

COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY
Regular Meeting – May 11, 2026, 3:00 PM

73-510 Fred Waring Drive
(Administrative Conference Room)
Palm Desert, CA 92260

Teleconference locations:

State of California Natural Resources Agency
715 P Street,
2nd floor, Conference Room 02-310
Sacramento, CA 95814

California Department of Fish and Wildlife
39400 Clinton Keith Rd.
Murrieta, CA 92562

NOTICE AND AGENDA

1.0 Call to Order and Introductions – The Board Chair will establish quorum and call the meeting to order, as well as make introductions.

2.0 Public Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

At this time, any member of the public may address the Governing Board on any item not on the agenda. The Board cannot act on an item not on the agenda, but it can place it on the agenda for a future meeting. For items on the agenda, there will be an opportunity to speak when that item is heard. The Chair may limit the time for each speaker. Any written material may be submitted to the person taking minutes.

3.0 Closed Session

Pursuant to Government Code sections 11126 (a)(1), 11126(e)(1) and 11126.3(a) the Board may hold a closed session to discuss and take possible action on personnel matters and or receive advice of counsel on pending or potential litigation. In addition, pursuant to Government Code section 11126(c) 7(A) the Board may meet in closed session with its negotiator prior to the purchase or sale of real property by or for the state body to give instructions to its negotiator regarding the price and terms of payment for the purchase or sale. Confidential memoranda related to these issues may be considered during such closed session discussions. The matters scheduled for closed sessions are:

No closed session is scheduled.

4.0 Action Items – Public Hearing (if there is any member of the public who wishes to address the Governing Board before action is taken, testimony from the public will be taken prior to a vote.)

Action Item 4.1 Approval of February 9, 2026, Meeting Minutes – The Board will review and vote to approve meeting minutes from February 9, 2026.
(See Attachment 1.)

Information Item 4.2 Proposition 1 Grant Program - Notice of Funding Availability Update – Staff will provide a general informational overview of Proposition 1 Notice of Funding Availability.
(See Attachment 2.)

Action Item 4.3 Adoption of Resolution 2026-01 consenting to and approving a Proposition 1 Local Assistance Grant to the Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM) – The Board will vote on a grant to CNLM for its Groundwater Surface Water Monitoring Project at Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve.
(See Attachment 3.)

Action Item 4.4 Adoption of Resolution 2026-02 consenting to and approving a Proposition 1 Local Assistance Grant to The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens (TLD) / Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians (TM) – The Board will vote on a grant to TLD for its Desert Pupfish Conservation Refugia Project at Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians Reservation.
(See Attachment 4.)

Action Item 4.5 Adoption of Resolution 2026-03 consenting to and approving a Proposition 4 Local Assistance Planning Grant to Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT) – The Board will vote on a grant to MDLT for its Wildlife Bridge Crossing Project.
(See Attachment 5.)

- Action Item 4.6 Adoption of Resolution 2026-04 consenting to and approving a Proposition 84 Local Assistance Grant to Oswit Land Trust (OLT) – The Board will vote on approval regarding acquisition of approximately 45.41 acres located adjacent to the Willow Hole Conservation Area.
(See Attachment 6.)
- Action Item 4.7 Consideration and possible action to establish a Board Finance Subcommittee to support fiscal sustainability and strategic financial planning, including efforts to diversify the agency’s financial portfolio, build reserves and a rainy-day fund, and collaborate with partners to identify and pursue additional revenue streams.
(See Attachment 7.)

5.0 Reports

- 5.1 Reports from Staff – Staff will provide updates on Conservancy on-going projects. (See Attachment 8.)
- 5.2 Executive Director Report – Conservancy Executive Director will provide updates for Fiscal Year 2025/2026.
- 5.3 Board Member comments and reports from Conservancy member agencies - This is an opportunity for any of the Governing Board Members to present a report on matters of interest regarding the agency he or she represents.

6.0 Adjourn to August 10, 2026, Meeting at 3:00 p.m.

This Agenda is available on our website at <http://cvmc.ca.gov>. Anyone with questions about any item on the agenda may contact the Conservancy by phone at (760) 776-5026 or by visiting our office located at 42-600 Cook Street, Suite 219, Palm Desert, CA 92211.

Contact:

This meeting notice and agenda, and any available meeting materials, will be posted on the Conservancy webpage. These records are also available for public inspection upon request.

If you need further information prior to the meeting, please contact the Conservancy by phone at (760) 776-5026 or by visiting our office located at 42-600 Cook Street, Suite 219, Palm Desert, CA 92211.

Public Participation:

In accordance with the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act, all meetings of the Conservancy Board are open to the public. Discussion and action may be taken on any item on the Conservancy's meeting agenda. The time and order of agenda items are approximate and subject to change at the discretion of the Chair or their designee to facilitate the effective transaction of business.

Government Code section 11125.7 provides the opportunity for the public to address each agenda item during discussion or consideration by the Conservancy or prior to the Conservancy taking any action on said item. The Conservancy will provide members of the public with an opportunity to make public comments during the meeting on any issues before the Conservancy, but the Chair or their designee, at their discretion, may apportion available time among those who wish to make public comment during the meeting. Individuals may also make public comment to the Conservancy regarding items not on the agenda; however, the Conservancy cannot discuss or take official action on these items during the same meeting. (Gov. Code, §§ 11125, 11125.7, subd. (a).)

Members of the public may but are not obligated to provide their names or personal information as a condition of observing or participating in the meeting.

Accessibility:

Meetings of the Conservancy are open to the public. Public meetings are held in barrier free facilities that are accessible to those with physical disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you are a person with a disability requiring disability-related modifications or accommodations to participate in the meeting, including auxiliary aids or services, or if you require documents be made available in an alternate format or another language or require an interpreter at the meeting, please contact the Conservancy by phone at (760) 776-5026 or by visiting our office located at 42-600 Cook Street, Suite 219 Palm Desert, CA 92211. Requests should be made as soon as possible, but at least 72 hours prior to the scheduled meeting. You may also dial a voice TTY/TDD/Speech-to-Speech Communications Assistant at 7-1-1.

ATTACHMENT 1 – May 11, 2026

Action Item 4.1 Approval of February 9, 2026, Meeting Minutes

COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY
(CVMC)
REGULAR MEETING

73-510 Fred Waring Drive
Administrative Conference Room
Palm Desert, California 92260

DRAFT MINUTES

February 9, 2026 - 3:00 p.m.

Teleconference locations:

State of California, Resources Agency
715 P St.
2nd floor (Conference Room 02-310)
Sacramento, CA 95814

MEMBERS PRESENT: Enrique Arroyo, California State Parks
Stephen Benson, Department of Finance (Remote)
Denise Delgado, City of Coachella
Steve Downs, City of Rancho Mirage
Madeline Drake, CA Natural Resources Agency (CNRA)
(Remote)
Gary Gardner, City of Desert Hot Springs
Grace Garner, City of Palm Springs
Benjamin Guitron, City of Indio
Richard Kim, California Department of Fish and Wildlife
(Remote)
Rita Lamb, City of Cathedral City (*Vice Chair*)
Deborah McGarrey, City of La Quinta (*Chair*)
Brian Penna, City of Indian Wells
V. Manuel Perez, Riverside County
Savanna Saubel, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians
Joan Taylor, Governor's Appointee
Christopher Tracy, University of California, Riverside (UCR)
Ellen Lloyd Trover, Senate Rules Committee Appointee
Evan Trubee, City of Palm Desert
John Walsh, Wildlife Conservation Board (Remote)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Beatriz Gonzalez, State Assembly Appointee

CVMC STAFF PRESENT: Elizabeth King, Executive Director
Diana Rosas, Associate Director
Maximiliano Ochoa, Project Coordinator
Abriana Elms, Administrative Coordinator

OTHERS PRESENT: Patricia Cooper, Riverside County
Tammy Martin, Friends of the Desert Mountains
Arin Sain, Coachella Valley Conservation Commission
Will Steichen, Coachella Valley Conservation Commission

1.0 Call to Order & Introductions

Chair Deborah McGarrey declared a quorum with 14 voting members present and called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. Subsequently, three additional Board Members (Delgado; Perez; Taylor) arrived after the roll call bringing the attendance to 17 voting members.

2.0 Public Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

Tammy Martin, Executive Director of Friends of the Desert Mountains (FODM), commented that Wildflower Festival is on March 7, 2026, at Civic Center Park in Palm Desert, and noted that if anyone would like to donate a gift to their raffle, they could reach out to her directly. FODM announced their shoe drive fundraiser. Vice Chair Rita Lamb commented on the former Board Member Buford Crites bench dedication, noting that it was a fantastic event. Board Member Gary Gardner acknowledged CVMC Staff and Max Ochoa specifically on increased CVMC social media presence and public outreach.

3.0 Closed Session

No closed session was scheduled for this meeting.

4.0 Action/Informational Items- Public Hearing

Action Item 4.1 Approval of November 17, 2025, Meeting Minutes.

Vote: A motion was made and seconded (Gardner/Penna) to approve November 17, 2025, minutes; the motion passed unanimously.

Action Item 4.2 Approve the Proposition 4 Grant Program Guidelines and Grant Application materials, authorize the submission of all necessary documents to the Office of Administrative Law pursuant to the Emergency Regulations

Process, and authorize the Executive Director to make any minor, non-substantive revisions requested by OAL.

Executive Director Elizabeth King gave a brief overview of the proposed Conservancy's Proposition 4 Grant Program Guidelines and Grant Application materials for submission to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) pursuant to the emergency regulations process. It was further recommended that the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy Governing Board authorize the Executive Director to make any minor, non-substantive revisions requested by OAL. Should OAL request substantive changes, staff would return to the Coachella Valley Conservancy Governing Board for further review and approval of the revised guidelines.

Board Member Gary Gardner asked about additional outreach strategies. Associate Director Diana Rosas stated that the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) will be posted on the CVMC website, shared on social media and distributed through the partner email list. Executive Director King added that staff are available to attend City Council and Tribal Meetings to share the information. Board Member Stephen Benson asked about coordinating with other conservancies. Executive Director King responded that staff worked closely with the San Joaquin River Conservancy (SJRC), using its guidelines as a template and adapting them to the CVMC's regulations.

Vote: A motion was made and seconded (Trubee/Gardner) to approve the Conservancy's Proposition 4 Grant Program Guidelines and Grant Application materials for submission to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) pursuant to the emergency regulations process, and to authorize the Executive Director to make any minor, non-substantive revisions requested by OAL. The motion passed unanimously.

Informational Item 5.1 Presentation by the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC).

Chair McGarrey introduced Will Steichen, Conservation Ranger Coordinator for the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC). Conservation Ranger Coordinator Steichen gave a brief informational presentation on the Ranger Program and draft ordinance for conserved lands.

Board Member Gardner expressed his excitement to see how the Ranger Program has evolved. Board Member V. Manuel Perez, Riverside County, commented that

while the County is excited about this Ranger Program, there is a concern about the financial sustainability of the program. He expressed the request to carefully consider how long the funding will support these positions and what the plan will be once the grant period ends. Long-term financial stability is critical to ensure continued employment of rangers without disruption. Supervisor Perez also asked if there is data identifying the areas of highest concern, such as recurring encampment locations or hotspots, and further inquiring what systems are in place to track high concern areas over time. He also questioned what steps are being taken to ensure individuals in encampments are being connected to appropriate resources and services. Board Member Joan Taylor also commented that it may be beneficial to have a discussion with the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC) to better understand the scope of how management funds are currently being allocated. Chair McGarrey commented that, in past experiences, Code Enforcement has played a role in coordinating with other agencies when dealing with encampments.

Conservation Ranger Coordinator Steichen, responded regarding sustainability of funding, noting that his role in developing the program is supported through grant funding by the Conservancy. CVCC is prepared to transition to CVCC funding to support the contract moving forward. Once a tentative budget is established, there will be a clearer understanding of how many ranger positions can be sustained. At that point, staff will evaluate supplemental funding opportunities, including additional grants, to support or expand the program as appropriate. From a data perspective, countywide information exists, and CVCC also maintains its own data to specific CVCC managed lands. Regarding encampments, many individuals relocated approximately 1,000 – 2,000 feet away onto private property during a recent CVCC cleanup funded by CalRecycle. While this does not resolve the broader issue of homelessness, it was considered a success in terms of clearing high-resource or environmentally sensitive areas. The cleanup efforts effectively moved individuals out of those priority areas. However, it is important to recognize broader strategies beyond site cleanups alone. One potential approach worth exploring is identifying responsible individuals within encampments who may be interested in land stewardship roles or other structured opportunities. Finding ways to positively integrate individuals into stewardship or workforce pathways could provide mutual benefit. As it relates to Code Enforcement, CVCC meets regularly with County Code Enforcement, and there is ongoing coordination with partner agencies.

Board Member Richard Kim, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), commented that CDFW encounters similar challenges and currently lacks the

authority to issue citations. Exploring ways to provide or expand enforcement authority could improve coordination and effectiveness for both agencies in managing these areas. Board Member Dr. Christopher Tracy, UC Riverside (UCR), highlighted the importance of sustainability in moving forward with this program. It was noted that partnering with an agency that has trained and certified personnel is an effective way to hit the ground running. This approach allows the program to quickly generate data on personnel needs, recurring issues, and the cost of ongoing maintenance. Using a short-term program in this way provides clear demonstration of the scope and resources required for long-term, sustainable maintenance. Overall, this strategy was seen as a practical and effective method to both address immediate needs to inform future planning.

Informational Item 5.2 CVMC Photo Contest- Protecting Public Lands.

Associate Director Rosas gave a brief overview of the Photo Contest process and presented the results. Board Member Perez presented certificates to the top five awardees. Will Steichen received fifth place with the Burrowing Owl in Flight in Upper Mission Creek/Big Morongo Canyon Conservation Area in Desert Hot Springs. Shannon Dean received fourth place with her photo of Lupine and Yellow Thistle in Sky Valley. Associate Director Rosas acknowledged Bryan Newman, Owner of Pedego, Electric Bikes in La Quinta, for sponsoring the third place prize of bike rentals for four. Scott Collins received third place with his Bighorn Ram Overlooks Mountain Terrain at Sunrise image in Palm Springs. Associate Director Rosas thanked Board Member Tracy as the sponsor for the second place prize, a private tour for four at the Desert Boyd Deep Canyon Preserve. Erica Diaz received second place with her Calm Water Reflection image at Whitewater Preserve. Associate Director Rosas thanked Board Member Trubee for sponsoring the first place prize, a Big Wheel Tour. Shelley Westall received first place with a Bighorn Sheep Jumping Over a Creek image at Andreas Canyon. Shelley's photo will also be featured in CVMC's Annual 2025 Report. Associate Director Rosas concluded by thanking the Board for their participation and our team member Max Ochoa who organized the contest. Board Members expressed interest in displaying the images in their offices, and CVMC staff agreed to explore the possibility of printing and sharing the images with permission.

Informational Item 5.3 Community Engagement Update.

Project Coordinator Maximiliano Ochoa gave a brief Community Engagement update.

Board Member Savana Saubel thanked Executive Director King for presenting at the Speaker Series at Agua Caliente. Board Member Tracy commented the first-place photo looks fantastic on the draft 2025 Annual Report cover.

6.0 Reports

6.1 Written reports from staff.

Associate Director Rosas gave a brief update on acquisitions, grant and land management updates.

There were no questions or discussions from the board.

6.2 Executive Director Report.

Executive Director King reported on the following:

- Reminder – all Board Members must complete their Form 700s by April 1, 2026, and a new Ethics Training this calendar year.
- Educational Bighorn sheep pop-ups are scheduled with our partners to educate the public.

There were no questions or discussions from the board.

6.3 Board Member Comments and Reports.

Board Member Enrique Arroyo, California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks), announced that State Parks will be hosting a series of meetings in support of the Salton Sea General Plan as posted below:

Salton Sea General Plan Meeting Dates:

- **Wednesday, Feb. 18, 6–7:30 p.m.**
Bombay Beach Community Center
9590 Avenue C, Niland, CA
- **Thursday, Feb. 19, 6–7:30 p.m.**
North Shore Beach and Yacht Club
99155 Sea View Drive, Mecca, CA
- **Tuesday, Feb. 24, 6–7:30 p.m.**
Virtual Workshop via Zoom; can register at saltonseasragp.com

Stakeholder meeting March 11, 10 am-noon at Mecca Boys and Girls Club

Chair McGarrey commented that bighorn sheep were observed near the course during the annual PGA Golf Tournament and expressed appreciation for the presence of wildlife.

7.0 Adjourn to the meeting May 11, 2026.

Chair McGarrey adjourned the meeting without objection at 4:14 p.m.

ATTACHMENT 2 – May 11, 2026

Information Item 4.2 Proposition 1 Grant Program and Notice of Funding Availability Update.

The Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA No. 2025-01) for the Conservancy's Proposition 1 Grant Program was issued on November 7, 2025, with applications due by February 27, 2026. Four proposals were received requesting a total of \$3,559,201.

| Applicant | Project | Funding Request | Type |
|---|---|------------------------|----------------|
| Center for Natural Lands Management | Groundwater Surface Water Monitoring at Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve | \$695,751 | Infrastructure |
| City of Indian Wells | Low Flow Channel Project | \$1,200,000 | Infrastructure |
| City of Palm Desert | Dave Erwin Stormwater Retention Basin | \$800,000 | Infrastructure |
| The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens / Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians | Desert Pupfish Conservation Refugia | \$863,450 | Restoration |
| Total | | \$3,559,201 | |

In accordance with the Conservancy's Proposition 1 Grant Program Guidelines (Guidelines), the proposals were reviewed by a panel consisting of staff (Executive Director Elizabeth M. King, Associate Director Diana Rosas, Project Coordinator Maximiliano Ochoa) and two outside external experts (Director of Power Building at Lift to Rise, Joe Mota, and Former Executive Officer of Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board, Jose L. Angel. P.E). Panel members reviewed the proposals, with an emphasis on documenting the objectives of Proposition 1 that each project would fulfill and then developed preliminary rankings for funding or general conditions to be achieved by grantees prior to the funding recommendation. Staff compiled scores for each project using the point system established by Section VIII of the Guidelines. The results and preliminary funding recommendations are presented in the next section of this report.

To date, the Board has awarded \$7,696,347.53 in Proposition 1 grants which are now in various stages of implementation. The funding balance remaining in Proposition 1 for new projects is \$1,603,652.47.

DISCUSSION OF PROPOSALS

Projects were categorized in two groups:

- Category I. Priority for funding
- Category II. Potential fundable elements, but funding not recommended as proposed.

Two projects are being recommended as Category I and two projects are recommended as Category II.

Projects Recommended as Priority for Funding – Category I

Center for Natural Lands Management

Summary: The Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM) is requesting \$695,751 for their Groundwater Surface Water Monitoring at Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve project. More information will be shared in the following agenda item.

