State of California – The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

PROJECT TITLE: Tijuana Estuary Tidal Restoration Program II Phase I; Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement

May 27, 2021

The California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) is the Lead Agency under the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and will be preparing a joint Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as Lead Agency for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for the Tijuana Estuary Tidal Restoration Program II Phase I (TETRP II Phase I). The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is participating as a Cooperating Agency under NEPA. State Parks is requesting the views of agencies with statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project, as well as comments from organizations or individuals with interest in the proposed project. A brief description of TETRP II Phase I, the park unit's location, and a brief description of possible environmental effects to be analyzed are included.

Responses must be sent either to the email address or mailing address listed below no later than **Monday, July 12, 2021**. Please include your name and contact information or the name of a contact person in your organization or agency, if appropriate. Please reference the following project title (provided below) in the subject line of your correspondence.

Project Title: TETRP II Phase I EIR/EIS

Electronic submittals may be sent to the following email address:

Email: fw8plancomments@fws.gov

Please include "TETRP NOP" in the email subject line.

Hard copies can be mailed to the following contact and address:

Brian Collins
USFWS, San Diego NWR Complex
1080 Gunpowder Point Drive
Chula Vista, CA 91910
Phone (760) 431-9440 ext. 273

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

TETRP II Phase I project site is located in the Tijuana Estuary in southwestern San Diego County, California (Figure 1). TETRP II Phase I is the first phase of a multi-phase restoration of the southern arm of the Tijuana Estuary as first evaluated in the overall Restoration Project component of the 1991 Tijuana Estuary Tidal Restoration Program EIR/EIS. Of the project components discussed in the 1991 EIR/EIS, the Model Marsh component finished construction in 2000 and successfully restored approximately 20 acres. TETRP II Phase I builds upon the revised conceptual restoration plan developed in the Tijuana Estuary – Friendship Marsh Restoration Feasibility and Design Study completed in 2008, which proposed multi-phase restoration of approximately 250 acres of the estuary. TETRP II Phase I has been designed to restore approximately 80 to 85 acres within the study area to increase the tidal prism (amount of water coming and going with the tides) of the estuary by restoring salt marsh, mudflat, and tidal channels, as well as transitional and upland habitats that have been degraded over the past several decades.

Two action alternatives and the no action alternative will be evaluated in the draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement. Both action alternatives would reconfigure a portion of the southern arm of the Tijuana Estuary to re-establish wetlands, increase tidal prism in the estuary, and enhance estuarine function within the system. Through sediment excavation, the project would establish elevations with appropriate inundation frequencies to support specific habitat types. Habitats would range in elevation and include transitional/upland, mid- to high salt marsh, low salt marsh, intertidal mudflats, and intertidal channels.

Alternative 1 (Maximum Tidal Prism) is currently identified as the proposed action. This alternative, which would restore approximately 85 acres of coastal habitat, would maximize deeper intertidal habitats, by expanding tidal channels and intertidal mudflat.

Alternative 2 (Reduced Impact Alternative), which would restore approximately 80 acres of coastal habitat, has been designed to preserve existing native plant communities, including high salt marsh and transition zone throughout the project site. The primary tidal connection to Alternative 2 is the existing South Beach Slough, which would be deepened to increase tidal flows into the proposed restoration site.

The primary differences between the two action alternatives include the amount of intertidal mudflat restored versus salt marsh habitat; the total acreage of restored versus preserved habitats; and the number of connections to existing tidal channels.

Under the No Action Alternative, restoration of the estuary would not be implemented. No sediment or vegetation would be removed and no establishment of habitat for the enhancement of biological and hydrological functions within the project site would occur.

Excavated materials may be used onsite to supplement transitional areas located along the southern edge of the restoration area and within the site. This would help increase resiliency to sea level rise in the future, and buffer sources of sedimentation that have contributed to degradation of wetland habitats. Additional on-site use options include opportunities for beneficial reuse of beach-suitable material either as dune replenishment or nearshore beach nourishment. Material not used within the project site would be exported for beneficial reuse or disposal. Material may be beneficially reused in the Nelson Sloan Quarry Restoration and Beneficial Reuse of Sediment Project, a proposed project that seeks to restore landform and native habitat in a local abandoned quarry. Excavated material may also be hauled away for placement at an approved upland site or disposed of in a local landfill.

