

NOTICE OF PREPARATION/NOTICE OF INTENT FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

TO: Responsible Agencies and Interested Parties

FROM: California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), and Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), U.S. Department of the Interior

LEAD AGENCIES: Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), CDFG and the Service, the respective CEQA and NEPA lead agencies propose to prepare a joint Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for the Buena Vista Lagoon Restoration Project.

ACTION: Notice of Preparation/Notice of Intent for Buena Vista Lagoon Restoration Project

SUMMARY: The Buena Vista Lagoon Restoration Project would restore approximately 200 acres of wetland habitat at Buena Vista Lagoon, a coastal lagoon and State Ecological Reserve located in the cities of Carlsbad and Oceanside, CA, and that is managed by CDFG. The proposed action, for purposes of environmental analysis, is restoration of the lagoon to a predominantly tidal saltwater system (regime). This would increase shorebird and marine fish habitat, while taking advantage of the lagoon basin bathymetry to protect and enhance existing freshwater habitat at the lagoon's upper (easterly) end that supports sensitive bird species. Alternatives to the proposed action that will be evaluated in the EIR/EIS include: restoring and enhancing the existing freshwater regime; creating a mixed saltwater-freshwater regime; and no project/no action. Implementation of the proposed action or the mixed saltwater-freshwater alternative would involve the creation and management of a new ocean inlet/outlet. Potential infrastructure modifications that may be considered for the three action alternatives include the existing bridges over the lagoon for U.S. Interstate 5 (I-5), the railroad, and Carlsbad Boulevard ("Coast Highway"), along with culverts, and/or a weir. Additional information is available at www.buonavistalagoonfoundation.org, and presented below.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions regarding the scoping process or preparation of the EIR/EIS may be directed to Ms. Terri Stewart, California Department of Fish and Game, 4949 Viewridge Avenue, San Diego, CA 92123, 858/467-4209, or Mr. Jack Fancher, Fish and Wildlife Service, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, CA 92011, 760/431-9440.



SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

1. Proposed Action

Project Purpose

The purpose of the project is to restore approximately 200 acres of wetland habitat at Buena Vista Lagoon, a coastal lagoon and State Ecological Reserve located in the cities of Carlsbad and Oceanside, CA. Historically (e.g., pre-1940s), the lagoon was in a dynamic equilibrium between a tidal-influenced saltwater system during dry conditions and a river-influenced freshwater system during wet weather. Over time the lagoon was converted to a freshwater system as a result of highway, roadway, and railroad construction and installation of a weir. The lagoon has been progressively degrading in terms of benefits and value to biological communities, habitats, and human uses. Without restoration, it would most likely become a vegetated freshwater marsh or riparian woodland-meadow within the next 30 to 50 years. This degradation would reduce or eliminate wetland functions and values, and result in increased concerns about vectors, water quality impairments, and impacts to aesthetic resources.

Project Location

The project site is located in the cities of Carlsbad and Oceanside, in northern San Diego County, CA. The lagoon is bordered by the Pacific Ocean on the west, Vista Way/State Highway 78 on the north, and Jefferson Street on the east and south (see Figure 1).

Project Description

Creation of a predominantly saltwater regime would be achieved through elimination and disposal of existing freshwater vegetation (principally reeds), dredging and disposal to remove excess sediment (up to approximately 2 million cubic yards), and establishment of continuous tidal exchange through an ocean inlet/outlet. Habitat creation as a result of dredging would include saltwater and eelgrass habitats at appropriate depths for those respective systems. The existing 50-foot wide weir would be removed and an open channel would be constructed to provide continuous tidal exchange between the lagoon and the ocean. Depending on the final distribution of habitats to be created and inlet maintenance considerations, the ocean inlet/outlet may require stabilization with one or two jetties of similar length to those constructed for the Batiquitos Lagoon inlet/outlet, farther south in Carlsbad. Various scenarios of habitat creation and lagoon flow characteristics would also influence considerations for modifying lagoon crossings to optimize tidal exchange, such as related to I-5, railroad, and Coast Highway bridges.

2. Alternatives

CEQA (15126.6) and NEPA (40 C.F.R. 1502.14[a]) Guidelines require that an EIR and an EIS examine alternatives to a project in order to explore a reasonable range of alternatives that fulfill the project purpose, while reducing potentially significant environmental impacts. The EIR/EIS will compare merits of the alternatives and determine an environmentally superior alternative. A series of Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings and informal public meetings/workshops were held over the past few years to solicit input on the development of project alternatives. Three public meetings were held between June 2002 and April 2004 with the last meeting held on April 8, 2004. Further, a comprehensive Feasibility Analysis funded by the SCC was completed in 2004 by Everest International Consultants, Inc. This analysis documented the general engineering feasibility and associated potential environmental impacts and considerations for a full range of hydrologic regimes and alternatives. Based on this analysis and input from the public and the TAC, alternatives that will receive detailed analysis in

the EIR/EIS, in addition to the Proposed Action are: Restore and Enhance the Existing Freshwater Regime, Create a Mixed Saltwater-Freshwater Regime, and No Project/No Action.