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens / Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians Natural Resources Department

Summary: The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens (TLD) and the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians (TMDCI) Natural Resources Department are jointly requesting \$863,450 for the Desert Pupfish Conservation on Torres Martinez

Desert Cahuilla Indians' Land project. More information is available in a later agenda item.

Funding Not Recommended as Proposed – Category II

City of Palm Desert

Summary: The City of Palm Desert requested \$800,000 for the construction of the Dave Erwin Stormwater Retention Basin, a critical component of the City's larger 27-acre Dave Erwin Park project located at the intersection of Dinah Shore Drive and Gerald Ford Drive in north Palm Desert. The retention basin is designed to capture stormwater runoff from the adjacent I-10 corridor, reduce flood risk to nearby low- and moderate-income housing complexes, and incorporate native pollinator landscaping. The project is in a designated high climate vulnerability zone and adjacent to a FEMA Special Flood Hazard Area. The City has completed CEQA and design and has \$18.2 million in committed Capital Improvement funding for the full park. The grant request represents the final funding gap for retention basin construction. The total project cost is \$19,000,000, with \$18,200,000 funded by the City.

Map of Project Location for Proposed Project City of Palm Desert – Dave Erwin Stormwater Retention Basin





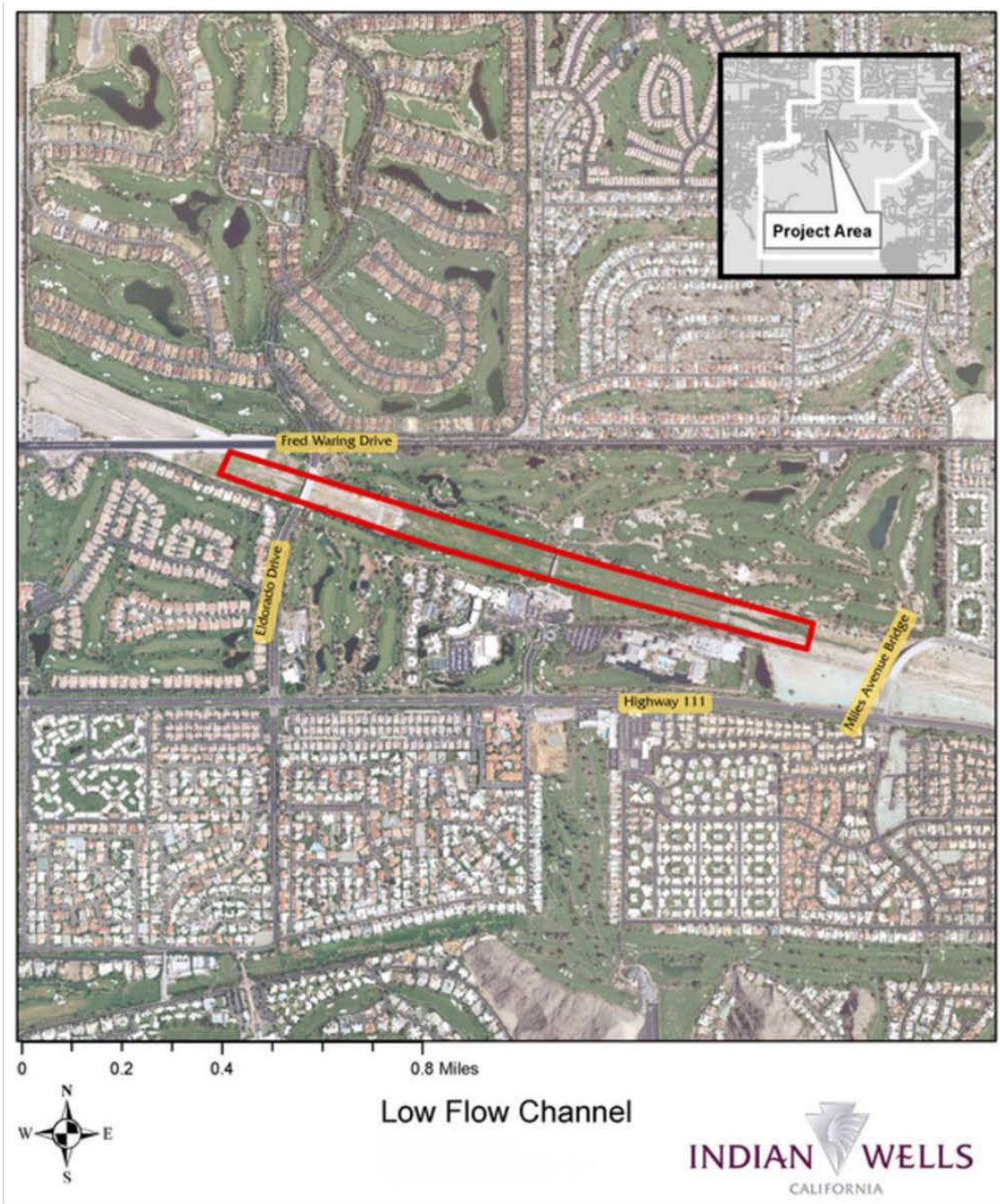
Review Panel Analysis: The proposed project presents a strong multi-benefit case, addressing flood control, stormwater management, groundwater recharge, native habitat, and community access needs in a high-need census tract. The project is technically sound, expected to be shovel-ready by end of 2026, and supported by robust community outreach and organizational capacity. However, the Conservancy's current Proposition 1 funding balance of \$1,603,652.47 will be fully exhausted after approving the two previously mentioned projects from Category I.

Staff Recommendation: Category II – Funding not recommended as proposed at this time because design is not fully completed, and project is not shovel-ready. The project is a strong candidate, and the review panel recognizes its merits. However, staff recommends that the City of Palm Desert complete the current planning project that the Conservancy is already funding for design of this park and then reapply for the stormwater retention basin in a future Proposition 4 application once the project is shovel ready. Staff also advised the City of Palm Desert staff to pursue other alternative funding sources through the Proposition 1 Stormwater and Flood Management program administered by the Department of Water Resources, or through Proposition 68 Floodplain Management, Protection, and Risk Awareness Grant Program. Staff will continue to work with the City of Palm Desert to identify the most appropriate funding pathway for this project.

City of Indian Wells

Summary: The City of Indian Wells requested \$1,200,000 (or \$400,000 as a reduced alternative) for the reconstruction of the Low Flow Channel within the Whitewater River Channel, a 5,800 linear foot concrete conveyance structure that runs through the city. The project involves demolition of the existing damaged channel and reconstruction with an expanded 8.5-foot-wide trapezoidal cross-section to manage higher-velocity flows and reduce sediment buildup. The project is intended to enhance flood protection, reduce erosion, and improve downstream water quality to the Salton Sea. The total project cost is \$2,000,000, with \$800,000 in secured matching funds from a Proposition 68 Floodplain Management grant and the City's Capital Improvement budget.

**Map of Project Locations for Proposed Project
City of Indian Wells – Low Flow Channel Project**



Review Panel Analysis: While the project addresses a legitimate infrastructure need within the Coachella Valley watershed, the project as proposed did not reach the scoring threshold required for a funding recommendation under the

Conservancy's Proposition 1 Grant Program. In addition, the project's CEQA review has not yet been completed, which is a prerequisite for a grant award. The project's primary focus on reconstruction of a concrete flood control channel, while beneficial, presents limited ecological uplift relative to other applicants in this round.

Staff Recommendation: Category II – Funding is not recommended as proposed because the project did not meet the minimum review panel score threshold. The review panel scoring indicated that the proposed project was not a multi-benefit project, it does not provide benefits to covered species or habitats for species under the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan objectives, nor was there a direct benefit to an underserved community. Staff advised the City of Indian Wells staff to pursue other alternative funding sources through the Proposition 1 Stormwater and Flood Management program administered by the Department of Water Resources, or through Proposition 68 Floodplain Management, Protection, and Risk Awareness Grant Program, both of which are better suited to the scale and nature of this infrastructure investment.

ATTACHMENT 3 – May 11, 2026

Action Item 4.3 Adoption of Resolution 2026-01 Approving a Proposition 1 Local Assistance Grant to the Center for Natural Lands Management for its Groundwater–Surface Water Monitoring Project at Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve.

BACKGROUND

The Conservancy issued a Notice of Funding Availability (No. 2025-01) on November 7, 2025, with an application deadline of February 27, 2026. As discussed in Agenda Item 4.2 above, the expert and staff review panel identified the Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM) project as Category I – Priority for Funding.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

CNLM is requesting \$695,751 for a multi-year hydrogeologic investigation and monitoring project (the Project) at Simone Pond, a spring-fed wetland within the 880-acre Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve (Preserve) located in Riverside County, north of Palm Desert and east of Palm Springs. Simone Pond provides critical habitat for the federally and state-listed endangered desert pupfish (*Cyprinodon Macularius*) and supports one of the Coachella Valley’s remaining desert fan palm oases.

The Project was directly precipitated by a documented ecological emergency. Simone Pond dried completely in July 2024, the first such event in at least 17 years of CNLM observation and dried again in July 2025. Both events caused desert pupfish mortality and required emergency, labor-intensive relocation efforts by CNLM and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). These relocations carry inherent risk to the species and are not a sustainable long-term conservation strategy. No site-specific data currently exists on the groundwater sources, flow paths, or hydrologic thresholds that sustain the pond, and the cause of the drying events is currently unknown.

To address this critical information gap, CNLM has engaged the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) California Water Science Center (CAWSC) to lead the hydrogeologic investigation and monitoring work under a cooperative agreement. USGS will serve as the primary technical implementer. The Project will be carried out over a four-year period from Summer 2026 through Winter 2029, organized into three integrated technical tasks:

Task 1 - Identification of Groundwater Sources (\$398,098): USGS will install 12–16 shallow groundwater monitoring wells, conduct fiber-optic distributed temperature

sensing surveys to identify groundwater discharge zones, perform electrical resistivity tomography (ERT) geophysical surveys to characterize subsurface geology and fault controls, install continuous surface-water stage recorders at all three Simone Pond pools, and collect seasonal groundwater and surface-water chemistry samples for analysis of major ions and stable isotopes.

Task 2 - Assessment of Pond Drying Events 2024–25 (\$101,459): Continuous groundwater-level monitoring from all installed wells and surface-water stage recording from the three pond pools will be conducted throughout the project period. Water table elevation maps will be developed from these data to characterize groundwater flow direction and identify hydrologic thresholds associated with pond drying.

Task 3 - Indicators for Pond Drying Events (\$177,444): USGS will synthesize all collected data into a conceptual model of groundwater flow at the Preserve, design an ongoing long-term monitoring program incorporating early-warning indicators for pond drying, and prepare a peer-reviewed interpretive report summarizing project findings and management implications. All data will be publicly released through USGS data platforms.

CNLM will provide project coordination, grant administration, site access, and logistical support throughout the project period, and will assume responsibility for continued operation and maintenance of the monitoring network following project completion. USGS will train CNLM staff on instrument maintenance and data management prior to the transfer of the monitoring network at project's end. CNLM commits to 15 years of annual post-completion reporting as required by Proposition 1 bond requirements.

The total cost of the Project is \$943,800. CNLM is providing \$248,049 in in-kind match (26.28% of total project cost), consisting of staff labor, supplies, travel, mileage, and unrecovered indirect costs. California State Parks is also providing in-kind staff coordination, site access, and resource information, the value of which is not separately quantified in the budget.

ANALYSIS

In accordance with Proposition 1 and the Conservancy's Grant Program Guidelines (Guidelines), eligible projects must implement the California Water Action Plan in the Coachella Valley by meeting one or more of the objectives listed in Public Resources Code section 79732, with a preference for projects that are "multi-benefit" because they fulfill more than one objective. In addition, funded projects must score highly on the numerous project evaluation criteria set by the Guidelines, including technical effectiveness and innovation, cost effectiveness, leveraged financial support,

collaboration with other governmental agencies, grantee technical capacity, local economic benefits to disadvantaged communities, and evidence of public and community support.

The staff and outside expert evaluation panel rated the Project with a score of 84 out of 100 points, meeting and exceeding the 80-point minimum threshold required for funding eligibility under Section VIII of the Guidelines and recommend the Project as Category I – Priority for Funding. In particular, the panel found that the Project qualifies as “multi-benefit” because it meets numerous Proposition 1 objectives, as discussed in more detail below.

PROPOSITION 1 OBJECTIVES

- Public Resources Code sec. 79732(1): *“Protect and increase the economic benefits arising from healthy watersheds, fishery resources, and instream flow.”*

The Desert Fan Palm Oasis Woodland at the Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve attracts thousands of visitors annually, particularly from November through April, and is identified as a recommended regional destination in visitor resources. The ecological integrity of the spring-fed wetland system is the primary feature underlying its recreational and tourism value. By improving the scientific understanding needed to sustain Simone Pond and the palm oasis ecosystem, the Project protects the natural asset that generates these visitation-based economic benefits for the Coachella Valley.

- Public Resources Code sec. 79732(2): *“Implement watershed adaptation projects in order to reduce the impacts of climate change on California’s communities and ecosystems.”*

Simone Pond dried in both 2024 and 2025, events unprecedented in at least 17 years of CNLM observation. These drying events are consistent with the intensifying drought and hydrologic variability associated with climate change in arid landscapes. The Project improves preparedness for future climate-driven variability by identifying measurable hydrologic indicators and drying thresholds, enabling adaptive management responses before crisis conditions develop. The resulting monitoring framework directly supports the California Water Plan Update 2023 emphasis on climate-informed, outcome-based monitoring for watershed resilience.

- Public Resources Code sec. 79732(4): *“Protect aquatic and wetland ecosystems, including fish and wildlife corridors and the acquisition of water rights for instream flow.”*

Simone Pond and the associated desert fan palm oasis at the Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve constitute a rare groundwater-dependent inland spring wetland ecosystem. The Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve is a centerpiece of the Coachella Valley preserve system and is co-managed in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Parks and Recreation, and CDFW. By characterizing the groundwater surface water interactions that sustain Simone Pond and establishing a long-term monitoring framework capable of detecting hydrologic stress before ecological impacts occur, the Project provides the scientific basis necessary to protect the long-term function of this rare wetland ecosystem.

- Public Resources Code sec. 79732(11): *“Reduce pollution or contamination of rivers, lakes, streams or coastal waters, prevent and remediate mercury contamination from legacy mines, and protect or restore natural system functions that contribute to water supply, water quality, or flood management.”*

The Project will characterize groundwater chemistry, hydraulic gradients, and hydrologic connectivity that sustain surface water at the Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve. Seasonal groundwater and surface-water sampling, including field parameters, major ions, and stable isotopes, will establish baseline water-quality conditions in the Desert Hot Springs Subbasin, a basin designated as very low-priority by the California Department of Water Resources that currently lacks comprehensive groundwater monitoring. This data will improve understanding of recharge sources, mixing processes, and groundwater surface water connectivity, supporting protection of the natural hydrologic functions that sustain wetland persistence and water quality.

- Public Resources Code sec. 79732(12): *“Assist in the recovery of endangered, threatened, or migratory species by improving watershed health, instream flows, fish passage, coastal or inland wetland restoration, or other means, such as natural community conservation plan and habitat conservation plan implementation.”*

Simone Pond provides habitat for the federally and state-listed endangered desert pupfish. The pond dried completely in 2024 and 2025, both times causing pupfish mortality and requiring emergency relocation efforts. By identifying groundwater sources and hydrologic mechanisms contributing to pond drying, and by establishing measurable early-warning thresholds through a permanent monitoring network, the Project provides the scientific foundation necessary to protect desert pupfish habitat through proactive management before future mortality events occur. The Project directly implements a stated monitoring objective of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP) to “track changes in groundwater levels from wells and surface water

in the vicinity of fan palm oases,” further supporting the CVMSHCP’s adaptive management framework.

OTHER PROGRAM AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The Project will employ best available science and standardized federal protocols in all data collection, analysis, and reporting activities. All monitoring methods, instrumentation, and quality assurance procedures follow documented USGS National Field Manual standards and CAWSC-specific water quality protocols. The USGS Statement of Work was developed by CAWSC hydrologists and geologists and underwent formal internal USGS scientific and management review prior to submission, providing an independent quality assurance standard not typically available for grant-funded scientific work. All project data will be publicly released through USGS data platforms, including the USGS Water Data for the Nation database, ScienceBase, and the USGS GeoLog Locator, ensuring transparency and broad accessibility.

The Project is supported by formal letters from the California Department of Water Resources (Assistant Deputy Director for Sustainable Water Management), the Coachella Valley Water District (Water Resources Program Supervisor), and California State Parks (Ocotillo Wells District Superintendent). Each letter is substantive and project-specific, identifying concrete agency contributions and confirming the Project’s value to regional groundwater management and ecosystem resilience in the Coachella Valley.

CNLM is a Land Trust Accreditation Commission-accredited 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with over 30 years of preserve management experience, 100+ preserves across California, Oregon, and Washington, and 20+ years of direct stewardship of the Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve. CNLM has a demonstrated track record of prior CVMC grant administration and has successfully met all reporting, schedule, and fiscal compliance requirements on previous awards. The CNLM and USGS partnership combines site-specific land management expertise with federal scientific capacity, ensuring that monitoring infrastructure can be installed efficiently, data collected and validated under standardized protocols, and findings synthesized into actionable management products.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

CNLM has evaluated the proposed Project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines and determined that the Project qualifies for multiple categorical exemptions. The Project consists of small-scale, temporary, and minimally invasive

monitoring and data collection activities, including installation of shallow groundwater monitoring wells, surface-water stage recorders, temperature probes, fiber-optic distributed temperature sensing cables, and periodic water-quality sampling. All work is limited in spatial extent, avoids mechanized grading, and is designed to prevent permanent disturbance to biological or physical resources. No changes to land use, water rights, hydrologic regimes, or habitat conditions are proposed.

The Project qualifies for exemption under the following CEQA Guidelines categorical exemption classes:

- Class 6 - State CEQA Guidelines §15306 (Information Collection): The Project consists primarily of data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities that do not result in serious or major disturbance to environmental resources.
- Class 4 - State CEQA Guidelines §15304 (Minor Alterations to Land): Installation of small-diameter probes, hand-augered pilot holes, and shallow monitoring wells constitutes minor alteration of land and water with no removal of healthy, mature native vegetation, in support of fish and wildlife conservation.
- Class 1 - State CEQA Guidelines §15301 (Existing Facilities): The Project includes monitoring and minor work within existing natural features and previously disturbed areas associated with springs, refugia, and existing access routes, with negligible physical effects.
- Class 33 - State CEQA Guidelines §15333 (Small Habitat Restoration Projects): The Project is intended to protect and enhance habitat for fish, plants, and wildlife. The total area subject to temporary disturbance will not exceed five acres, and no hazardous materials are present or will be disturbed.

