



WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY

October 13, 2016

Ronald H. Chilcote, President
Foundation for Sustainability and Innovation
P.O. Box 149
Laguna Beach, CA 92652

Dear Ron,

Western Rivers Conservancy greatly appreciates the Foundation for Sustainability and Innovation's support of the Santa Margarita River Project. We are pleased to provide this report for the \$5,000 grant awarded June 12, 2013 and \$10,000 grant awarded on January 14, 2016.

Project Overview

The San Diego region is a "hotspot" for biodiversity, having more rare, threatened and endangered species than any comparable land area in the continental United States. Flowing through the heart of this area is one of the last free-flowing rivers in Southern California, the Santa Margarita. The stream is an ecological and recreational treasure of tremendous importance and remains one of the last unbroken habitat links between Southern California's high desert, the coastal Santa Ana Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. The Santa Margarita River supports the highest diversity and density of bird species in the Southern California coastal region and a great array of plants and wildlife.

With no dams on its main stem, the Santa Margarita has great biological diversity in its channel, floodplain and watershed. The 27-mile-long Santa Margarita River forms where Murrieta and Temecula Creeks join near the city of Temecula. From here, carving its way through Temecula Canyon along the southern end of the Santa Ana Mountains, the river forms a floodplain that lies largely within the Camp Pendleton Marine Base. It meets the Pacific Ocean at the Gulf of Santa Catalina. Much of the Santa Margarita River is protected within Camp Pendleton and San Diego State University's 4,000-acre Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve (SMER).

Widely recognized for its biological diversity in a region where little undisturbed native habitat can be found, the Santa Margarita River supports 70 species of concern, including 30 that are currently protected under the Endangered Species Act. The riparian corridor supports a large share of the nation's entire population of endangered least Bell's vireos, as well as providing habitat for the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher. Coastal wetlands along the lower river support imperiled bird species including the light-footed clapper rail, Belding's savannah sparrow and California least tern. The river is also critical to fish species, and is a focus of steelhead recovery for the endangered southern California population. The arroyo chub, a California Species of Special Concern, also counts on the Santa Margarita to sustain its largest remaining population.

From a recreational perspective, the Santa Margarita is equally important. Equestrians, hikers, birders, wildlife watchers and mountain bikers use the river corridor year-round.

Project Update

On one of the largest unprotected properties within the Santa Margarita basin, WRC successfully negotiated purchase and signed a contract in December, 2015 to buy 1,384 acres owned by the Fallbrook Public Utility District (FPUD). This property is one of the most important conservation properties in the Santa Ana–Palomar landscape linkage. The Santa Ana–Palomar Connection is one of only two remaining natural areas in southern California that provides linkages between protected coastal and inland habitats.



Santa Margarita River. Myles McGuiness photo

This acquisition will conserve five miles of the Santa Margarita River, over 1.5 miles of Sandia Creek and extensive chaparral, coastal sage scrub and live oak woodland communities, and

connect key protected areas in a watershed spanning nearly 500,000 acres. By placing this land into the hands of a permanent conservation steward, WRC will improve the integrity of one of Southern California’s largest, most intact rivers and strengthen habitat connectivity within one of the region’s key wildlife corridors. The effort will improve public access to the river and its network of trails and help ensure this unique stream remains healthy for fish, wildlife and people.

Once the property is purchased and funding is secured, WRC will convey the land into the capable hands of The Wildlands Conservancy. Based in Oak Glen, California, The Wildlands Conservancy (TWC) owns and operates the largest nonprofit preserve system in California. TWC manages 15 preserves and more than 142,000 acres, including many in Southern California—and all of them are open to the public, free of charge. TWC shares our dual mission of preserving natural landscapes while ensuring long-term public access for people to enjoy and be rejuvenated by nature. The Wildlands Conservancy is a new project partner and we are very excited to have them on board. With TWC, we are beginning to develop a long-term management plan for the property, which will be submitted to FPUD for approval when complete.

Successful acquisition and conveyance of the FPUD property to The Wildlands Conservancy will improve the integrity of one of Southern California’s largest, most intact rivers and strengthen habitat connectivity within one of the region’s key wildlife corridors.

The majority of the funding to permanently convey the FPUD property will come from a Department of Defense (DoD) buffering program, which typically delivers 50 percent of the property value for conservation acquisitions. The FPUD property is valued at approximately \$10.5 million, the DoD will fund over \$7 million requiring us to raise about \$3 million from local, state and regional conservation sources to be successful. The scale of funding from the DoD is an

unusual achievement for a conservation project like this. WRC is now working to complement the DoD funding and complete the project with State of California sources, including California Wildlife Conservation Board and Environmental Enhancement Mitigation Program (EEMP) funding.

Our goals for the year ahead are to: Acquire 1,384 acres of land to enhance an interconnected natural area link between Camp Pendleton, Santa Margarita County Preserve, San Diego State University Research Field Station and the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve; conduct project development activities; build community support and secure permanent funding from potential partners, including Wildlife Conservation Board and EEMP or other sources to complement over 70% federal funding from Camp Pendleton; convey the property to The Wildlands Conservancy as a permanent steward to preserve rare habitats and valuable public recreation opportunities in perpetuity; and help facilitate management agreements between The Wildlands Conservancy and Fallbrook Land Conservancy’s Trails Council to maintain and enhance hiking and equestrian trails.

Financial Report

FSI’s 2013 and 2016 grants were dedicated to Western Rivers Conservancy’s efforts to permanently protect strategically-located lands along the Santa Margarita River in southern California. FSI’s funds were restricted to direct project costs, including environmental surveys and biological assessments, and have now been fully expended.


	<i>FSI Funds: FY13 and FY16</i>	<i>FY16 Total: (10/1/15 – 9/30/2016)</i>
Project Management: Personnel		\$83,744
Direct Program Costs	\$15,000	33,962
Project Travel & Operating Costs	_____	<u>20,721</u>
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$15,000</i>	<i>\$138,427</i>

Additional recent project supporters include The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (\$200,000, Southern California Warm-Water Rivers Project), the Marisla Foundation (\$25,000) and individual donors.

Conclusion

With FSI’s support, WRC is leveraging the permanent preservation of more than one thousand acres of land in this strategically-located riparian corridor, and is protecting biodiversity and preserving the open space, wildlife habitat and flora and fauna of southern California. Please contact us at 503-241-0151 with any questions. Thank you for investing in this project.

Sincerely,



Sue Doroff
President

Santa Margarita River San Diego County, CA



- Fallbrook Public Utility District Property (1,384 acres)
- Bureau of Land Management
- US Forest Service
- US Forest Service Wilderness Areas
- San Diego State University
- County Lands
- Camp Pendleton Military Base
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- State Lands
- Highways
- Trails

