence shall remain in effect and no separate concurrence from CDFW shall be required so long as the other public agency is carrying out or approving the Project as described by the Lead Agency Determination and the Request.

Other Legal Obligations

The Project shall remain subject to all other applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and this Concurrence shall not weaken or violate any applicable environmental or public health standards. (Pub. Resources Code, § 21080.56, subd. (f).)

CDFW Director's Certification

By: 
Charlton H. Bonham, Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Date: 8/2/2024