The Project does not meet any of the exceptions to categorical exemptions listed in CEQA Guidelines §15300.2. No unusual circumstances are present, and the Project will not affect scenic resources, involve hazardous materials, or result in significant cumulative impacts. No EIR or Negative Declaration is required.

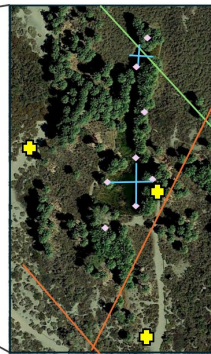
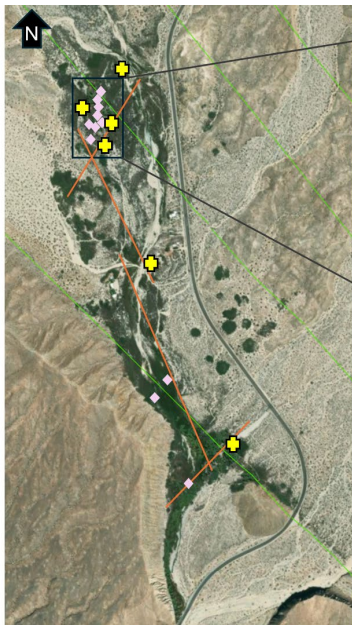
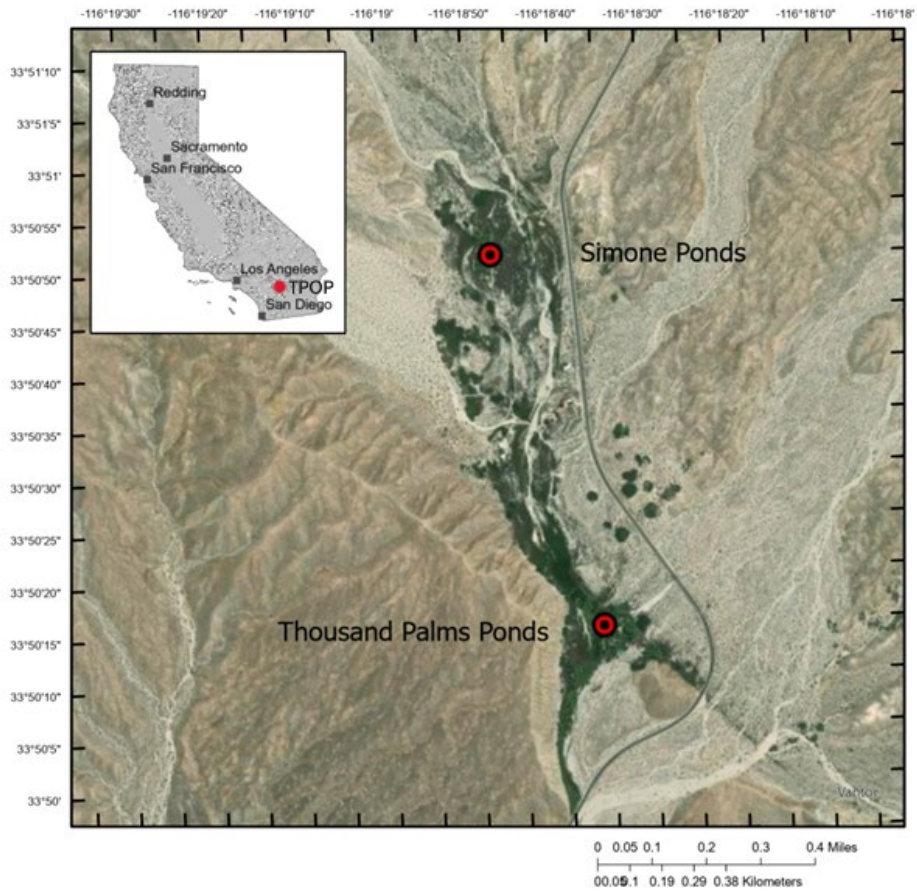
The attached Resolution 2026-01 contains detailed findings for adoption by the Board as part of Project approval in accordance with CEQA and applicable law.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION







Staff recommends adoption of Resolution 2026-01 approving a Proposition 1 local assistance grant to the Center for Natural Lands Management in an amount not to exceed \$695,751 for its Groundwater Surface Water Monitoring at Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve Project.

EXHIBIT A

Project Location Map – CNLM Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve



Explanation

-  Faults, well constrained and inferred (U.S Geological Survey and California Geological Survey, 2022)
-  Detailed extent of Simone Ponds
-  Proposed Geoprobe groundwater monitoring wells
-  Proposed hand-driven groundwater table wells
-  Proposed ERT lines
-  Proposed fiberoptic lines

**RESOLUTION 2026-01 OF THE GOVERNING BOARD OF THE
COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY
ADOPTED IN REGULAR SESSION
MAY 11, 2026**

**APPROVING A PROPOSITION 1 LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANT
TO THE CENTER FOR NATURAL LANDS MANAGEMENT
FOR ITS GROUNDWATER SURFACE WATER MONITORING PROJECT
AT THOUSAND PALMS OASIS PRESERVE**

WHEREAS, Public Resources Code Section 33501 created the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy for the purpose, among other things, of acquiring and holding, in perpetual open space, mountainous lands surrounding the Coachella Valley and natural community conservation lands, and to provide for the protection of natural and cultural resources and the public's enjoyment thereof; and

WHEREAS, Public Resources Code Section 33601(e) provides that the Conservancy may "in order to further the conservancy's purposes as set forth in Section 33501, award grants to cities, counties, resource conservation districts, or nonprofit organizations...."; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 (Proposition 1), the Conservancy operates its Proposition 1 Grant Program, which funds projects of local public agencies or nonprofit organizations that implement California Water Action Plan in the Coachella Valley; and

WHEREAS, on November 7, 2025, the Conservancy issued its Notice of Funding Availability 2025-01 (NOFA 2025-01) for watershed restoration and acquisition and water-related infrastructure projects eligible for funding under its Proposition 1 Grant Program Guidelines (Guidelines); and

WHEREAS, CNLM submitted a Proposition 1 local assistance grant application for funding in the amount of \$695,751 for a multi-year hydrogeologic investigation and monitoring framework at Simone Pond, a spring-fed wetland within the 880-acre Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve in Riverside County, which provides habitat for the federally and state-listed endangered desert pupfish (*Cyprinodon macularius*) and supports one of the Coachella Valley's remaining desert fan palm oases; and

WHEREAS, Simone Pond dried completely in July 2024 and again in July 2025, the first such events in at least 17 years of CNLM observation, both times causing desert pupfish

mortality and requiring emergency relocation efforts by CNLM and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife; and

WHEREAS, no site-specific data currently exists on the groundwater sources, flow paths, or hydrologic thresholds that sustain Simone Pond, and the Project addresses this critical information gap through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Geological Survey California Water Science Center; and

WHEREAS, the Project will improve understanding of the groundwater surface water interactions that sustain Simone Pond and the broader Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve, enabling informed long-term habitat management for the endangered desert pupfish and contributing to regional groundwater sustainability knowledge in a currently unmonitored desert basin; and

WHEREAS, by improving the scientific understanding needed to sustain Simone Pond and the Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve ecosystem, which attracts thousands of visitors annually, the Project will protect and increase the economic benefits arising from healthy watersheds, which fulfills the Proposition 1 objective identified in Public Resources Code sec. 79732(1); and

WHEREAS, by identifying measurable hydrologic indicators and drying thresholds associated with pond drying under increasing drought and climate variability, the Project implements a watershed adaptation project to reduce the impacts of climate change on California's communities and ecosystems, which fulfills the Proposition 1 objective identified in Public Resources Code sec. 79732(2); and

WHEREAS, by characterizing the groundwater surface water interactions sustaining Simone Pond and the associated desert fan palm oasis, a rare groundwater-dependent inland spring wetland ecosystem and establishing a long-term monitoring framework for its protection, the Project will protect aquatic and wetland ecosystems, which fulfills the Proposition 1 objective identified in Public Resources Code sec. 79732(4); and

WHEREAS, by collecting baseline groundwater and surface-water chemistry data in the Desert Hot Springs Subbasin, a data-limited basin lacking comprehensive monitoring the Project will protect natural system functions contributing to water quality, which fulfills the Proposition 1 objective identified in Public Resources Code sec. 79732(11); and

WHEREAS, by identifying the groundwater sources and hydrologic mechanisms contributing to pond drying and establishing measurable early-warning indicators through a permanent monitoring network, the Project will assist in the recovery of the endangered

desert pupfish by enabling proactive management before future mortality events occur, which fulfills the Proposition 1 objective identified in Public Resources Code sec. 79732(12); and

WHEREAS, the Project directly implements a stated Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP) monitoring objective to track changes in groundwater levels from wells and surface water in the vicinity of fan palm oases, and is therefore consistent with the implementation of the CVMSHCP; and

WHEREAS, CNLM will provide \$248,049 in matching funds (26.28% of total project cost), representing in-kind staff labor, supplies, travel, mileage, and unrecovered indirect costs, and California State Parks will provide additional in-kind staff coordination and site access; and

WHEREAS, upon project completion, the monitoring network will transfer to CNLM for continued long-term operation within CNLM's regular preserve stewardship program, ensuring continuity of data collection and protection of the State's investment beyond the grant period; and

WHEREAS, CNLM will provide 15 years of annual post-completion reporting as required by Proposition 1 bond requirements, ensuring long-term conservation benefit and protection of the State's investment; and

WHEREAS, CNLM evaluated the proposed Project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines and determined that the Project qualifies for multiple categorical exemptions under State CEQA Guidelines §15306 (Information Collection), §15304 (Minor Alterations to Land), §15301 (Existing Facilities), and §15333 (Small Habitat Restoration Projects), and that no EIR or Negative Declaration is required; and

WHEREAS, the Project involves no changes to land use, water rights, hydrologic regimes, or habitat conditions; no grading or vegetation removal; and no permanent modification of wetlands or waters of the state; and

WHEREAS, it is in furtherance of the Conservancy's purposes as established in Public Resources Code Section 33501 and the implementation of the CVMSHCP to complete the Project; and

WHEREAS, the Conservancy wishes to authorize a Proposition 1 local assistance grant to CNLM in an amount not to exceed \$695,751 to support the Project

WHEREAS, it is in furtherance of the Conservancy's purposes as established in Public Resources Code Section 33501 and the implementation of the CVMSHCP to complete the Project; and

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved in regular session of the Governing Board of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy that the Board finds and determines that the Project meets the objectives of the California Water Action Plan and Proposition 1, including but not limited to those objectives set forth in Public Resources Code Sections 79732(1), (2), (4), (11), and (12); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board finds and determines that the Project complies with the requirements of the Conservancy's Proposition 1 Grant Program Guidelines and is consistent with the implementation of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board finds and determines that the Project is categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines §15306, §15304, §15301, and §15333, and that no further environmental review is required; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board approves a Proposition 1 local assistance grant to the Center for Natural Lands Management (Grantee) in an amount not to exceed \$695,751 to support its Groundwater Surface Water Monitoring at Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve Project; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a condition of the grant is that the Grantee shall enter into a Proposition 1 Local Assistance Grant Agreement with the Conservancy, which shall contain provisions requiring the following:

1. That the Grantee will agree to defend, indemnify, and hold harmless the Conservancy and the State of California, its contractors, officers, directors, agents or employees against any and all claims, liability, demands, damages, debts, judgments, costs, or expenses, including reasonable attorney's fees, arising out of or in any way connected to the Grantee's actions, omissions, or other conduct relating in any way to this agreement and the Project, including, but not limited to, any such losses, damages, or expenses arising out of (a) loss of or damage to the Project, and (b) injury to or death of persons;
2. That the Grantee must complete the Project no later than March 31, 2030, unless the Conservancy agrees in writing to an extension;

3. That the Grantee shall notify the Conservancy in writing within 30 days of any change in the entity assuming responsibility for long-term operation of the monitoring network following project completion;
4. That the grant agreement shall include defined milestone dates for USGS data releases and the interpretive report, with a minimum of one publicly accessible USGS data release by Year 3 of the project and delivery of the interpretive report by Fall 2029;
5. That the Grantees shall provide annual reports for a minimum of 15 years following project completion documenting groundwater surface status, pond condition, wildlife utilization, and management actions taken;
6. That should the Grantee violate the Grant Agreement in any material way, and fail to cure such violation upon written notice from the Conservancy as provided in the Grant Agreement, the Grantee shall reimburse the Conservancy for the full amount of the grant within thirty (30) days of a written demand from the Conservancy to do so;
7. That the Grantee shall maintain accounting records of how the grant sum was spent for a period of three years and shall make such records available for inspection by the Conservancy or the Department of Finance upon request by either agency;
8. That the Conservancy shall review and approve all material changes to the Project as described in the grant application prior to their implementation; and
9. That any unused grant funds must be returned to the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, along with any accrued interest, not later than one month after the project completion date.

BE IT FURTHER resolved that the Board hereby authorizes its Executive Director, or in her absence the Acting Director or Board Chairwoman, to execute any and all documents necessary to effect the grant.

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED at a regular meeting of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy Governing Board, held on this 11th day of May 2026, by the following vote, to wit:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSTENTIONS:

ABSENT:

Deborah McGarrey, Chair
Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy

ATTACHMENT 4 – May 11, 2026

Action Item 4.4 Adoption of Resolution 2026-02. Approving a Proposition 1 Local Assistance Grant to The Living Desert for their Desert Pupfish Conservation Refugia Project on Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians' Land.

BACKGROUND

The Conservancy issued a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA 2025-01) on November 7, 2025, with an application deadline of February 27, 2026. As discussed in Agenda Item 4.2 above, the expert and staff review panel identified the joint application by The Living Desert (TLD) and the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians (TMDCI) Natural Resources Department as Category I – Priority for Funding.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

TLD and the TMDCI Natural Resources Department are requesting \$863,450 for a two-year project to create two large one-acre (43,560 ft² each) desert pupfish refugia on TMDCI Tribal reservation land in the town of Mecca, Riverside County (the Project). The Project will restore two of the currently dry wetland cells at an existing TMDCI wetlands facility near the corner of Lincoln Street and 73rd Avenue, less than two miles from the northeastern shore of the Salton Sea and immediately proximate to the Whitewater Channel.

The desert pupfish (*Cyprinodon macularius*) is the only native fish species in the Salton Sink Basin and has been listed as endangered by the California Fish and Game Commission since 1980 and by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service since 1986. Currently only 14 established desert pupfish refugia exist in California, with a combined surface area of approximately 1.4 acres (60,984 ft²). The two proposed refugia will together add approximately 87,120 ft² of new refugia, more than doubling the total refugia surface area currently available in the Coachella Valley. The refugia will be purpose-built and maintained exclusively for desert pupfish conservation and recovery, with fish to be sourced from declining populations in the north shore drains of the Salton Sea under coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).

In addition to serving as desert pupfish refugia, the refugia will provide rare freshwater resources for migratory birds and wildlife along the Pacific Flyway. The increasing salinity of the Salton Sea and the loss of freshwater availability in the Salton Trough due to climate change and shifting water management have significantly reduced stopover habitat for

migratory species. These two large refugia will provide open freshwater for migratory birds, dragonflies, damselflies, and other wildlife in a landscape where such resources are rapidly disappearing.

The Project is organized into the following tasks:

CEQA Review: Aspen Environmental Group has been engaged to advise on CEQA compliance. A Categorical Exemption under CEQA is anticipated based on the project's restoration nature and benefit to a listed species on Tribal land.

Pond Construction: TLD will rent and operate heavy equipment to terraform the pond interiors, constructing deep zones of at least four feet and shallow breeding shelves of less than 12 inches, consistent with the proven design used at TLD's Sharon and Preserve Refugia. Each pond will be lined differently: one with a fabric pond liner (minimum 25-year warranty) and one with bentonite clay, allowing comparative assessment of lining methods for future refugia projects. Energy dissipation structures will be installed at water entry points to minimize turbidity. TMDCI's pre-cleared contractor will separately drill and install a new borehole and pump, funded in part through TMDCI's secured Bureau of Reclamation funds. Surrounding berms (approximately 5–6 feet high) and adjacent channels provide approximately 16 feet of combined vertical flood protection, consistent with protection against 100-year flooding events.

Fish Introduction and Monitoring (ongoing): Following an aging period to establish water quality and invertebrate populations, refugia will be stocked with desert pupfish sourced from north shore Salton Sea drains under CDFW coordination. CDFW's Sharon Keeney, who designed TLD's Sharon Pond and conducted the 2024 population survey, will manage fish introduction and ongoing monitoring. TLD commits to 15 years of annual post-completion reporting as required by Proposition 1 bond requirements, with TMDCI maintaining the refugia in perpetuity.

The total project cost for the two-pond option is \$1,551,313. TLD and TMDCI are providing \$687,863 in combined match, including TMDCI's \$350,000 secured Bureau of Reclamation commitment for borehole infrastructure, TLD staff and volunteer time, and TLD departmental support.

ANALYSIS

In accordance with Proposition 1 and the Conservancy's Grant Program Guidelines (Guidelines), eligible projects must implement the California Water Action Plan in the Coachella Valley by meeting one or more of the objectives listed in Public Resources

Code section 79732, with a preference for projects that are “multi-benefit” because they fulfill more than one objective. In addition, funded projects must score highly on the numerous project evaluation criteria set by the Guidelines, including technical effectiveness and innovation, cost effectiveness, leveraged financial support, collaboration with other governmental agencies, grantee technical capacity, local economic benefits to disadvantaged communities, and evidence of public and community support.

The staff and outside expert evaluation panel rated the Project a score of 94 out of 100 points, exceeding the 80-point minimum threshold required for funding eligibility under Section VIII of the Guidelines, and recommending the Project as Category I – Priority for Funding. The panel found that the Project qualifies as “multi-benefit” because it meets numerous Proposition 1 objectives, as discussed in more detail below.

PROPOSITION 1 OBJECTIVES

- Public Resources Code sec. 79732(1): *“Protect and increase the economic benefits arising from healthy watersheds, fishery resources, and instream flow.”*

The Project site is located on TMDCI Tribal reservation land in Mecca, a community that ranks in the 97th percentile for poverty and 96th percentile for unemployment statewide. The Project directly employs and engages TMDCI community members and contractors in the construction and ongoing management of the refugia, with priority given to contractors from local disadvantaged communities. The Project funds 25% of a TMDCI Natural Resources Department staff salary for two years and builds long-term Tribal environmental stewardship capacity through connections to the TMDCI youth ambassador program and cultural connections to ancestral lands.

- Public Resources Code sec. 79732(2): *“Implement watershed adaptation projects in order to reduce the impacts of climate change on California’s communities and ecosystems.”*

The increasing salinity of the Salton Sea due to climate change and reductions in freshwater inflows has dramatically reduced available freshwater habitat in the Salton Trough. The proposed refugia directly respond to this climate-driven loss by creating stable, managed freshwater refugia that provide habitat resilience for the desert pupfish and freshwater resources for migratory species as natural water sources in the region continue to diminish. The Project provides an enduring conservation asset specifically designed to offset the expected accelerating effects of climate change on desert aquatic ecosystems.

