

San Diego Bay/Southern California Coastal Program

National Program Goal: To protect and restore coastal ecosystems for the benefit of fish, wildlife, and people.



The Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program has these goals:

1) identify and prioritize coastal habitats and evaluate ecosystem health, 2) identify threats to coastal living resources and ecosystem functions, 3) lend biological focus to the planning processes of other agencies, 4) implement on-the-ground projects in partnership with others, 5) monitor project impacts and refine approach to maximize success, 6) promote public stewardship of coastal fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats.

This program area extends from the U.S./Mexico border at the Tijuana Estuary, north to Santa Monica Bay, and includes the heavily populated urban areas of San Diego, Orange, and Los Angeles Counties. The region includes San Diego Bay, one of California's largest, and 17 other coastal lagoons, wetlands, and river mouths. These coastal wetlands constitute the surviving ten percent of the coastal wetlands in this region a century ago.

Resources: The intertidal mudflat, saltmarsh, seagrass, sheltered open water, seasonal pond, and marsh areas provide important nesting, resting, feeding, and overwintering habitat for an abundant and diverse array of migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, birds of prey, and seabirds. Listed endangered or threatened species relying on these areas include: the California least tern, light-footed clapper rail, California brown pelican, least Bell's vireo, western snowy plover, and salt marsh bird's beak. Significant portions of remaining least tern, snowy plover, and clapper rail breeding sites are concentrated along this section of coast and are within or associated with these surviving wetlands.



Threats/Problems: Never abundant in the region, historic destruction of coastal wetlands has reduced their extent by 90%, and much of the remnant acreage has been degraded by obstructions to tidal influence and wetland hydrology, sediment accumulation, biotic contamination by nonnative plant and animal species, contamination from urban runoff, and human recreational activities in this densely populated region. San Diego Bay, already highly industrialized, suffers from continued proposals for additional marina and ship handling facilities, urban drainage, and intense human waterborne recreation.

Strategy: With minimum staff, the Service works cooperatively in every venue and with the multitude of agencies and groups concerned about the variety of uses, in San Diego Bay to gather information and implement agreeable measures to achieve habitat conservation for fish and wildlife, but especially for breeding and overwintering shorebirds, waterfowl, and seabirds and National Wildlife Refuge expansion. Along the coast of the three Counties, this Coastal Program focus is on wetland restoration at damaged coastal lagoons, identification of problems and their solutions, and on-the-ground actions (enabled by Cooperative Agreements, Grants, leveraged funding from others) that fulfill the program goal, while minimizing program overhead. Coastal program is co-located with other Ecological Services programs and the Refuge Complex.

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Accomplishments: The San Diego Bay/Southern California Coastal Program has:

- ! completed the Southern California coastal wetland inventory, in partnership with two State agencies and EPA The inventory is posted on the World Wide Web. (About \$55,000 total over both years of FWS salary for GIS mapping and inventory review)
- ! documented shorebird and waterfowl use and major breeding colonies of seabirds at the Western Salt Works in south San Diego Bay. (About \$85,000 of FWS salary for biologists monitoring nesting birds over 4 years)
- ! researched the prey base for fish eating birds (elegant, Forster's, Caspian terns, black skimmers) nesting at South San Diego Bay and Bolsa Chica through grant to Cal State Univ. (About \$40,000 each year for 3 years)
- ! supported the proposal for a the South San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge Overlay with technical assistance and Coastal Program study results of migratory waterbird use of middle and south San Diego Bay.(About \$5,000 FWS salary for biologists assistance.)
- ! with FWS team, facilitated the acquisition of FWS property interests in 1,400 acres of the saltworks in south San Diego Bay, and preparation of plans to manage the nesting activities of endangered species and seabirds, remove the salt making operation and restore tidal wetlands to the area. (About \$25,000 in FWS salary and \$389,000 for preliminary engineering)
- ! guided the completion and the monitoring of success for the Batiquitos Lagoon Enhancement Project (6 agency partnership, 500 acres, \$50 million leveraged by and \$10,000 FWS salary, biologist time, over several years)
- ! guided the restoration plan and is Federal lead agency for EIS preparation for the San Dieguito Lagoon restoration project (Joint Powers Authority and S.Cal. Edison partnership, 350 acres, \$20 million potentially leveraged, \$25,000 coop. agreement with JPA, and about \$45,000 FWS salary biologist EIS prep., over four years.)
- ! guided the restoration plan and is Federal lead agency for construction for the Bolsa Chica wetland restoration project (10 agency partners, 1000 acres, \$79 million leveraged, about \$95,000 FWS salary time from Coastal Program).
- ! clear 20-acre of nonnative iceplant from dune plant community rehab area at Bolsa Chica (\$15,000 coop agrmnt)
- ! produced 110,000 "River of Birds" brochures for use in ongoing education and outreach programs on coastal wetlands (\$18,000 printing costs for distribution to public interpretive programs.).
- ! undertook an interim tidal restoration project at San Elijo Lagoon with wetland conservancy and local governments \$287,000 to local conservancy by Cooperative Agreements and grants over six years, about \$7,500 FWS salary for biologist time, and \$1.5 million from State and local sources.
- ! completed a freshwater, urban runoff cleansing marsh restoration project at Famosa Slough with wetland conservancy and local governments (\$40,000 Coop Agreement with Friends of Famosa Slough, \$126,000 grant from Regional Water Board, \$75,000 in-kind service City of San Diego).
- ! undertaken tidal wetland restoration by removal of old fill from Famosa Slough (Cooperative Agreement with Friends of Famosa Slough, \$78,000)
- ! funded the removal of non-native pest plants from Batiquitos Lagoon by the local Conservancy (\$15,000 cooperative agreement with Lagoon Foundation, and \$2,000 FWS biologist salary).
- ! funded Huntington Beach Wetland conservancy to reintroduce eelgrass to restored tidal wetland (\$15,000)
- ! participated in the preparation of a draft wetland enhancement plan for the Santa Margarita River Mouth for the Navy and watershed plan with EPA (\$5,000 FWS biologist salary).
- ! supported the emergency eradication efforts at Agua Hedionda Lagoon of the "killer algae" *Caulerpa taxifolia*. (\$118,000 contract) in coordination with \$1.8 million from 3 other agencies.
- ! facilitated implementation of Tijuana Slough 20-acre model marsh restoration with technical assistance and endangered species surveys (\$10,000 FWS biologist salary over three years)
- ! initiated and supported the Tijuana River Valley invasive plant (giant reed) eradication program (\$60 Cooperative Agreement with NGO and \$500,000 of State funds)
- ! funded Buena Vista Lagoon restoration alternatives plan (\$60,000 Coop Agr. and \$560,000 cost share from State)
- ! supported State attempted acquisition of 600-acre Ormond Beach wetlands
- ! continued negotiation for wetland restoration projects at Ballona, Los Cerritos, and Santa Ana River mouth (\$45,000 FWS biologist salary over seven years).
- ! consummated 13 agency Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project Agreement to plan, prioritize, and implement coastal wetland acquisition and restoration (\$10,000 FWS biologist salary over two years).