

NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project

Introduction

The California Department of Fish & Game (CDFG), the State Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy), and the California State Lands Commission (SLC) are considering a large-scale restoration of the Ballona Wetlands, a State-owned Ecological Reserve located in the western portion of the city and county of Los Angeles. As the primary landowner, project proponent, and permitting agency for the state, CDFG is serving as the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The project will require permits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District (Corps), who will serve as lead agency under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The agencies are examining the environmental consequences associated with implementing the project. CDFG is hereby issuing this Notice of Preparation (NOP) that they will be preparing a draft environment impact report (EIR) to satisfy the environmental review requirements of CEQA. The Corps is also issuing a separate Notice of Intent to prepare a draft environment impact statement (EIS) to satisfy the requirements of NEPA. The two documents will be prepared as a joint document (EIS/EIR). This notice solicits input as to the content of environmental review for the project from the public and federal, state, and local agencies relevant to their respective statutory responsibilities.

Project Location

The Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve is located in the western portion of the city of Los Angeles (partially within unincorporated Los Angeles County), south of Marina Del Rey and north of Playa Del Rey, as shown in Figure 1. The site is approximately 1.5 miles west of Interstate 405 and approximately 0.25 mile east of Santa Monica Bay. The entire project site is held by the State of California, with part owned by CDFG and part owned by SLC. The site is bisected by and includes a channelized span of Ballona Creek, and it is traversed by Culver Boulevard, Jefferson Boulevard, and Lincoln Boulevard. An aerial photograph of the project site is shown in Figure 2.

Project Summary and Proposed Action

The project entails restoring, enhancing, and creating native coastal wetland and upland habitats in the approximately 600-acre Ecological Reserve. The reserve comprises previously filled and dredged coastal wetland and upland habitat that would be restored by increasing tidal flow throughout the project area, removing invasive species, and planting native vegetation. Figure 3 shows a conceptual design of the proposed restoration. The main components of the project are:

- Habitat restoration of estuarine wetland and upland habitats connected to a realigned Ballona Creek.
- Removal of existing Ballona Creek levees and realignment of Ballona Creek to restore a more meandering channel.
- Construction of new levees to replace the existing Ballona Creek levees and to allow restoration of tidally influenced wetlands while providing flood protection for Culver Boulevard and surrounding areas.
- Installation of water control structures, including culverts with self-regulating tide gates or similar structures, to provide a full range of tides up to an elevation acceptable for flood management and storm drainage, while protecting against some storm events.
- Maintenance of existing levels of flood protection for areas surrounding the Ballona Wetlands site and inclusion of flood hazard management measures into the restored wetlands.

- Provision of erosion protection as an integral part of the restoration design.
- Modification of infrastructure and utilities as necessary to implement the restoration project.
- Improving public access by realigning existing trails, creating new trails, repairing existing fences, constructing overlook platforms, and providing other visitor-oriented facilities.
- Long-term operations and management activities including inspections, repairs, clean-up, vegetation maintenance, and related activities.

As this project is anticipated to be implemented over the course of several years, the project would include an adaptive management component whereby lessons learned from initial stages would be considered as further work is planned, designed, and implemented, allowing maximum realization of project objectives and minimization of on- and offsite environmental impacts. Additionally, the restoration and flood management approaches to the project will consider the effects of future sea-level rise, per the California Governor's Executive Order S-13-08 and the Conservancy's Climate Change Policy, adopted June 4, 2009.

The primary federal action associated with this project is the issuance by the Corps of permits pursuant to Clean Water Act Section 404 and Section 408. The 404 permit is required for dredge and fill of material within jurisdictional waters of the U.S.; the 408 permit is required for demolition of the concrete-lined flood control channel and realignment of Ballona Creek. The Corps and CDFG also anticipate formally consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, with the State Historic Preservation Officer under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and with the Native American Heritage Commission regarding this project.

Potential Environmental Effects

The project's effects with respect to the following environmental issue areas will be analyzed and addressed in the EIS/EIR: aesthetics, air quality and greenhouse gas emissions, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, noise, public services, recreation, sea-level rise, traffic, and utilities. Additional issues may be identified during the scoping process. The EIS/EIR will consider direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts, and will present a coequal level of detail for impact analysis on a reasonable range of alternatives to the project, including the No Action/No Project Alternative.

Scoping Process

CDFG and the Corps will conduct a public scoping meeting for the EIS/EIR to receive agency and public comment regarding the appropriate scope and preparation of the environmental document. Potential significant issues to be addressed in the EIS/EIR include aesthetics, air quality and greenhouse gas emissions, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, noise, public services, recreation, sea-level rise, traffic, and utilities. Additional issues may be identified in during the scoping process. Comments are invited from the public and affected agencies.