- Public Resources Code sec. 79732(4): *“Protect aquatic and wetland ecosystems, including fish and wildlife corridors and the acquisition of water rights for instream flow.”*

The Project will restore two wetland cells on TMDCI Tribal land to functional ecological condition, creating large freshwater refugia in a landscape where such resources are rapidly diminishing. The refugia will serve as vital freshwater stopover habitat for migratory birds along the Pacific Flyway and will support diverse native wildlife including herons, egrets, flycatchers, waterfowl, bats, coyotes, foxes, bobcats, quail, dragonflies, damselflies, and other invertebrates. The concentration of aquatic invertebrate life supported by the pupfish refugia will further benefit native bat and bird populations through improved foraging opportunities. Efforts will be made to preserve and support native vegetation surrounding the refugia to provide cover, perching, and foraging habitat.

- Public Resources Code sec. 79732(7): *“Collaborate with federal agencies in the protection of fish native to California and wetlands in the central valley of California.”*

The Project is co-developed with CDFW and engages USFWS, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Reclamation as active partners. CDFW’s Sharon Keeney, who designed TLD’s Sharon Pond, conducted the June 2024 population survey documenting approximately 20,000 Salton Sea pupfish at the Sonoran Pond, and produced drone site mapping of the TMDCI facility, will manage fish introduction and ongoing monitoring at the new refugia. Fish reared in these refugia will ultimately be available for release back into the Salton Sink Basin in coordination with CDFW, USFWS, and BLM.

- Public Resources Code sec. 79732(12): *“Assist in the recovery of endangered, threatened, or migratory species by improving watershed health, instream flows, fish passage, coastal or inland wetland restoration, or other means, such as natural community conservation plan and habitat conservation plan implementation.”*

The desert pupfish is the only native fish species in the Salton Sink Basin and has been listed as endangered by both the State of California and the federal government. Natural populations are declining across all three remaining Southern California water bodies due to habitat loss, increasing salinity, invasive predators, and changes in water management. Currently only 14 desert pupfish refugia exist in California. This Project will create two large purpose-built one-acre refugia on TMDCI Tribal land, increasing the number of refugia to 16 and more than doubling the total refugia surface area available in the Coachella Valley. The fish to be stocked will be sourced from the declining north shore

Salton Sea drain populations under CDFW coordination, providing a secure backup population and supporting the long-term recovery of the species. The Project is located within the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP) Planning Area and supports CVMSHCP objectives for native aquatic species recovery.

OTHER PROGRAM AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The Project employs pond design and construction methods proven over decades of implementation at TLD and developed in direct partnership with CDFW. Pond design elements including shallow breeding shelves, deep thermocline zones, energy dissipation structures, and appropriate lining techniques are based on the best available science for desert pupfish refugia construction and have been successfully applied in TLD's three prior CVMC-funded pupfish pond projects. The June 2024 CDFW survey documenting approximately 20,000 Salton Sea pupfish in TLD's 12,000 ft² Sonoran Pond provides direct empirical evidence of TLD's ability to create and sustain productive refugia at scale.

TLD is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with over 50 years of desert pupfish refugia experience and a demonstrated track record of successful CVMC grant administration, large-scale capital project management (including a \$10 million entrance renovation and \$30 million Rhino Savanna capital project), and compliance with state audit and reporting requirements. Dr. James Danoff-Burg, Vice President of Conservation at TLD, serves as project lead with over 30 years of conservation project management experience. Dr. Luis Ramirez will serve as field implementation lead, and Mary Thomas, Assistant Conservation Scientist, will coordinate desert pupfish monitoring and CDFW liaison activities.

The TMDCI Natural Resources Department serves as co-applicant and landowner, providing Tribal land access, contractor coordination, Bureau of Reclamation funding for borehole infrastructure, and long-term stewardship commitment. TMDCI has demonstrated grant management capacity and established contractor relationships for the borehole installation. The project is supported by CDFW, USFWS, BOR, and BLM. The Project is consistent with the CVMSHCP and supports plan objectives for recovery of the desert pupfish and native aquatic species within the Coachella Valley.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

CEQA review is underway. TLD has engaged Aspen Environmental Group (Aspen) to prepare the required environmental documentation. The Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy is the CEQA lead agency for the Project, as confirmed in Aspen's April 13, 2026 scope of work. Aspen has determined that the Project qualifies for a Categorical

Exemption under CEQA Guidelines Section 15304 (Class 4 – Minor Alterations to Land) and/or Section 15333 (Class 33 – Small Habitat Restoration Projects). Aspen’s scope includes a site reconnaissance survey, preparation of a Categorical Exemption memorandum with technical and regulatory compliance analysis, and preparation of a Notice of Exemption (NOE) form for CVMC’s signature and filing with the State Clearinghouse and County Clerk. Filing of the NOE will reduce the statute of limitations for CEQA legal challenges from 180 days to 35 days. Aspen’s scope does not include NEPA review, consistent with the determination that the Project’s activities do not independently trigger a federal nexus requiring NEPA; the Bureau of Reclamation’s involvement as a match contributor through TMDCI does not constitute a federal action requiring NEPA for this Project. Aspen anticipates completing the CEQA documentation within three weeks of receiving a Notice to Proceed.

The CEQA Categorical Exemption memorandum and Notice of Exemption will not be completed prior to the Board meeting. Consistent with Proposition 1 Grant Program Guidelines Section VIII, no final grant award may be made until CEQA compliance is achieved. Accordingly, staff recommends the Board approve a funding encumbrance for this Project at this meeting. No grant funds will be disbursed, and no grant agreement will be executed, until staff has received and accepted the completed Categorical Exemption memorandum from Aspen and confirmed that the Notice of Exemption has been filed with the State Clearinghouse and County Clerk. Staff anticipates this condition will be satisfied within approximately three weeks of Aspen receiving a Notice to Proceed, and will return to execute the grant agreement upon confirmation. NEPA review is not anticipated to be required for this Project.

The attached Resolution 2026-02 contains detailed findings for adoption by the Board as part of Project approval in accordance with CEQA and applicable law.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends adoption of Resolution 2026-02 approving a conditional Proposition 1 local assistance grant to The Living Desert in an amount not to exceed \$863,450 for their Desert Pupfish Conservation Refugia Project on Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians’ Land, pending completion of CEQA review and, if triggered, NEPA clearance, and Bureau of Reclamation commitment confirmation of the borehole infrastructure.

EXHIBIT A

Project Location Map – TMDCI Wetlands Facility, Mecca, Riverside County.

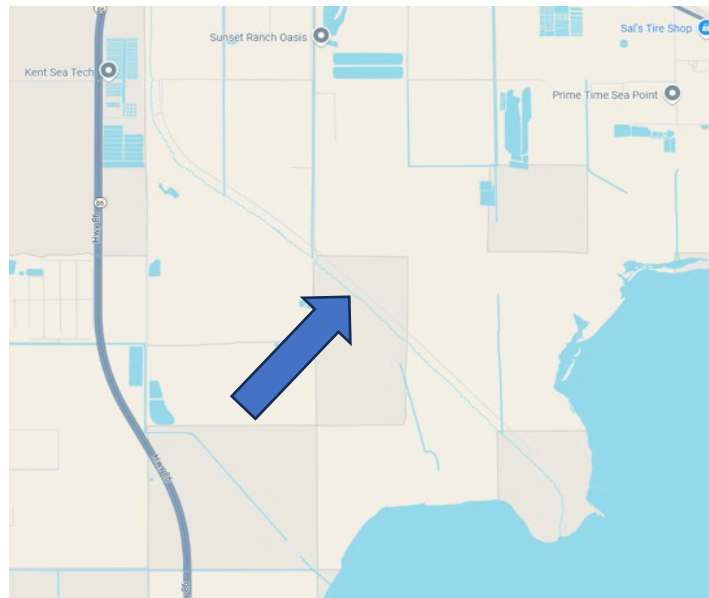


FIGURE 4 – THE ARROW POINTS TO THE LOCATION OF THE POTENTIAL TMDCI DESERT PUPFISH REFUGIA. NOT THE GRAY RECTANGLES, AS THAT INDICATES TMDCI TRIBAL RESERVATION LAND, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED LOCATION.



FIGURE 5 – SATELLITE IMAGE OF THE SIX NOW-DRY WETLANDS AT THE TMDCI FACILITY. THE THREE NORTHEASTERN-MOST REFUGIA IN THE BLUE BRACKET WILL BE THE ONES THAT WE WILL TARGET FOR THIS INTERVENTION.

**RESOLUTION 2026-02 OF THE GOVERNING BOARD OF THE
COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY
ADOPTED IN REGULAR SESSION
MAY 11, 2026**

**APPROVING A PROPOSITION 1 LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANT
TO THE LIVING DESERT FOR THEIR
DESERT PUPFISH CONSERVATION REFUGIA PROJECT
AT TORRES MARTINEZ DESERT CAHUILLA INDIAN RESERVATION**

WHEREAS, Public Resources Code Section 33501 created the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy for the purpose, among other things, of acquiring and holding, in perpetual open space, mountainous lands surrounding the Coachella Valley and natural community conservation lands, and to provide for the protection of natural and cultural resources and the public's enjoyment thereof; and

WHEREAS, Public Resources Code Section 33601(e) provides that the Conservancy may "in order to further the conservancy's purposes as set forth in Section 33501, award grants to cities, counties, resource conservation districts, or nonprofit organizations...."; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 (Proposition 1), the Conservancy operates its Proposition 1 Grant Program, which funds projects of local public agencies or nonprofit organizations that implement California Water Action Plan in the Coachella Valley; and

WHEREAS, on November 7, 2025, the Conservancy issued its Notice of Funding Availability 2025-01 (NOFA 2025-01) for watershed restoration and acquisition and water-related infrastructure projects eligible for funding under its Proposition 1 Grant Program Guidelines (Guidelines); and

WHEREAS, The Living Desert (TLD) is a California nonprofit corporation, recognized as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization by the Internal Revenue Service, and is therefore a nonprofit organization eligible to receive funding under Proposition 1; and

WHEREAS, the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians (TMDCI) is a federally recognized Indian Tribe whose reservation lands in the town of Mecca, Riverside County constitute the project site, and TLD and TMDCI are submitting this application as co-applicants; and

WHEREAS, TLD and TMDCI submitted a Proposition 1 local assistance grant application for funding in the amount of \$863,450 (two-pond option) for the creation of two large one-acre desert pupfish refugia on TMDCI Tribal reservation land near the northeastern shore of the Salton Sea; and

WHEREAS, the desert pupfish (*Cyprinodon macularius*) is the only native fish species in the Salton Sink Basin, listed as endangered by the California Fish and Game Commission since 1980 and by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service since 1986, and is the subject of active recovery efforts coordinated by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife; and

WHEREAS, only 14 established desert pupfish refugia currently exist in California, with a combined surface area of approximately 1.4 acres, and this Project will create two additional one-acre refugia, more than doubling the total refugia surface area available in the Coachella Valley; and

WHEREAS, the Project directly employs and engages TMDCI community members and contractors in one of California's most economically disadvantaged communities, ranking in the 97th percentile for poverty and 96th percentile for unemployment statewide, which fulfills the Proposition 1 objective identified in Public Resources Code sec. 79732(1) (economic benefits from healthy watersheds); and

WHEREAS, the Project provides stable managed freshwater refugia to offset the accelerating effects of climate change on desert aquatic ecosystems, including the increasing salinity of the Salton Sea and the loss of freshwater availability in the Salton Trough, which fulfills the Proposition 1 objective identified in Public Resources Code sec. 79732(2) (watershed adaptation to reduce climate change impacts); and

WHEREAS, the Project will create two large purpose-built desert pupfish refugia on TMDCI Tribal land, restore wetland habitat, and provide rare freshwater resources for migratory birds and wildlife along the Pacific Flyway, which fulfills the Proposition 1 objectives identified in Public Resources Code sec. 79732(12) (recovery of endangered species) and sec. 79732(4) (protection and restoration of aquatic, wetland, and migratory bird ecosystems); and

WHEREAS, the Project is co-developed with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and engages the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Reclamation as active partners in fish sourcing, introduction, monitoring, and coordination, which fulfills the Proposition 1 objective identified in Public Resources Code sec. 79732(7) (collaboration with federal agencies in the protection of fish native to California); and

WHEREAS, the Project is located within the CVMSHCP Planning Area and supports CVMSHCP objectives for the recovery of the desert pupfish and native aquatic species in the Coachella Valley; and

WHEREAS, TLD and TMDCI are providing \$687,863 in combined match, including TMDCI's \$350,000 secured Bureau of Reclamation commitment for borehole infrastructure, TLD staff and volunteer time, and TLD departmental support; and

WHEREAS, upon project completion, TMDCI will maintain the refugia in perpetuity as part of ongoing Tribal wetland management, and TLD will provide 15 years of annual post-completion reporting as required by Proposition 1 bond requirements, ensuring long-term conservation benefit and protection of the State's investment; and

WHEREAS, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy is the CEQA lead agency for the Project, as confirmed by Aspen Environmental Group in its April 13, 2026 scope of work; CEQA review is underway and Aspen has determined that the Project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption under CEQA Guidelines Section 15304 (Class 4, Minor Alterations to Land) and/or Section 15333 (Class 33, Small Habitat Restoration Projects); Aspen will prepare a Categorical Exemption memorandum and a Notice of Exemption for CVMC's signature and filing with the State Clearinghouse and County Clerk, with completion anticipated within approximately three weeks of Aspen receiving a Notice to Proceed; the CEQA documentation will not be completed prior to this Board meeting and the Board's action today is therefore a funding reservation only; consistent with CVMC Grant Program Guidelines Section VIII, no grant funds shall be disbursed and no grant agreement shall be executed until CEQA compliance is confirmed; NEPA review is not anticipated to be required for this Project; and

WHEREAS, it is in furtherance of the Conservancy's purposes as established in Public Resources Code Section 33501 and the implementation of the CVMSHCP to complete the project; and

WHEREAS, the Conservancy wishes to authorize a Proposition 1 local assistance grant to TLD and TMDCI in an amount not to exceed \$863,450 to support the Project;

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved in regular session of the Governing Board of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy that the Board finds and determines that the Project meets the objectives of the California Water Action Plan and Proposition 1, including but not limited to those objectives set forth in Public Resources Code Sections 79732(1), (2), (4), (7), and (12); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board finds and determines that the Project complies with the requirements of the Conservancy's Proposition 1 Grant Program

Guidelines and is consistent with the implementation of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board finds and determines that the Project is categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines §15306, §15304, §15301, and §15333, and that no further environmental review is required; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board approves a Proposition 1 local assistance grant to The Living Desert (Grantee) in an amount not to exceed \$863,450 to support the two-pond option of their Desert Pupfish Conservation Refugia Project on Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians' Reservation; provided that no grant funds shall be disbursed and no grant agreement shall be executed until the Conservancy has received the completed Categorical Exemption memorandum from Aspen Environmental Group and confirmation that the Notice of Exemption has been filed with the State Clearinghouse and County Clerk; and provided further that the Executive Director is authorized to execute the grant agreement and proceed to fund disbursement upon satisfaction of the CEQA condition without further Board action; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a condition of the grant is that the Grantee shall enter into a Proposition 1 Local Assistance Grant Agreement with the Conservancy, which shall contain provisions requiring the following:

1. That the Grantee will agree to defend, indemnify, and hold harmless the Conservancy and the State of California, its contractors, officers, directors, agents or employees against any and all claims, liability, demands, damages, debts, judgments, costs, or expenses, including reasonable attorney's fees, arising out of or in any way connected to the Grantee's actions, omissions, or other conduct relating in any way to this agreement and the Project, including, but not limited to, any such losses, damages, or expenses arising out of (a) loss of or damage to the Project, and (b) injury to or death of persons;
2. That the Grantee must complete the Project no later than March 31, 2028, unless the Conservancy agrees in writing to an extension;
3. That the Grantee shall notify the Conservancy in writing within 30 days of any change in the entity assuming responsibility for long-term operation of the monitoring network following project completion;
4. That the Grantees shall provide a formal Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians Tribal Council resolution authorizing the project and the grant application prior to grant agreement execution;

5. That final performance measures shall be confirmed in the grant agreement, including at minimum: minimum desert pupfish population thresholds at Year 1 and Year 3 post-stocking; water quality parameters to be maintained; minimum pond surface area achieved; and documentation of wildlife species utilizing the refugia;
6. That the Grantees shall provide annual reports for a minimum of 15 years following project completion documenting pupfish population status, pond condition, wildlife utilization, and management actions taken;
7. That should the Grantees violate the Grant Agreement in any material way, and fail to cure such violation upon written notice from the Conservancy as provided in the Grant Agreement, the Grantees shall reimburse the Conservancy for the full amount of the grant within thirty (30) days of a written demand from the Conservancy to do so;
8. That the Grantees shall maintain accounting records of how the grant sum was spent for a period of three years and shall make such records available for inspection by the Conservancy or the Department of Finance upon request by either agency;
9. That the Conservancy shall review and approve all material changes to the Project as described in the grant application prior to their implementation; and
10. That any unused grant funds must be returned to the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, along with any accrued interest, not later than one month after the project completion date.

BE IT FURTHER resolved that the Board hereby authorizes its Executive Director, or in her absence the Acting Director or Board Chairwoman, to execute any and all documents necessary to effect the grant.

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED at a regular meeting of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy Governing Board, held on this 11th day of May 2026, by the following vote, to wit:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSTENTIONS:

ABSENT:

Deborah McGarrey, Chair
Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy

ATTACHMENT 5 – May 11, 2026

Action Item 4.5 Adoption of Resolution 2026-03 Approving a Proposition 4 Local Assistance Planning Grant to the Mojave Desert Land Trust for its State Route-62 Wildlife Crossing Yucca Grande and Morongo Project.