The alternative to Restore and Enhance the Existing Freshwater Regime would focus on elimination and disposal of some existing freshwater vegetation to help restore flow conditions, and dredging and disposal to remove excess sediment necessary for creation of freshwater habitat and two islands to provide riparian forest and fringing upland habitat. Additionally, channel enhancement would be provided to improve water flow and circulation, and the existing 50-foot wide weir would be replaced with a larger-width weir at the ocean outlet. No structural modifications would occur to existing lagoon crossings for Interstate 5, railroad, or Coast Highway bridges.

The alternative to Create a Mixed Saltwater-Freshwater Regime would focus on elimination and disposal of some existing freshwater vegetation to help restore flow conditions, dredging and disposal to remove excess sediment necessary for creation of saltwater habitat and eelgrass habitat west of I-5 and shallow freshwater habitat east of I-5. The existing weir would be replaced with an ocean inlet/outlet to provide continuous tidal exchange between the western portion of the lagoon and the ocean, and a new weir would be constructed under I-5 to maintain a freshwater basin east of the freeway. As noted for the proposed action, the ocean inlet/outlet may require stabilization with one or two jetties, and various scenarios of habitat creation and lagoon flow characteristics would influence considerations for modifying lagoon crossings to optimize tidal exchange, such as related to I-5, railroad, and Coast Highway bridges.

The No Project/No Action Alternative would not involve any restoration or enhancement of the lagoon.

Potential Project Impacts

The scoping process is designed to elicit comments from the public, responsible agencies, and interested parties on the scope of the EIR/EIS. A preliminary list of potential impacts and considerations that could be related to project implementation is identified below to initiate the scoping process.

Biological Resources: Avoidance or minimization of impacts to special status species and associated habitats; optimization of fish/fisheries and bird habitats, and special status species and their habitats; preservation of biological values for the lagoon system; optimization of a regional habitat mix; and avoidance of effects from potential nuisance species.

Physical-Chemical Resources: Avoidance of flooding; minimization of impacts to water quality and beneficial uses, such as those related to sedimentation/turbidity and bacteria during construction and maintenance; dredging/excavation of sediments and vegetative material and associated disposal and/or beneficial reuse; minimization of potential effects (e.g., erosion and/or accretion) to adjacent beaches; and optimization of ecosystem health as influenced by lagoon circulation and flushing.

Social Resources: Land use and ownership; public beach access impacts associated with an ocean inlet/outlet; impacts to recreational and beneficial uses; changes in vector control; modification of aesthetic resources such as visual effects/changes; balancing infrastructure needs and changes, such as lagoon crossings, culverts, and the weir; and minimization of short-term effects such as traffic, noise, and odor during construction and maintenance.

3. Scoping Process

CDFG and the Service will seek public input on topics, issues, and alternatives to be considered in the EIR/EIS during a scoping meeting to be held in April, 2007. Scoping is an open process

of eliciting comments on the content of the EIR/EIS from responsible and reviewing agencies, and interested parties. The Draft EIR/EIS (DEIR/S) will incorporate public concerns in the analysis of impacts associated with the proposed action and alternatives. The DEIR/S will be subject to a 45-day public review period, during which time both written and verbal comments will be solicited on the adequacy of the document. The Final EIR/EIS (FEIR/S) will address the comments received on the DEIR/S during public review, will be furnished to all who commented on the DEIR/S, and additionally made available to anyone that requests a copy during a 30-day FEIR/S comment period. The final step involves, for the state EIR, certification of the EIR and adoption of a Mitigation, Monitoring, and Reporting Plan, and for the federal EIS, preparation of a Record of Decision (ROD). A certified EIR indicates that the environmental document adequately assesses the environmental impacts of the proposed project with respect to CEQA. The ROD is a concise summary of the decisions made by the Service from among the alternatives presented in the FEIR/S. The ROD can be published immediately after the FEIS public comment period ends.

Date and Address: The schedule and location of the public scoping meeting are as follow:

April 18, 2007 from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. at the City of Carlsbad, Faraday Building, Room 173 A & B, 1635 Faraday Avenue, Carlsbad, CA, 92008.

RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF PREPARATION/NOTICE OF INTENT

Please submit your comments, concerns, mitigation measures, and any other pertinent information that may enable us to prepare a comprehensive, meaningful EIR/EIS for the project. Written input should be sent at the earliest possible date, but post-marked no later than 5 p.m. on May 24, 2007, to Ms. Terri Stewart, California Department of Fish and Game, 4949 Viewridge Avenue, San Diego, CA 92123, or Mr. Jack Fancher, Fish and Wildlife Service, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, CA 92011. Please include your name and address so that you can be contacted directly if clarification is needed.