A public scoping meeting to receive input on the scope of the EIS/EIR will be conducted on August 16, 2012, beginning at 4:00 pm at the Fiji Gateway entrance to the Ballona Wetlands (13720 Fiji Way, Marina del Rey, CA 90292, across from Fisherman's Village and the Los Angeles County Department of Beaches and Harbors). Participation in the public meeting by federal, state, and local agencies and other interested persons and organizations is encouraged. If you have any questions regarding the meeting, please contact Donna McCormick at (949) 333-6611 (Donna.Mccormick@icfi.com).

Written comments on the scope of environmental review may be submitted at the scoping meeting or sent to the address listed below. Comments will be accepted until September 10, 2012.

Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project
C/O Donna McCormick
1 Ada, Suite 100
Irvine, CA 92816

or by email to:
Donna.McCormick@icfi.com

Additional information on the project and the environmental review process is available on the Ballona Wetlands Restoration website at: www.ballonarestoration.org.



Figure 1
Regional Location



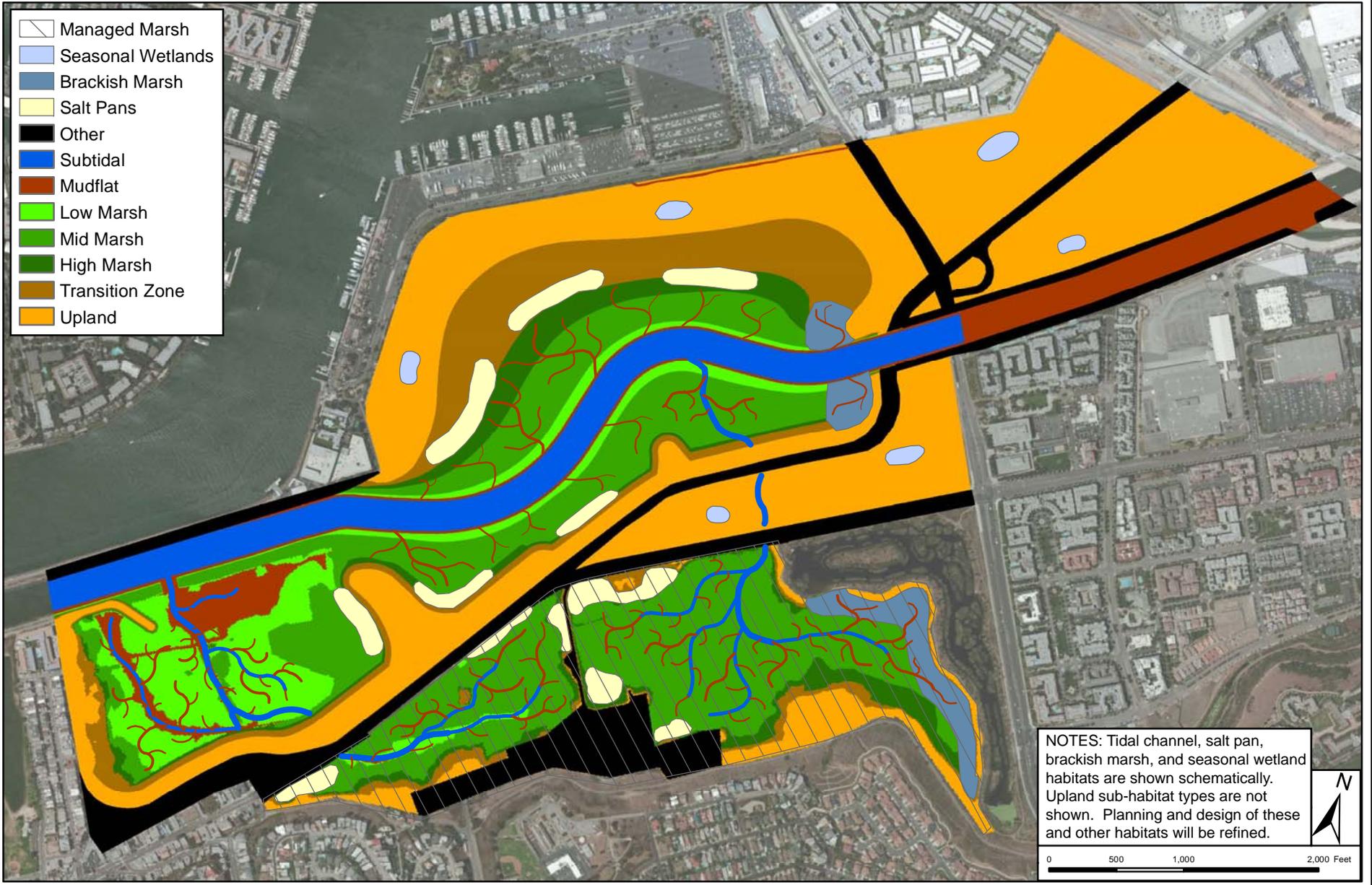
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Source: Digital Globe Imagery, 2008



Figure 2
Project Site

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Source: ESA PWA



Figure 3
Proposed Project