BACKGROUND

The Conservancy issued Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) 2026-01 on March 6, 2026, for watershed restoration, habitat conservation, climate resilience, and public access projects eligible for funding under its Proposition 4 Grant Program for which applications are accepted on a rolling basis. The Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT) reached out to CVMC staff in 2025 with interest of pursuing a grant and support from the Conservancy for their State Route-62 Wildlife Crossing Project. At that time, the Conservancy had not yet received approval of its Proposition 4 appropriation, staff encouraged MDLT to seek funding from other state agencies whose Proposition 4 allocations were larger and already approved. MDLT subsequently applied to and was awarded a planning grant from the California Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) in the amount of \$5,497,453. WCB issued a Notice to Proceed on March 24, 2026, and the project is now underway. MDLT submitted a Pre-Application Consultation Form and participated in a Pre-Application Consultation meeting with Conservancy staff on April 8, 2026. Following that consultation, MDLT was invited to submit a Full Application, which was received on April 20, 2026. Staff has reviewed the application and identified the project as Category I – Priority for Funding.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

MDLT is requesting \$512,000 from the Conservancy's Proposition 4 Grant Program to serve as matching funds for a planning-phase grant to complete the Caltrans project planning process for two proposed wildlife crossing structures on State Route 62 (SR-62) between Desert Hot Springs and Yucca Valley (the Project). The Project will fund Caltrans documentation, environmental review, and preliminary and design-level engineering for two crossing locations: the Yucca Grade Wildlife Crossing, on MDLT-owned land in San Bernardino County, and the Morongo Crossing, on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land in Riverside County where a right-of-way application is pending. The Project period runs from March 2026 through February 2029.

SR-62 bisects the San Bernardino and Little San Bernardino Mountains and the Sand to Snow National Monument across a historically continuous 94-mile protected landscape, separating Joshua Tree National Park from the western portion of the Sand to Snow National Monument and other protected areas including the San Gorgonio and Bighorn

Wilderness Areas. A 2021 Caltrans wildlife connectivity study documented a “complete barrier effect” on this segment of SR-62, with large mammals including mountain lion, desert bighorn sheep, mule deer, bear, bobcat, and desert tortoise observed approaching the road but not crossing. The study documented 232 wildlife mortalities across 14 species in just over one year and recommended construction of wildlife crossings at both the Morongo and Yucca Grade locations to restore wildlife connectivity. Both crossing locations are identified as “Irreplaceable and Essential Corridors” in the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Areas of Conservation Emphasis database. In February 2026, six populations of mountain lions in Central and Southern California were listed by the California Fish and Game Commission as a Threatened Distinct Population Segment under the California Endangered Species Act. Two of these populations, the Eastern Peninsular and San Gabriel–San Bernardino Mountains populations meet in the vicinity of the proposed crossings. Both populations are already exhibiting physical signs of inbreeding and are not considered large enough in isolation to persist long-term without restored connectivity. Without restored connectivity, their loss could trigger broader ecosystem disruption through trophic cascade effects.

The proposed crossings are located within designated habitat linkages under the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP), and Section 4.3.7 of the CVMSHCP/NCCP specifically calls for the protection and maintenance of biological corridors at SR-62. The project area offers a 10,000-foot elevational gradient identified by The Nature Conservancy as an area of high climate resilience and high flow, enabling climate-driven species range shifts that are increasingly critical as temperatures rise in the desert Southwest.

The Project is organized into five tasks:

Task 1 - Project Management and Grant Administration (\$262,218): MDLT staff and project manager oversight including subcontracting, coordinating participating entities, reviewing work products, invoicing, and reporting.

Task 2 - Alternatives Analysis (\$178,844, of which \$11,834 is the CVMC match portion): Development of Cooperative Agreements between Caltrans and lead agencies, and preparation of a Project Initiation Report (PIR) by the engineering consultant.

Task 3 - Project Initiation Document (\$1,196,672, of which \$252,717 is the CVMC match portion): Preparation of a Conceptual Engineering Document, Preliminary Environmental Analysis Report, and Project Initiation Document (PSR-PDS) for submission to Caltrans for both crossing locations. This task initiates the formal Caltrans project planning pathway.

Task 4 - Project Approval and Environmental Document (\$1,767,753, of which \$114,759 is the CVMC match portion): Completion and certification of environmental review including database searches, field surveys, initial study, environmental study, and environmental documents.

Task 5 - Plans, Specifications and Estimates (\$2,005,230, of which \$132,690 is the CVMC match portion): Alternatives analysis, design-level base mapping, Plans Specifications and Estimates (65% PSE), Bridge Type Selection Report, and preparation of a Cooperative Agreement request with Caltrans.

The total project cost is \$6,109,453. The \$512,000 CVMC grant request represents approximately 8.4% of total project cost and was specifically identified as unsecured matching funds in MDLT’s WCB grant application. The WCB grant of \$5,497,453 is secured and a Notice to Proceed was issued on March 24, 2026. The project budget and match are summarized below:

| Funding Source | Amount |
|--|--------------------|
| Wildlife Conservation Board | \$5,497,453 |
| Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy | \$512,000 |
| Coachella Valley Conservation Commission | \$50,000 |
| Mojave Desert Land Trust (direct contribution) | \$50,000 |
| Total Project Cost | \$6,109,543 |

ANALYSIS

In accordance with Proposition 4 and the Conservancy’s Grant Program Guidelines, eligible projects must advance the Conservancy’s statutory mission and be consistent with one or more objectives of the Proposition 4 Grant Program, including reducing risks of climate change impacts, protecting and restoring habitat, advancing the California 30x30 Initiative, and providing meaningful and direct benefits to disadvantaged communities. Projects are evaluated on technical effectiveness, cost effectiveness, leveraged funding, collaboration, organizational capacity, local economic benefits to disadvantaged communities, community support, consistency with established local plans, and meaningful and direct benefits.

Staff has reviewed the Project and finds it meets the criteria for Category I - Priority for Funding. The Project addresses a scientifically confirmed and urgently critical wildlife

movement barrier, aligns directly with the CVMSHCP, demonstrates exceptional financial leverage, and advances multiple Proposition 4 objectives as described below.

PROPOSITION 4 OBJECTIVES

- *Objective 1(I): Conservation and Habitat Connectivity - Reduce Risks of Climate Change Impact.*

The proposed wildlife crossings restore habitat connectivity across a segment of SR-62 that has been scientifically documented as a complete barrier to wildlife movement. Restoration of functional wildlife corridors enables species including mountain lion, desert bighorn sheep, mule deer, bear, bobcat, and desert tortoise to move between the San Bernardino and Little San Bernardino Mountains and the Sand to Snow National Monument. Wildlife connectivity is essential to maintaining gene flow between mountain ranges, which supports healthy plant and animal populations and the capacity to adapt to environmental change, including climate change. The project area's 10,000-foot elevational gradient provides access to climate refugia, enabling climate-driven species range shifts that are increasingly critical as temperatures rise in the desert Southwest. The recent listing of mountain lions as Threatened in February 2026 further elevates the urgency of this project. Two of the six listed populations converge in the vicinity of the proposed crossings, and neither is considered viable in isolation. Loss of mountain lions in the area could trigger a trophic cascade with significant secondary effects on other species and habitats throughout the ecosystem.

- *Objective 1(I)(iv) and (v): 30x30 Initiative and CVMSHCP Consistency*

Both proposed crossing locations are within designated habitat linkages under the CVMSHCP, making this project a direct implementation of the regional conservation plan. By restoring functional connectivity between existing protected areas, including Joshua Tree National Park, the San Geronio and Bighorn Wilderness Areas, and the Sand to Snow National Monument, the Project advances California's 30x30 goal by making existing protected lands more ecologically connected and resilient, extending their conservation value without additional acquisition.

- *Objective 3: Co-Benefits to Disadvantaged Communities.*

The Project is located in and adjacent to disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities along the SR-62 corridor. Communities including Morongo Valley and portions of Desert Hot Springs have median household incomes below 60 percent of the statewide average, qualifying as Severely Disadvantaged Communities under Proposition 4 and the Conservancy's Guidelines and the Vulnerable Communities Platform. These communities also face high climate vulnerability including extreme heat,

flooding, and drought. The Project will provide measurable and lasting benefits to these communities, including: reduction of vehicle-wildlife collisions that cause property damage and risk injury to motorists who depend on SR-62 for transportation; restoration of ecosystem health and regional biodiversity that supports tourism, a leading economic driver in both the high and low desert; construction and maintenance jobs with fair wages and training opportunities; and opportunities for Tribal stewardship, community monitoring, and public engagement. Two federally recognized Tribes, the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians and the Morongo Band of Mission Indians have expressed interest in participation in the project.

OTHER PROGRAM AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The Project follows the formal Caltrans project planning and environmental review process, which incorporates rigorous technical standards, public agency coordination, and regulatory compliance checkpoints. The 2021 Caltrans wildlife connectivity study, which documented the complete barrier effect at the proposed crossing locations and recommended construction, provides a strong scientific foundation for the Project's technical approach.

MDLT is an established regional land conservation nonprofit that has protected more than 133,000 acres of desert landscape since its founding 20 years ago. The project team is exceptionally well-qualified for this work. Kelly Herbinson, Executive Director, brings 20 years of Mojave Desert conservation experience. Geary Hund, Senior Biologist and Project Manager, is a former CVMC staff member and former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist with direct experience leading complex Habitat Conservation Plan efforts including a seven-year successful wildlife corridor preservation project at Coal Canyon in Orange County. Amy Levine, Chief Conservation Officer, holds a Ph.D. in Biological Anthropology and has led a wildlife overpass feasibility study at Vail Pass in Colorado that is now nearing construction. The engineering team is led by Mark Thomas Engineering with over 95 years of California infrastructure experience, and the biological and environmental work is led by Dudek, whose Transportation Ecology Practice prepared the original 2021 SR-62 wildlife connectivity study that identified the two proposed crossing locations. The Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC) is a formal project partner, contributing \$50,000 in in-kind support and entering into a Cooperative Agreement with Caltrans for the Morongo Grade crossing. The Mojave Desert Resource Conservation District (MDRCD) is also a formal partner, serving as the local agency for the Yucca Grade crossing in cooperation with Caltrans. Both the CVCC and MDRCD have provided letters confirming their participation.

MDLT owns the Yucca Grade crossing site, providing direct site control for one of the two project locations. For the Morongo Crossing, MDLT has initiated a right-of-way application with BLM from the Palm Springs–South Coast Field Office; site control at that location must be confirmed prior to fund disbursement at that location, consistent with grant Guidelines.

The Project requires Tribal consultation given its location near federally recognized Tribal lands. MDLT has proactively reached out to multiple Tribes in the region, including those whose ancestral lands include the crossing sites and adjacent areas. The Morongo Band of Mission Indians and the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians have both responded and expressed interest in the project. MDLT's Director of Community Conservation Initiatives, Sarah Bliss, brings over a decade of specialized experience in Tribal Historic Preservation and has participated in over 300 correspondence projects involving Tribal consultation. CVMC will apply its Tribal Consultation Policy and coordinate with MDLT to ensure that appropriate Tribal consultation is completed prior to grant agreement execution and environmental review.

With respect to California Conservation Corps participation: the Project is in the planning and design phase and does not include ground-disturbing construction activities at this stage. CCC participation is not currently applicable. MDLT has confirmed this in its Pre-Application materials. Staff recommends that CCC consultation be revisited for any subsequent construction-phase grant application.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

Environmental review has not yet been completed for this Project. CEQA and NEPA documentation are proposed deliverables under Task 4 of the grant scope (Project Approval and Environmental Document). The Project is a planning and design grant; no ground-disturbing construction is proposed within the current grant period.

Consistent with Proposition 4 Grant Program Guidelines Section V(a), all required CEQA documentation must be completed prior to the Board meeting at which funding approval for any subsequent construction-phase grant is sought. For this planning-phase grant, staff has determined that the Conservancy's approval of planning and design funding is itself consistent with CEQA under the following basis:

- The Project at this stage consists solely of studies, surveys, technical analysis, document preparation, and engineering planning activities. These activities are not a project that would have a significant effect on the environment within the meaning of CEQA Guidelines §15378, as they involve no physical changes to the environment.
- To the extent the Conservancy's approval of planning funding constitutes a project under CEQA, it qualifies for the Class 6 categorical exemption (State CEQA Guidelines §15306 – Information Collection) as the scope consists entirely of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in serious or major disturbance to environmental resources.

The CEQA and NEPA documents to be prepared under Task 4 will establish the environmental baseline and identify any mitigation measures required for construction of the wildlife crossing structures in a subsequent project phase. Staff recommends that completion of CEQA and NEPA documentation for both crossing locations be included as

a grant agreement condition and as a prerequisite for any future construction-phase grant award from the Conservancy.

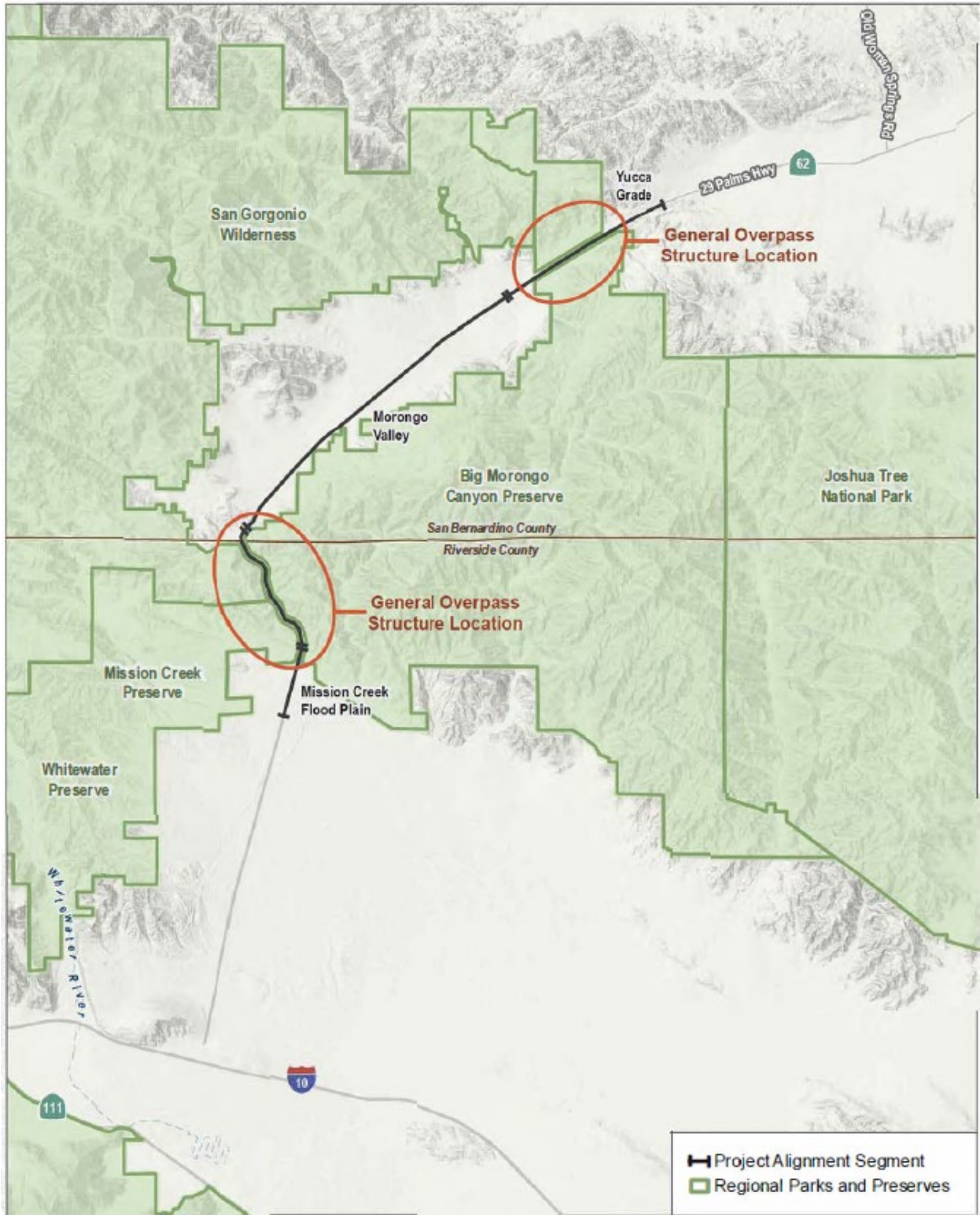
The attached Resolution 2026-03 contains detailed findings for adoption by the Board as part of Project approval in accordance with CEQA and applicable law.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends adoption of Resolution 2026-03 approving a Proposition 4 local assistance grant to the Mojave Desert Land Trust in an amount not to exceed \$512,000 for its State Route-62 Wildlife Crossing Project.

EXHIBIT A

Project Location Map – MDLT SR-62 Wildlife Crossing Locations



**RESOLUTION 2026-03 OF THE GOVERNING BOARD OF THE
COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY
ADOPTED IN REGULAR SESSION
MAY 11, 2026**

**APPROVING A PROPOSITION 4 LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANT
TO THE MOJAVE DESERT LAND TRUST
FOR ITS STATE ROUTE-62 WILDLIFE CROSSING PROJECT**

WHEREAS, Public Resources Code Section 33501 created the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy for the purpose, among other things, of acquiring and holding, in perpetual open space, mountainous lands surrounding the Coachella Valley and natural community conservation lands, and to provide for the protection of natural and cultural resources and the public's enjoyment thereof; and

WHEREAS, Public Resources Code Section 33601(e) provides that the Conservancy may "in order to further the conservancy's purposes as set forth in Section 33501, award grants to cities, counties, resource conservation districts, or nonprofit organizations...."; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (Proposition 4), the Conservancy operates its Proposition 4 Grant Program, which funds projects that advance climate resilience, habitat protection, watershed health, and public access improvements within the Coachella Valley region; and

WHEREAS, on March 6, 2026, the Conservancy issued its Notice of Funding Availability 2026-01 (NOFA 2026-01) for projects eligible for funding under its Proposition 4 Grant Program Guidelines (Guidelines); and

WHEREAS, the Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT) is a California nonprofit corporation, recognized as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization by the Internal Revenue Service, and is therefore a nonprofit organization eligible to receive funding under Proposition 4; and

WHEREAS, MDLT submitted a Pre-Application Consultation Form and participated in a Pre-Application Consultation with Conservancy staff on April 8, 2026, and submitted a Full Application on April 20, 2026, following an invitation from Conservancy staff; and

WHEREAS, MDLT has secured a grant of \$5,497,453 from the California Wildlife Conservation Board for the planning and design of the wildlife crossings, for which a Notice to Proceed was issued on March 24, 2026; and

WHEREAS, MDLT is requesting \$512,000 from the Conservancy’s Proposition 4 Grant Program to serve as the identified matching funds for the planning-phase project to complete the Caltrans project planning process for two proposed wildlife crossing structures on State Route 62 (SR-62), including the Yucca Grade Wildlife Crossing on MDLT-owned land and the Morongo Crossing on Bureau of Land Management land; and

WHEREAS, SR-62 bisects the San Bernardino and Little San Bernardino Mountains and the Sand to Snow National Monument, separating Joshua Tree National Park from other protected areas including the San Gorgonio and Bighorn Wilderness Areas, and a 2021 Caltrans wildlife connectivity study documented a complete barrier effect on this segment of SR-62 with large mammals observed approaching the road but not crossing; and

WHEREAS, in February 2026, six populations of mountain lions in Central and Southern California were listed as a Threatened Distinct Population Segment by the California Fish and Game Commission, and two of these populations, the Eastern Peninsular and San Gabriel–San Bernardino Mountains populations meet in the vicinity of the proposed crossings, with neither population considered large enough in isolation to persist long-term without restored connectivity; and

WHEREAS, both proposed crossing locations are within designated habitat linkages under the CVMSHCP, and Section 4.3.7 of the CVMSHCP/NCCP specifically calls for the protection and maintenance of biological corridors at SR-62, and the Project is therefore a direct implementation of the CVMSHCP; and

WHEREAS, by restoring functional wildlife connectivity across SR-62, the Project will reduce the risk of climate change impacts on fish, wildlife, and natural resources by enabling climate-driven species range shifts across a 10,000-foot elevational gradient providing access to climate refugia, which fulfills the Proposition 4 Objective 1 to reduce risks of climate change impact upon communities, fish and wildlife, and natural resources; and

WHEREAS, the proposed crossings will restore genetic connectivity between isolated mountain lion populations, desert bighorn sheep herds, and other wildlife species, reducing extinction risk and supporting the long-term health of ecosystems across the Sand to Snow National Monument and surrounding protected areas, which fulfills Proposition 4 Objective 1(I)(ii) to preserve natural and cultural areas essential to endangered or threatened species or to overall ecosystem health; and

WHEREAS, by restoring functional connectivity between existing protected areas including Joshua Tree National Park, the San Gorgonio and Bighorn Wilderness Areas, and the Sand to Snow National Monument, the Project advances California’s 30x30 Initiative, which fulfills Proposition 4 Objective 1(I)(iv); and

WHEREAS, the Project serves disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities along the SR-62 corridor including Morongo Valley and portions of Desert Hot Springs, with median household incomes below 60 percent of the statewide average, providing meaningful and direct benefits including reduction of vehicle-wildlife collisions, restoration of ecosystem health, economic opportunity through construction and maintenance employment, and support for Tribal stewardship and cultural connections, which fulfills Proposition 4 Objective 3; and

WHEREAS, the Project demonstrates exceptional leveraged financial support, with \$5,597,453 in secured and committed partner funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board, the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission, and MDLT's direct contribution, representing a leverage ratio of approximately 11:1 against the \$512,000 grant request; and

WHEREAS, MDLT owns the Yucca Grade crossing site and is pursuing a right-of-way from the Bureau of Land Management for the Morongo Crossing site, with site control at the Morongo location to be confirmed prior to fund disbursement at that location; and

WHEREAS, the Project at this planning and design phase consists solely of studies, surveys, technical analysis, document preparation, and engineering planning activities involving no physical changes to the environment, and is therefore not a project under CEQA Guidelines §15378 or, to the extent it constitutes a project, qualifies for the Class 6 categorical exemption (Information Collection) under State CEQA Guidelines §15306; and

WHEREAS, CEQA and NEPA documentation for both crossing locations will be prepared as deliverables under Task 4 of the grant scope, and completion of all required environmental review is a prerequisite for any future construction-phase grant award; and

WHEREAS, it is in furtherance of the Conservancy's purposes as established in Public Resources Code Section 33501 and the implementation of the CVMSHCP to complete the Project; and

WHEREAS, the Conservancy wishes to authorize a Proposition 4 local assistance grant to MDLT in an amount not to exceed \$512,000 to support the Project

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved in regular session of the Governing Board of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy that the Board finds and determines that the Project meets the objectives of Proposition 4 and the Conservancy's Proposition 4 Grant Program Guidelines, including Objective 1 (Reduce risks of climate change impact), Objective 1(I)(ii) (Preserve habitat essential to threatened or endangered species),

Objective 1(I)(iv) (Advance the 30x30 Initiative), and Objective 3 (Co-benefits to disadvantaged communities); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board finds and determines that the Project complies with the requirements of the Conservancy's Proposition 4 Grant Program Guidelines and is consistent with and directly implements Section 4.3.7 of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, which calls for the protection and maintenance of biological corridors at State Route 62; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board finds and determines that the Project at this planning and design phase involves no physical changes to the environment and is not a project under CEQA Guidelines §15378, or to the extent it constitutes a project, qualifies for the Class 6 categorical exemption under State CEQA Guidelines §15306 (Information Collection), and that no further environmental review is required for this planning-phase grant award; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board approves a Proposition 4 local assistance grant to the Mojave Desert Land Trust (Grantee) in an amount not to exceed \$512,000 to support its SR-62 Wildlife Crossing Yucca Grade and Morongo Project; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a condition of the grant is that the Grantee shall enter into a Proposition 4 Local Assistance Grant Agreement with the Conservancy, which shall contain provisions requiring the following:

1. That the Grantee will agree to defend, indemnify, and hold harmless the Conservancy and the State of California, its contractors, officers, directors, agents or employees against any and all claims, liability, demands, damages, debts, judgments, costs, or expenses, including reasonable attorney's fees, arising out of or in any way connected to the Grantee's actions, omissions, or other conduct relating in any way to this agreement and the Project, including, but not limited to, any such losses, damages, or expenses arising out of (a) loss of or damage to the Project, and (b) injury to or death of persons;
2. That the Grantee must complete the Project no later than June 30, 2029, unless the Conservancy agrees in writing to an extension;
3. That prior to disbursement of grant funds for activities at the Morongo Crossing location, the Grantee shall provide documentation of satisfactory site control, including confirmation of an executed right-of-way agreement or equivalent legal interest from the Bureau of Land Management;

4. That the Grantee shall conduct Tribal consultation consistent with the Conservancy's Tribal Consultation Policy prior to initiation of environmental review activities and shall document and report the results of all Tribal consultation to the Conservancy;
5. That CEQA and NEPA documentation for both crossing locations shall be completed as deliverables under Task 2 and submitted to the Conservancy for review, and that completion of all required environmental review is a prerequisite for any future construction-phase grant application to the Conservancy;
6. That the Grantee shall notify the Conservancy of any material amendments to the WCB grant agreement, changes to the project scope or budget, or changes in WCB funding status that may affect overall project feasibility or the use of Conservancy funds;
7. That the grant agreement shall include defined milestone reporting dates aligned with Caltrans process checkpoints, including submission of the Project Initiation Document to Caltrans, initiation of environmental technical studies, and submission of the 65% Plans, Specifications and Estimates;
8. That should the Grantee violate the Grant Agreement in any material way, and fail to cure such violation upon written notice from the Conservancy as provided in the Grant Agreement, the Grantee shall reimburse the Conservancy for the full amount of the grant within thirty (30) days of a written demand from the Conservancy to do so;
9. That the Grantee shall maintain accounting records of how the grant sum was spent for a period of twenty years following final payment and shall make such records available for inspection by the Conservancy or the Department of Finance upon request by either agency
10. That the Conservancy shall review and approve all material changes to the Project as described in the grant application prior to their implementation;
11. That the Grantee shall submit a funding acknowledgment and signage plan to the Executive Director prior to project completion, consistent with Proposition 4 Grant Program Guidelines Section VIII(B); and

12. That any unused grant funds must be returned to the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, along with any accrued interest, not later than one month after the project completion date.

BE IT FURTHER resolved that the Board hereby authorizes its Executive Director, or in her absence the Acting Director or Board Chairwoman, to execute any and all documents necessary to effect the grant.

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED at a regular meeting of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy Governing Board, held on this 11th day of May 2026, by the following vote, to wit:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSTENTIONS:

ABSENT:

Deborah McGarrey, Chair
Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy

ATTACHMENT 6 – May 11, 2026

Action Item 4.6 Adoption of Resolution 2026-04 approving a local assistance grant, subject to conditions, to Oswit Land Trust for acquisition of approximately 45.41 acres located adjacent to the Willow Hole Conservation Area.

BACKGROUND

In early 2023 the Conservancy was contacted by local property owners, David and Robin Angier and the Mark Dewitt Sanford Trust, who were interested in selling their 45-acre property for conservation. Conservancy staff evaluated the 45-acre property to determine whether conserving it would (i) extend or enhance the habitat values present in the Plan conservation areas, or (ii) contribute to the Valley's resilience in the face of climate change. The subject property is adjacent to the Willow Hole Conservation Area (WHCA) which provides high-value habitat for endangered species and unique desert ecosystems, including critical blow sand habitats for the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard, mesquite hummocks, and a California fan palm oasis. This conservation area also serves as a vital sand transport corridor, protecting biodiversity and supporting wildlife such as the burrowing owl, LeConte's thrasher, and various migratory birds. Generally, staff looked at the subject property and determined that it contains mesquite hummocks and is located adjacent to core habitat for the Coachella Valley milkvetch, Palm Springs pocket mouse, and near a recorded burrowing owl location. Additionally, the property is adjacent to an area that is highly significant to local tribes, particularly the Cahuilla, hence staff reached out to Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians and the Native American Land Conservancy for interest to the property; both agencies had no interest in acquiring the subject property due to no proximity to any reservation lands. In its evaluation, staff determined that conserving the 45-acre Property is critical for expanding contiguous landscapes that will allow species to move, adapt, and forage across larger protected buffer zones and by acquiring the property will further prevent fragmentation of wildlife habitats from becoming isolated islands. Moreover, acquiring the property will enhance biodiversity and mitigate climate change through carbon sequestration, aiding California's greenhouse gas reduction goals while supporting the state's 30x30 goal of conserving California lands and waters by 2030.

DISCUSSION

Staff evaluated the property and determined that it was located adjacent to the WHCA and near already conserved parcels owned by the Conservancy and the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC). Staff reached out to CVCC for interest on the property but given that the property is outside of the conservation area boundary, CVCC

was not interested in pursuing an acquisition. Staff shared the property information with other local conservation partners, and the Oswit Land Trust (OLT) took interest given that they aim to conserve properties adjacent to conservation areas with the goal of conserving these lands to serve as a buffer to the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (the Plan).

An appraisal was completed in June 2023, to determine the fair market value of the property which consists of two parcels (Assessor Parcel Number's 660-140-026 & 660-140-028) containing approximately 45.41+/-acres of vacant land (the Property). The Property is located adjacent to the boundary of the WHCA and North of the I-10 and southeast of Desert Hot Springs (see map, attached as Exhibit A).

The appraised Fair Market Value of the property was determined to be \$551,250 for both parcels. After extensive negotiations, the Sellers agreed to a bargain sale and executed a purchase and sale agreement with OLT. The bargain sale is contingent on the Seller's ability to receive a tax benefit and legacy naming in honor of Lois and Mark Sanford who wished to have the property conserved in perpetuity.

After execution of the purchase and sale agreement, Conservancy staff learned from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) of a potential Southern California Edison (SCE) compensatory mitigation funding opportunity for the acquisition of properties supporting Coachella Valley milkvetch or Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard habitat. Conservancy staff subsequently initiated discussions with USFWS to evaluate whether the subject Property would qualify for SCE compensatory mitigation funding. SCE expressed interest in funding the acquisition, and OLT agreed to proceed with the bargain sale acquisition using either Conservancy funds or SCE compensatory mitigation funds, depending on which funding source could meet the June 30, 2026, closing deadline established in the purchase and sale agreement.

Closing after June 30, 2026, would require the sellers to incur an additional six months of property taxes, creating a strong incentive to complete the transaction on or before that date and avoid potential termination of the bargain sale agreement. Accordingly, timely funding is critical.

Given the significance of the Property, OLT is requesting a Proposition 84 local assistance grant in the amount of \$358,312.50, plus reasonable closing and transaction-related costs not to exceed \$2,500, to support acquisition. While Conservancy staff recommend approval of the grant, there are concerns regarding the ability to meet the June 30 closing deadline due to state end-of-fiscal-year constraints, which may delay processing and disbursement of funds.

SCE indicated they may be able to disburse funds more quickly than the Conservancy; however, SCE must complete their respective due diligence process prior to funding approval. SCE's due diligence requirements include review and approval of a Preliminary Title Report to confirm clear title (free of liens or encumbrances), as well as completion of a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment to verify the absence of hazardous conditions or illegal dumping. Similar contingencies are included in both the Conservancy's grant agreement and the executed purchase and sale agreement.

If SCE is unable to approve or fund the project in time and if the Conservancy is not able to disburse funds by the closing deadline, OLT will proceed with the acquisition using their own funds until the Conservancy or SCE may reimburse them for the purchase of the property.

The Property was appraised using USPAP standards and the appraisal was reviewed and approved by an independent qualified appraiser. The purchase price does not exceed the appraised fair market value. This acquisition is exempt from CEQA review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines 15313 and 15325.

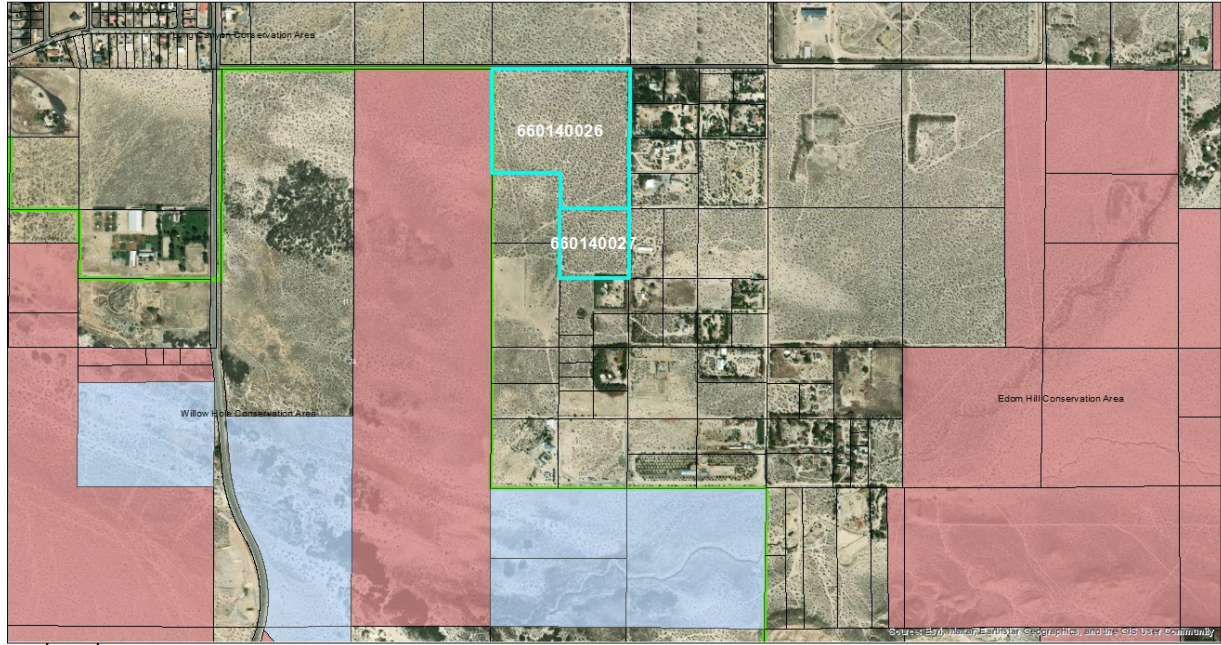
STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Board approve a local assistance grant to the Oswit Land Trust (OLT) in the amount of \$358,312.50, plus reasonable closing and transaction-related costs not to exceed \$2,500, for the acquisition of the subject Property, subject to the following conditions:

1. No grant funds shall be disbursed until all required due diligence materials are completed and approved, including, but not limited to, a Preliminary Title Report confirming clear title and a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment demonstrating the absence of hazardous conditions.
2. No grant funds shall be disbursed until all applicable state and federal environmental compliance requirements have been satisfied.
3. The grantee shall make all reasonable efforts to coordinate funding with the Southern California Edison (SCE) compensatory mitigation program; however, Conservancy funds may be used if SCE funding is not available in time to meet the June 30, 2026 closing deadline.
4. If neither SCE nor Conservancy funds can be disbursed by the closing deadline, OLT may proceed with acquisition using its own funds and seek reimbursement from the Conservancy, subject to the terms of the grant agreement and availability of funds.

This recommendation is based on the significant conservation value of the Property and the need to maintain flexibility in funding sources to ensure timely acquisition consistent with the purchase and sale agreement.

EXHIBIT A Parcel Location Map



Legend

- ParcelAssessor selection 2
- ConservedLands_Thru_102024 cons_area
- OWNER
 - CV/CC
 - STATE - CVMC
- Willow Hole Conservation Area



**RESOLUTION 2026-04 OF THE GOVERNING BOARD OF THE
COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY
ADOPTED IN REGULAR SESSION
MAY 11, 2026**

**APPROVING A LOCAL ASSISTANCE GRANT TO OSWIT LAND TRUST FOR
ACQUISITION OF APPROXIMATELY 45.41 ACRES ADJACENT TO THE
WILLOW HOLE CONSERVATION AREA**

WHEREAS, Public Resources Code Section 33501 created the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy for the purpose, among other things, of acquiring and holding, in perpetual open space, mountainous lands surrounding the Coachella Valley and natural community conservation lands, upon approval of a Natural Community Conservation Plan, for the protection of natural and cultural resources and the public's enjoyment thereof; and

WHEREAS, Public Resources Code Section 33601(e) provides that the Conservancy may, "in order to further the conservancy's purposes as set forth in Section 33501, award grants to cities, counties, resource conservation districts, or nonprofit organizations...."; and

WHEREAS, Oswit Land Trust is a nonprofit organization qualified as an exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954, and has as its purpose the acquisition and protection of land in the Coachella Valley area; and

WHEREAS, Assessor's Parcel Numbers 660-140-026 & 660-140-028 comprising of 45.41 acres in unincorporated Riverside County adjacent to the Willow Hole Conservation; and

WHEREAS, conservation of the Property would add this privately held site to the conservation holdings in the area that include large adjacent properties owned by the Conservancy, the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, thereby enhancing the habitat values within the Conservation Area; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Southern California Edison (SCE) have determined that the Property contains critical habitat for milkvetch, and therefore would be eligible for the use of SCE mitigation funds; and

WHEREAS, it is in furtherance of the Conservancy's purposes as established in Public Resources Code Section 33501 to protect this area; and

WHEREAS, the Oswit Land Trust (OLT) requests a local assistance grant not to exceed \$358,312.50 to purchase this property, plus reasonable closing and transaction-related costs not to exceed \$2,500; and

WHEREAS, the Conservancy wishes to authorize a local assistance grant to OLT to purchase the Property; and

WHEREAS, the Conservancy grant shall be used to acquire the property if funding from the SCE mitigation source is not approved; and

WHEREAS, this acquisition is exempt from further CEQA review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines 15313 and 15325;

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved in regular session of the Governing Board of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy that the Board approves a local assistance grant not to exceed \$358,312.50, plus reasonable closing and transaction related costs not to exceed \$2,500 to the Oswit Land Trust to assist with the acquisition; and

BE IT FURTHER resolved that a condition of the grant is that the Oswit Land Trust shall enter into an Acquisition Grant Agreement with the Conservancy, which shall contain provisions requiring the following:

1. That Oswit Land Trust will agree to defend, indemnify, and hold harmless the Conservancy and the State of California, its contractors, officers, directors, agents or employees against any and all claims, liability, demands, damages, debts, judgments, costs, or expenses, including reasonable attorney's fees, arising out of or in any way connected to the Grantee's actions, omissions, or other conduct relating in any way to this agreement and the property, including, but not limited to, any such losses, damages, or expenses arising out of (a) loss of or damage to the property, and (b) injury to or death of persons;
2. That Oswit Land Trust shall execute and record a Notice of Unrecorded Grant Agreement and execute a Memorandum of Understanding with the Conservancy designed to assure that the properties acquired with the grant sum shall be protected, maintained, and managed consistent with the Conservancy's mission as defined in Public Resources Code Section 33501;
3. That Oswit Land Trust must return all funds not used for the acquisition purpose described above no later than October 31, 2026, unless both parties mutually agree in writing to an extension;
4. That Oswit Land Trust shall not convey title or any other interest in the properties acquired with the grant sum to any other person or entity without the express written approval of the Conservancy;
5. That upon the sale or conveyance of any interest in the property acquired with the grant sum, Oswit Land Trust shall reimburse the Conservancy for the full amount

of the grant sum unless the funds received from the sale or conveyance are less than the amount of the grant sum, whereupon the Oswit Land Trust shall provide the Conservancy with all funds obtained from the sale or conveyance less costs incurred by the Friends arising from the sale or conveyance;

6. That if Oswit Land Trust ceases to exist as an organization or if the Oswit Land Trust materially breaches the grant agreement, title to the properties acquired with the grant sum shall automatically be conveyed to the State of California upon approval by the State Public Works Board;
7. That Oswit Land Trust shall maintain accounting records of how the grant sum was spent for a period of three years and shall make such records available for inspection by the Conservancy or the Department of Finance upon request by either agency;
8. That the Conservancy shall review and approve all documents pertaining to the acquisition of the properties described above, including but not limited to title reports obtained by Oswit Land Trust prior to acquisition of said properties; and
9. That any unused grant funds must be returned to the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, along with any accrued interest, not later than one month after the project completion date. Should interest be earned on the grant funds between their disbursement and expenditure for the purchase of the property, the interest may be applied toward the purchase price. Otherwise, any such interest must be paid to the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy. No revenue will be generated by Grantee from the property acquired with the grant funds.

BE IT FURTHER resolved that the Board hereby authorizes its Executive Director, or in her absence the Board Chair, to execute any and all documents necessary to effect the grant.

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED at a regular meeting of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy Governing Board, held on this 11th day of May 2026, by the following vote, to wit:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSTENTIONS:

ABSENT:

Deborah McGarrey, Chair
Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy

ATTACHMENT 7 – May 11, 2026

Action Item 4.7 Consideration and Possible Action to Establish a Board Finance Subcommittee.

Consideration and possible action to establish a Board Finance Subcommittee to support fiscal sustainability and strategic financial planning, including efforts to diversify the agency's financial portfolio, build reserves and a rainy-day fund, and collaborate with partners to identify and pursue additional revenue streams.

Recommendation:

Establish a Board Finance Subcommittee to support long-term fiscal sustainability and strategic financial planning.

Background:

In light of evolving fiscal conditions and the need to strengthen financial resilience, staff recommends the formation of a Board Finance Subcommittee. The Subcommittee would provide focused oversight and strategic guidance on key financial priorities, including diversification of the agency's financial portfolio, strengthening reserve levels, and identifying new and sustainable revenue opportunities.

Purpose of the Finance Subcommittee:

If established, the Finance Subcommittee would serve in an advisory capacity to the full Board and may be tasked with:

- Evaluating and recommending strategies to diversify operational funding streams, including:
 - State appropriations and budget change proposals
 - Local government partnerships and cost-sharing opportunities
 - Federal, state, and private grant funding
 - Fee-based services or program-generated revenue, where appropriate
- Assessing opportunities to build financial reserves and a “rainy day” fund
- Identifying and analyzing emerging funding opportunities aligned with the Agency's mission
- Providing periodic reports and recommendations to the full Board for consideration and action

Proposed Scope of Work:

The Finance Subcommittee would work in coordination with staff to:

- Evaluate and recommend strategies to diversify the agency’s financial portfolio, consistent with applicable laws and investment policies
- Develop a framework to build and maintain adequate reserves, including a formal rainy day fund to mitigate economic uncertainty
- Review and provide input on long-term financial forecasting and risk management practices
- Engage with relevant state agencies and partners to identify and pursue additional revenue streams, including grants, partnerships, and programmatic funding opportunities
- Provide periodic updates and recommendations to the full Board

Subcommittee Structure:

The Subcommittee would be composed of Board members, appointed by the Chair, and would meet on an as-needed basis in compliance with Bagley-Keene open meeting requirements.

Fiscal Impact:

No immediate fiscal impact is associated with establishing the Subcommittee. Future recommendations may have fiscal implications subject to Board approval.

Action Requested:

Approve the establishment of the Board Finance Subcommittee and authorize the Board Chair to appoint its members.

ATTACHMENT 8 – May 11, 2026

Reports 5.1 Reports from Staff – Ongoing Conservancy projects update.

INFORMATIONAL ITEM – No Board action required.

Item A. ACQUISITION AND LAND MANAGEMENT UPDATES

Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC)/Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy (CVMC)/Friends of the Desert Mountains (FODM) Management – The Conservancy continues to perform monitoring inspections on properties owned by the Conservancy and oversee grantees whose local assistance grants have been provided in support of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (the Plan).

CVCC ACQUISITION MANAGER PROGRAM - The Conservancy continues to contract with CVCC as Acquisition Manager to implement the Plan. ***To date in 2026, 17.63 acres have been newly acquired for conservation in perpetuity with ongoing negotiations on 177.18 acres to be conserved in this calendar year.***

2026 efforts:

Thousand Palms Conservation Area:-In February 2026 the CVCC Board approved the acquisition of two parcels consisting of +/-10.0 acres. Escrow is expected to close at the end of April 2026.

Mecca Hills Orocopia Mountains Conservation Area: In April 2026 the CVCC Board approved the acquisition of three parcels consisting of +/-140.75 acres. Escrow is expected to close at the end of June 2026.

Willow Hole Conservation Area: In April 2026 the CVCC Board approved the acquisition of one parcel consisting of +/-9.23 acres. Escrow is expected to close at the end of June 2026.

Willow Hole Conservation Area: potential acquisition of two additional parcels consisting of +/-17.2 acres, pending negotiations.

Tax Default Properties:

In February 2026, staff received a letter from the County with notice of new requirements for direct sale to public agencies/nonprofits through a rolling Chapter 8 application process that require approval by the Board of Supervisors. Because these transactions

do not involve competitive bidding to establish market value, they must be supported by reliable, objective valuation information to meet statutory requirements and to support the Board's required findings regarding property value per AB 418. AB 418 mandates that any funds remaining after all taxes, fees, and penalties are paid from a tax sale must be returned to the assesses or their heirs. Currently, staff have five (5) pending applications submitted ranging from fiscal years 2022 to 2025, with a total of 61 parcels. These applications are on hold until conservation partners decide if they want to proceed with expending appraisal costs in order to meet the new requirements.

Active Appraisals:

Willow Hole Conservation Area, in January 2026 an appraisal was completed on 3 parcels, consisting of +/-26.43 acres, representing separate ownerships. Contingent offer letters were sent out; two property owners accepted CVCC's contingent offer for the purchase of +/-14.23 acres.

1. **Upper Mission Creek Conservation Area** Additionally, in March 2025 an appraisal was completed on 12 parcels, consisting of +/-294.61 acres, representing separate ownerships. Contingent offer letters were sent out; one property owner accepted CVCC's contingent offer for the purchase of +/-3.16 acres, and escrow closed August 2025. Staff will continue to pursue discussions with other property owners about potential acquisitions. Appraisal expires June 2026.
2. **Whitewater Floodplain Conservation Area:** In June 2025 an appraisal was completed on eleven parcels, consisting of +/-633.52 acres, representing separate ownerships. Contingent offer letters were sent out. Staff will continue to pursue discussions with the other property owners for potential acquisitions. Appraisal expires July 2026.
3. **Dos Palmas Conservation Area:** In May 2025 an appraisal was completed on four parcels, consisting of +/-444.99 acres, representing one owner. A Contingent offer letter was sent out. At this time the owner was not interested in the offer. Appraisal expires June 2026.

Item B. GRANT PROGRAM UPDATES

PROPOSITION 1 GRANT PROGRAM – ACTIVE GRANT PROJECT STATUS

Grant No. – Grant Award – Grantee - *Project Name (Project Type)*

P010027 - \$428,615 - The Wildlands Conservancy – *Whitewater Preserve Flood Control Improvement Project (Planning)*

The Wildlands Conservancy continues to advance permitting for the Whitewater Preserve Levee Replacement Project. Coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife progressed the Streambed Alteration Agreement (SAA) permit, including review of a draft permit and identification of a requirement to establish 3.64 acres of in-kind ephemeral wash habitat as mitigation. The Habitat Mitigation and Monitoring Plan was refined to correct the willow riparian mitigation acreage to 1.6 acres for planting and monitoring. The project is on track to meet the current grant term deadline of June 30, 2026. According to TWC's Desert Regional Director, the remaining grant objectives are expected to be completed by June 30th, with final invoices anticipated to be submitted by June 15, 2026. The project is currently under budget, and it is expected that a portion of the remaining grant balance of \$43,004.85 may go unspent, with unused funds returning to the Conservancy's Proposition 1 account. CVMC staff will continue to monitor projected expenditures and coordinate with TWC as the project approaches closeout.

P010036 - \$525,000 - City of Indio – *Flood Prevention Project at Jackson St. and Ave 50 (Infrastructure)*

The City of Indio has completed Phase 1 construction, and the design for Phase 2 is finalized. During Quarter 4 (October through December 2025), the City completed all appraisals and issued offers to all 14 adjacent property owners, reaching settlement with 2 to date, while right-of-way negotiations with the remaining owners are ongoing. IID's design for the undergrounding of electrical and telecommunication facilities along Avenue 50 is complete, however, additional private easements are still being secured. Right-of-way activities remain the primary scheduling challenge, with Phase 2 construction, including installation of the CVMC grant-funded storm drainage system expected to commence upon their completion and overall project completion targeted by December 2026.

P010040 - \$847,285 - Desert Recreation District – *Water Efficiency Project at Thermal Park (Infrastructure)*

The Desert Recreation District's Water Efficiency Project will construct water-efficient infrastructure prior to groundbreaking of the entire park. Due to unforeseen conditions and design changes, including change orders related to fire marshal and CVWD

requirements affecting the domestic water line and storm drain system, a no-cost grant extension for the project will be processed to extend the grant term through December 31, 2026. CVMC staff will continue to coordinate with DRD as the project advances toward completion.

P010041 - \$400,00 – City of Coachella – *Rancho Las Flores Park Stormwater Project (Infrastructure)*

The City of Coachella's Rancho Las Flores Park Stormwater Project is a multifunctional water retention basin and a central component of a 14-acre expansion of Rancho Las Flores Park. The project will address a critical stormwater management challenge, mitigate recurring flooding issues, and restore ecological balance. The City is awaiting a determination from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program, which is expected early April 2026, before proceeding with the RFP process. The City anticipates issuing the RFP in Fall 2026, with construction potentially beginning in January 2027. A formal schedule modification to the grant agreement may be necessary to align with the revised project milestones, and CVMC staff will coordinate with the City on next steps once the LWCF determination is received. The current grant deadline remains June 30, 2027.

P010042 - \$213,707 – Southern California Mountains Foundation – *Palm Canyon Restoration Project (Infrastructure)*

The Southern California Mountains Foundation's Palm Canyon Restoration Project aims to restore watershed and habitat in the Palm Canyon area of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument by removing invasive tamarisk and fountain grass from flowing streams, ephemeral streambeds, washes, and tributaries, with the goal of restoring water sources and native habitat for Peninsular Bighorn Sheep, riparian birds, and other wildlife. During Quarter 4 (October through December 2025), the Urban Conservation Corps conducted field treatment spikes in Palm Canyon, with approximately 4.5 acres of invasive tamarisk treated under this grant funding. Work was complicated by a federal government shutdown lasting over 43 days, which required the crew to proceed without federal staff support, and a rock wall encountered during Week 3 that redirected efforts to the eastern branch of the canyon. Despite these challenges, the crew completed a significant amount of work, supported by the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla, who contributed approximately 1,300 hours across the season including cultural monitoring. Work anticipated for the next reporting period includes reporting and billing activities, as well as scouting for alternate access points and mapping areas for future treatment and retreat ahead of the next field season.

PROPOSITION 1 GRANT PROGRAM – COMPLETED PROJECTS

35 PROJECTS COMPLETED TO DATE

\$5,288,524 TOTAL AMOUNT OF COMPLETED PROJECTS TO DATE

Grant No. – Grant Award Amount – Grantee - *Project Name (Project Type)*

P010003 – \$111,407 – Coachella Valley Conservation Commission – *Mesquite Restoration and Groundwater Monitoring (Restoration)*

P010004 – \$150,000 – Desert Recreation District – *North Shore Park Flood Improvements (Infrastructure)*

P010005 – \$15,647 – Friends of the Desert Mountains – *Palm Canyon and Santa Rosa Watershed Restoration (Planning)*

P010005 – \$111,043 – Friends of the Desert Mountains – *Palm Canyon Watershed Restoration (Restoration)*

P010005 – \$90,515 – Friends of the Desert Mountains– *Santa Rosa Mountains Watershed Restoration (Restoration)*

P010006 – \$95,156 – Mission Springs Water District – *Willow Hole Groundwater Monitoring Wells (Restoration)*

P010008 – \$59,154 – City of Palm Springs – Phase 1 – *San Jacinto Mountains Watershed Restoration (Planning)*

P010008 – \$803,611 – City of Palm Springs – Phase 2 – *San Jacinto mountains Watershed Restoration (Restoration)*

P010009 – \$50,000 – City of Palm Springs – *Tahquitz Creek – Triangle Parcel Restoration (Restoration)*

P010010 – \$7,532 – Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians – *Phase 1 – Salton Sea Wetlands Restoration (Planning)*

P010010 – \$169,580 – Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians – *Phase 1 – Salton Sea Wetlands Restoration (Restoration)*

P010011 – \$7,178 – Coachella Valley Resource Conservation District – *Root Water (Infrastructure)*

P010012 – \$150,000 – California Department of Fish and Wildlife – *Dos Palmas Reserve Artesian Well Project (Restoration)*

P010014 – \$26,440 – The Wildlands Conservancy – Phase 1 – *Whitewater Preserve Flood Control (Planning)*

P010015 – \$135,884 – Center for Natural Lands Management – *Desert Pupfish Refuge Habitat Restoration (Restoration)*

P010016 – \$200,461 – City of Coachella – *City-Wide Stormwater Resource Plan Project (Planning)*

P010017 – \$215,911 – University of California/Riverside – *Salton Sea Crust and Water Quality Remediation (Planning)*

P010018 – \$16,330 – Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians – *Phase 2 – Salton Sea Wetlands Restoration (Restoration)*

P010018 – \$236,728 – Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians – *Phase 2 – Salton Sea Wetlands Restoration – Implementation (Restoration)*

P010019 – \$500,000 – Desert Recreation District – *Flood Control Project at Oasis Park (Restoration)*

P010020 – \$501,305 – Coachella Valley Conservation Commission – *Snow Creek Watershed Acquisition – Lamb Property (Acquisition)*

P010022 – \$71,841 – Southern California Mountains Foundation – *Dos Palmas Restoration Project (Restoration)*

P010023 – \$54,000 – Palm Springs Cemetery District – *Invasive Species Removal Project (Restoration)*

P010024 – \$132,318 – Coachella Valley Conservation Commission – *Wetlands Restoration, Tamarisk Control and Rail Habitat Enhancement at North Shore Ranch (Restoration)*

P010025 – \$101,556 – The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – *Desert Pupfish Refugia and Native Habitat Restoration (Infrastructure)*

P010026 – \$152,707 – Salton Sea Authority – *NSBYC Harbor Rehabilitation & Flood Infrastructure (Infrastructure)*

P010028 – \$96,832 – Santa Rosa Band of Cahuilla Indians – *Santa Rosa Horse Creek Dam and Wetlands Restoration Project (Restoration)*

P010029 – \$57,865 – Center for Natural Lands Management – *Core Marsh Burn and Restoration Project (Restoration)*

P010030 – \$72,136 – The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – *Dos Palmas Middle Salt Creek Project (Restoration)*

P010033 – \$54,100 – Coachella Valley Public Cemetery District – *Water Management System (Infrastructure)*

P010034 - \$182,264 - Southern California Mountains Foundations – *Palm Canyon Watershed Restoration Project (Restoration)*

P010035 – \$235,000 – Coachella Valley Water District – *Groundwater Monitoring Well Project (Infrastructure)*

P010037 – \$203,498 – Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians – *Monitoring Wells Project Section 33 (Infrastructure)*

P010038 – \$160,000 – Coachella Valley Water District – *DHS and Mission Creek Subbasin Groundwater Monitoring Wells Project (Infrastructure)*

P010039 – \$60,515 – The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – *San Felipe Creek Desert Pupfish Pond Project (Infrastructure)*

PROPOSITION 68 GRANT PROGRAM – ACTIVE GRANT PROJECT STATUS

Grant No. – Grant Award – Grantee - *Project Name (Project Type)*

P680015 – \$125,000 – Coachella Valley Desert and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority – *Environmental Review of its Coachella Valley Trail System Expansion Project (Planning)*

The CEQA documentation has been completed, Conservancy staff is working with the consultants on next steps to obtain site control and entitlements.

P680023 – \$150,000 – City of Indio – *Parking Lot Improvement Project at Indio Hills Badlands Hiking Trailhead (Infrastructure)*

The parking lot improvements at the Indio Badlands Trailhead project will increase and enhance visitors' experience by improving the trailhead infrastructure and parking facility. During Quarter 4 (October through December 2025), the City continued coordination with the United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) to complete cultural resources compliance under Section 106. The City's consultant, Dudek, received USBR review comments, incorporated the requested revisions, and resubmitted the updated materials the same day, with USBR review still in progress as of the end of the quarter. The extended USBR review timeline was the primary scheduling challenge, as the encroachment permit could not be secured until review was complete. Construction commenced on February 23, 2026, and project improvements include a new parking lot with 30+ additional spaces, planting of 45+ new trees, landscaping upgrades, solar-

powered lighting, and a new walking path for improved access. The project is expected to be completed by June 2026, with a ribbon cutting ceremony scheduled for Monday, April 27, 2026, to which CVMC has been invited to participate.

P680024 – \$133,981 – The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – *Desert Hot Springs Pollinator Pathway Project (Infrastructure)*

The Desert Hot Springs Pollinator Project aims to create 10 to 20 pollinator gardens using native plants at various locations within the City of Desert Hot Springs on a total of less than five acres combined. During Quarter 1 (January through March 2026), The Living Desert's Conservation Department made significant progress in native plant propagation, collecting over 370 plants in 4" to 1-gallon containers, including *Encelia farinosa*, *Justicia californica*, and *Sphaeralcea ambigua*, and successfully propagating *Larrea tridentata* from seed for the first time. Two gardens were planted in Desert Hot Springs this quarter, one at the Cabot's Museum and one at the Desert Hot Springs Historical Society. Due to the early onset of high temperatures, out-planting has been postponed until fall 2026 to maximize plant survival. Work anticipated for the next reporting period includes coordinating with City grounds and irrigation crews to ensure irrigation infrastructure is in place for fall planting, and continued monitoring and care of propagated plants through the summer.

P680025 – \$17,998 – Coachella Valley Desert and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority – *West Deception Canyon Trail Project (Infrastructure)*

The West Deception Canyon Trail Project consists of installing approximately 200 feet of trail switchbacks, trail signage, and markers to enhance hiker safety and avoid erosion on a 4.3-mile loop trail. During this reporting period, the project team conducted a site visit to confirm the project alignment and scope, and initiated development of GPS-based trail mapping to support final design and implementation planning. A revised project schedule has been completed to reflect updated coordination needs. Project implementation has been delayed due to staffing transitions and coordination with tribal and environmental partners. An amendment extending the grant term through December 31, 2026 has been executed to support continued planning and phased project delivery. Staff will continue to coordinate with the grantee on trail mapping, environmental review coordination, and identification of a project biologist to support implementation.

P680026 – \$71,801 – Oswit Land Trust – *Happy Valley Restoration and Preservation Project (Infrastructure)*

The Happy Valley Restoration and Preservation Project will install approximately 467 locally sourced boulders along a 2,800-foot stretch of Dillon Road to prevent unauthorized vehicle access, illegal dumping, and habitat degradation at the Happy Valley property in Indio Hills, along with interpretive and regulatory signage to inform visitors of property

rules and the ecological significance of the area. During Quarter 4 (October through December 2025), a community cleanup event was successfully held at Happy Valley on November 20, 2025, in partnership with UCC, Southern California Mountains Foundation, and community volunteers. OLT initiated preliminary planning and internal coordination for boulder procurement and installation. The project has experienced staff changes, including a vacancy in the land's coordinator position, which has impacted project momentum. A grant amendment may be necessary to account for time associated with recruiting, hiring, and training a new lands coordinator. CVMC staff will continue to work OLT and monitor the project schedule accordingly.

P680027 – \$526,997 – The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – Central Coachella Valley Pollinator Pathways Project (*Restoration*)

The Central Coachella Valley Pollinator Pathways Project aims to enhance pollinator habitat across the Central Coachella Valley through the propagation and outplanting of native species on conservation lands, public spaces, and selected schools, restoring or enhancing 55.5 acres across 23 sites over two phases from 2025 through 2029. During Quarter 1 (January through March 2026), The Living Desert conducted monthly public outreach tabling events, continued partner coordination with organizations including Palm Springs Parks & Recreation, Rancho Mirage High School, Desert ARC, and College of the Desert, and installed the project's first urban public pollinator garden at Nellie Coffman Middle School in Cathedral City, consisting of 55 native plants across four beds. Seed collection permits were obtained from both the Bureau of Land Management and the USDA Forest Service for 15 plant species, and propagation of several native species is actively underway at the Conservation Greenhouse. Planning for habitat enrichment at Palm Hills and the TLD Nature Preserve also advanced, including coordination with CVCC staff and initiation of tribal consultation under AB52. No schedule or budget concerns were identified during the reporting period.

PROPOSITION 68 GRANT PROGRAM – COMPLETED PROJECTS

19 PROJECTS COMPLETED TO DATE

\$2,304,891 TOTAL AMOUNT OF COMPLETED PROJECTS TO DATE

Grant No. – Grant Award Amount – Grantee - *Project Name (Project Type)*

P680002 – \$28,947 – Friends of the Desert Mountains– *Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Visitor Center Improvement (Planning)*

P680003 – \$49,000 – ShumwayRanch.Org – *Shumway Ranch Master Site Plan (Design)*

P680004 – \$74,500 – Coachella Valley Desert and Mountains Recreation and Conservancy Authority – *Shumway Ranch Restoration and Infrastructure (Planning)*

P680005 – \$81,730 – Friends of the Desert Mountains – *Design-Interpretive-Improvement Project – National Monument Visitor Center (Design)*

P680006 – \$232,182 – Kounkuey Design Initiative, Inc. – *Salton Sea State Recreation Area Renovation and Restoration (Planning)*

P680007 – \$139,550 – Center for Natural Lands Management – *Coachella Valley Preserve Fencing Project (Infrastructure)*

P680008 – \$25,917 – Friends of the Desert Mountains – *Coachella Valley Trails Facility and Signage Inventory and Assessment Project (Planning)*

P680009 – \$38,530 – Southern California Mountains Foundation – *Coachella Valley Conservation Corps Center Project (Planning)*

P680010 – \$57,500 – Coachella Valley Desert and Mountains Recreation and Conservancy Authority – *Shumway Initial Improvements and Preparations Design Plans Project (Design)*

P680011 – \$245,274 – The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – *Greening the Desert (Infrastructure)*

P680012 – \$100,000 – Coachella Valley Desert and Mountains Recreation and Conservancy Authority – *Trails and Interpretative Signage Project (Infrastructure)*

P680013 – \$565,475 – Coachella Valley Desert and Mountains Recreation and Conservancy Authority – *Shumway Restroom and Pavilion Improvement Project (Infrastructure)*

P680014 – \$35,000 – ShumwayRanch.Org – *Preservation Plan for Historic Structure Improvements at Shumway Ranch (Planning)*

P680016 – \$53,856 – The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – *Signs of Nature: Connecting DHS to Nearby Nature (Infrastructure)*

P680017 – \$200,000 – The City of Coachella – *Environmental Review of its Grapefruit Boulevard Urban Greening and Connectivity Project (Planning)*

P680018 – \$88,479 – The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – *East Valley Pollinator Pathway Demonstration Project (Infrastructure)*

P680019 – \$35,000 – Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District – *Feasibility Study for new Regional Park in the Coachella Valley (Planning)*

P680020 – \$152,057 – The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – *Conservation Greenhouse Project (Infrastructure)*

P680021 – \$163,850 – Oswit Land Trust – *Biological Resources Assessment and Environmental Review for the Prescott Preserve (Planning)*

P680022 – \$90,098 – Center for Natural Lands Management – *Restroom Replacement Project (Infrastructure)*

CLIMATE RESILIENCE & COMMUNITY ACCESS GRANT PROGRAM – ACTIVE GRANT PROJECT STATUS

Grant No. – Grant Award – Grantee - *Project Name (Project Type)*

CRCA0004 – \$405,700 – Friends of the Desert Mountains – *Eastern Coachella Valley Programs Capacity Building (Capacity)*

The Project consists of expanding the Friends of the Desert Mountains capacity to provide recreational and educational programs that showcase the wildlife, scenic and cultural resources of the Coachella Valley to underserved and economically disadvantaged communities in the Eastern Coachella Valley. Status: The Director of Education/Community Liaison: helped staff with outreach boots at local community events. Helped staff with the Youth education classes/hikes. Wrote and managed grants for the environmental education programs. Designed the presentation for potential volunteers and potential investors. Assisted with creating content for social media pages. Assisted in updating the Native Planting Lecture. Attended bi-weekly meetings with KDI to continue the process for design and engineering from the Desert Lake Shore project. Attended monthly CA 30 x 30 meetings. Translation Specialist: created monthly calendar of events in English and Spanish. Coordinated 6 lectures for the Fall Native Planting Series. Continued the translation for the Coachella Valley Native Planting Guide. Assisted finance associate with processing donations and thank you letters, assisted volunteer coordinator with managing volunteer signups. Assisted with the Kiosk monthly update.

CRCA0006 – \$202,000 – Desert Recreation District Foundation – *Outdoor Adventure Experiences for Underserved Youth (Capacity)*

The Project consists of expanding two youth programs by retaining additional staff and purchasing additional equipment to be able to offer these programs for two years at no cost to at least 180 underserved and economically disadvantaged youth annually. Status: This quarter the outdoor adventure team delivered a variety of youth and family programs in the underserved communities, including bird watching, bike riding, rock climbing, hiking, and on-site leave no trace programming without Desert Recreation District Clubhouses and Kids clubs at various centers. Desert Recreation Foundation partnered with Friends of the Desert Mountains, Wildlands Conservancy and Big Morongo Canyon

Preserve to bring enriching and fun outdoor adventures to valley youth, serving a total of 167 youth this quarter. The fall programming was planned along with conducting community outreach to advertise summer activities and the various campsites. To date the project has successfully created safe and fun outdoor recreation opportunities to nearby outdoor spaces. The team placed an emphasis on stewardship and recreational responsibility, reminding participants that these places are for all to enjoy.

CRCA0007 – \$280,000 – Council of Mexican Federation in North America (COFEM) – *Coachella Defensores de Tierras Publicas/ Public Land Defenders (Capacity)*

The Project consists of expanding the Council of Mexican Federation's (COFEM) Defensores de Tierras Publicas program, which works in collaboration with conservation organizations to protect desert landscapes and create educational opportunities for people of low-income and traditionally underserved communities, by retaining a full-time, two-year conservation fellow to expand its educational program. During Quarter 4 (October through December 2025), COFEM advanced its Nuestro Desierto California Naturalist program through a series of classroom sessions, field classes, and community events, including a field class at the Mecca Hills within the newly designated Chuckwalla National Monument, a Camping 101 workshop, and the program's graduation ceremony celebrating the 2025 cohort's achievements. Community engagement activities included a collaboration with Audubon at the Salton Sea, a guided nature walk in the Chuckwalla National Monument, and a field session at Whitewater Preserve focused on watershed education and regional ecology. A previously planned Death Valley camping trip was rescheduled to Joshua Tree National Park in February 2026 due to federal shutdown-related constraints. A no-cost grant extension through December 2026 has been approved, and COFEM will continue its fifth year of the Nuestro Desierto California Naturalist program in the next reporting period.

CRCA0009 – \$215,000 – Coachella Valley Desert and Mountains Conservation and Recreational Authority – *Land Management Capacity Building (Capacity)*

The Project consists of establishing a program to assist non-profit, tribal or public entity owners of conservation land management related public works and related services. It promotes joint effort among adjacent conservation owners for monitoring, maintenance enforcement, recreation, and public education. Status: The position funded by this grant has been filled by a new Capital Projects Manager, who is currently becoming acquainted with the projects housed under CVDMRCA, including the West Deception Canyon Trail and the Shumway Restoration efforts. The Capital Projects Manager will work closely with CVMC, Friends of the Desert Mountains, and the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission to advance trails projects approved by the Conservancy Board. The position continues to be funded 50% by this CRCA grant and 50% by DRD.

CRCA0010 – \$52,950 – Friends of the Desert Mountains – *Desert Lake Shore PH2 (Planning)*

The Project consists of further development of the Desert Lake Shore Property as a conservation and education center in the Eastern Coachella Valley. Status: The grantee is advancing design and permitting activities. Kounkuey Design Initiative has engaged a civil engineer and initiated site assessments. Progress is currently focused on completing the County Plot Plan Application, which is estimated to cost \$15,000–\$30,000 and may require 9 to 12 months for review. The project team is also evaluating easement requirements and potential design adjustments to support permitting. Upon completion of design, the grantee will pursue construction cost estimates and identify funding opportunities, including potential support from the Wildlife Conservation Board and future CVMC grant programs. Staff will continue to coordinate with the grantee as the project advances

CRCA0011 – \$292,000 – The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – *Native American Conservation Workforce Development Program (Capacity/Training)*

The project provides paid training in conservation for up to 40 Native American participants, ages 18–34, from disadvantaged communities, integrating Western scientific skills with Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). During Quarter 1 (January through March 2026), The Living Desert continued supporting its intern cohort across separate conservation projects. Renee contributed to habitat restoration efforts along the Amargosa River, assisting with mesquite out planting and cage-building, continued desert tortoise care and husbandry, attended the International Desert Conservation Summit, and assisted in building habitats for Mojave Ground Squirrels. Isaiah concluded his internship at the end of January, having contributed to native plant propagation, nursery maintenance, seed cleaning for CVCC restoration projects, and preparation of community gardens for the Torres Martinez Band of Cahuilla Indians Senior Village. Belle focused on launching the Soboba Tribe Youth Environmental Ambassadors program, recruiting participants, leading two workshops integrating nature-based activities and Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and coordinating with Tribal youth leadership. No schedule or budget concerns were reported, and planning is underway to assess capacity for an additional intern in the next quarter.

CRCA0015 – \$300,000 – City of Palm Desert – *North Sphere Regional Park (Design)*

The Project supports developing a conceptual design and preparation of construction documents for a 27-acre regional park in an the City of Palm Desert. between I-10 and Dinah Shore/Gerald Ford Drive. Status: The City has completed the conceptual design phase, including City Council approval of the park design and name (Dave Erwin Park) in April 2025. The project has since transitioned to the preparation of plans and

specifications. The City is currently pursuing an amendment to update the project schedule and extend the grant term to allow completion of construction documents. Under the revised schedule, plans and specifications are anticipated to be completed by February 2027, with the overall grant term extended through April 2027. Staff will continue to coordinate with the City on finalizing the amendment and advancing the remaining design work.

CRCA0016 – \$41,087 – Friends of the Desert Mountains – *Native Plant Education Program (Capacity/Education and Outreach)*

The Project supports development of a native planting guide and implementation of a bilingual lecture series promoting nature-based solutions and urban greening in underserved communities. Status: During this reporting period, the grantee completed five bilingual community lectures across the Coachella Valley, reaching a total of 82 participants. Survey results indicate strong positive feedback, with average ratings above 9 out of 10 across all evaluation categories, including knowledge gained and likelihood of applying native planting practices. The Native Planting Guide continues to be distributed through lectures and outreach efforts. The Spanish-language version has been finalized and is anticipated to be printed and distributed in the next reporting period.

CRCA0017 – \$245,372 – Friends of the Desert Mountains – *Land Acquisitions and Management (Capacity)*

The Project supports implementation of a multi-year Land Acquisition and Management Program focused on land stewardship, monitoring, and acquisitions. Status: During this reporting period, the Land Administrator continued monitoring CVMC-funded lands and advanced parcel data management, including GIS updates and an internal tracking dashboard to support reporting and workflow coordination. Acquisition efforts included outreach to private landowners, initiation of a property purchase (RLF), and coordination with Stewart Title on land donation processing. Additional activities included site monitoring, coordination of cleanup efforts, and support for fire recovery documentation and interagency field coordination. Staff will continue to coordinate with the grantee on acquisitions, monitoring, and program development.

CRCA0018 – \$200,000 – Oswit Land Trust – *Sustainable Land Management (Capacity)*

The Project consists of retaining a full-time experienced land manager to establish and operate a sustainable land management program for two-and-one-half years. Status: OLT advanced land stewardship activities, invasive species mitigation, and community engagement across its properties, logging a total of 2,010 volunteer hours between land maintenance crew and trail ambassadors. The land manager position has since

experienced a vacancy, and OLT is in the process of onboarding a new land manager with experience in land management who has also been an OLT volunteer for the past six months. With a remaining grant balance of \$81,707 in salaries and benefits, OLT has requested a no-cost grant extension, and CVMC has confirmed the grant term can be extended through March 30, 2027, to allow sufficient time for the new land manager to carry out the remaining grant objectives. CVMC staff will continue to coordinate with OLT as the position is filled and work resumes.

CRCA0020 – \$372,712 – Coachella Valley Conservation Commission – Cooperative Ranger Initiative for Conservation Lands

The Project supports development of a Cooperative Ranger Initiative to Enhance monitoring, enforcement coordination, and public outreach across CVCC-managed conservation lands. Status: During this reporting period, the program advanced from planning into detailed operational development, with a focus on coordination with Riverside County Parks as a potential host agency. A field tour with County leadership helped identify patrol priorities, access points, and enforcement needs across conservation lands, informing development of a draft service scope. Staff continued refinement of patrol areas, management objectives, and recreation impact assessments, including issues related to illegal dumping, encampments, off-highway vehicle use, and sensitive habitat protection. Standard Operating Procedures were developed to guide ranger response protocols, emphasizing coordinated, outreach-first approaches for encampments and dumping incidents. An ordinance crosswalk was completed to assess enforcement authority and identify regulatory gaps under a County-hosted model. Additional work included development of training materials and continued interagency coordination to align ranger deployment strategies with land management and public safety needs. Staff will continue to work with the County and partners to finalize service proposals, operational protocols, and implementation planning for the program.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE & COMMUNITY ACCESS GRANT PROGRAM – COMPLETED PROJECTS

9 PROJECTS COMPLETED TO DATE

\$2,539,329 TOTAL AMOUNT OF COMPLETED PROJECTS TO DATE

Grant No. – Grant Award – Grantee - Project Name (Project Type)

CRCA0001 – \$310,000 - Kounkuey Design Initiative – Juntos al Aire Libre

CRCA0003 – \$398,000 – UC Riverside/Center for Conservation Biology – Palm Desert – Desert Climate Resilience Initiative (Capacity/Research)

CRCA0002 – \$407,277 – Southern California Mountains Foundation UCC Coachella Valley Center (Capacity)

CRCA0005 – \$390,000 – Native American Land Conservancy – NALC Capacity Building (Capacity)

CRCA0008 – \$128,000 – City of Desert Springs – Trails Conservation Outreach and Education Program (Design/Outreach & Education)

CRCA0012 – \$296,000 – Southern California Mountains Foundation – UCC Coachella Valley Center (Capacity/Training)

CRCA0013 – \$136,175 – Native American Land Conservancy – Nature Based Solutions Projects (Capacity)

CRCA0014 – \$200,000 – Desert Compost – Composting for Climate Resiliency (Capacity)

CRCA0019 – \$273,877 – UC Riverside/Center for Conservation Biology – Palm Desert – WUI Assessment (Capacity/Research)

Item C. CVMC FUND STATUS

After the Board consideration and awards from the action items above, the Conservancy's available grant funding balances are as follows:

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Proposition 1 | \$ | 0 |
| Proposition 68 | \$ | 2,992,274 |
| Proposition 84 | \$ | 5,545,453 |
| Proposition 4 | \$ | 1,688,000 |
| Total Remaining Grant Funds | \$ | 10,225,727 |