As part of the project, an existing pedestrian-only trail and unapproved routes that traverse the restoration area may be closed. Existing trails that extend along the edge of the restoration area may experience temporary closure for construction activity but would remain open for public use post-restoration. Adaptive management and maintenance of the site (e.g., channels, areas with non-native vegetation) may also be required in the future. Potential staging and access areas that may be used to implement marsh restoration are also shown on Figure 2.

An EIR/EIS has been determined to be the appropriate CEQA/NEPA document for TETRP II Phase I. This EIR/EIS is prepared as a tiered document to the previous 1991 Tijuana Estuary Tidal Restoration Program EIR/EIS, which was certified by the California State Coastal Conservancy (SCH #881130221) in September 1992 with a Record of Decision issued by the USFWS in July 1993.

PROJECT LOCATION: TETRP II Phase I project site is located in the southern arm of the Tijuana Estuary in southwestern San Diego County, California and is encompassed by the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve (TRNERR), which includes Border Field State Park and the Tijuana Slough National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) (Figure 1). The proposed project site extends into both Border Field State Park and Tijuana Slough NWR, as shown in Figure 2. The Tijuana River drains an approximately 1,700-square-mile watershed, 73% of which is within Mexico. The TRNERR encompasses approximately 2,531 acres of tidal and non-tidal land.

POSSIBLE EFFECTS AND MITIGATION: The scoping process is designed to elicit comments from the public, responsible agencies, and interested parties on the scope of the Draft EIR/EIS. A preliminary list of probable environmental effects and considerations that could be related to the project implementation is identified below to initiate the scoping process.

The current list of issues to be evaluated include: Land Use, Recreation and Public Access, Tidal and Fluvial Hydrology and Water Quality, Hazards Materials and Public Safety, Biological Resources, Geology/Soils, Cultural Resources, Tribal Cultural Resources, Paleontological Resources, Visual Resources, Transportation, Air Quality, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Noise, Socioeconomics/Environmental Justice, Public Services and Utilities, and Energy.

Based on our initial evaluation of the proposed action and alternatives, the following impacts would be expected: conversion of existing upland habitat to coastal wetlands; replacement of high salt marsh habitat with low salt marsh habitat; short-term disturbance to listed and sensitive avian species; temporary increases in dust and other air pollutants during construction; changes to the area's existing fluvial hydrology; temporary impacts to water quality during excavation; temporary and permanent changes to existing public access; and temporary increases in construction traffic on the roadways within the Tijuana River Valley.

ANTICIPATED PERMITS AND AUTHORIZATIONS:
The following permits and other authorizations are anticipated to be required:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Clean Water Act (CWA) section 404 Nationwide Permit 27 and others, if appropriate;
- San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board CWA section 401 water quality certification;
- California Coastal Commission consolidated coastal development permit, including a consistency determination in compliance with section 930.34 *et seq.* of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) federal consistency regulations;

- Refuge special use permit to the California Department of Parks and Recreation for construction access and activities on Refuge lands;
- Consultation pursuant to section 7 of the Federal Endangered Species Act with USFWS and NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service;
- Consultation with NOAA Fisheries for essential fish habitat under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and for marine mammals pursuant to the Marine Mammal Protection Act;
- Consultation with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife pursuant to section 2081 of the California Endangered Species Act;
- Consultation with Tribes and the State Historic Preservation Officer pursuant to section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

PUBLIC INFORMATION: The following websites shall provide digital availability of the Notice of Preparation posting, electronic files of draft and final EIR/EIS documents, and updates regarding document/project progress:

https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=983

https://trnerr.org/about/public-notices/

https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Tijuana_Slough/what_we_do/resource_management.html

In addition, the draft and final TETRP II Phase I EIR/EIS documents will be available for review at:

California Department of Parks and Recreation
San Diego Coast District Office
4477 Pacific Highway
San Diego, CA 92110
Phone (619) 688-3260
Hours: M-F, 8:30AM – 4:30PM *

Southern Service Center
2797 Truxton Road
San Diego, CA 92106
Phone (619) 221-7060
Hours: M-F, 8:00AM – 4:00PM *

Tijuana Estuary Visitor Center
301 Caspian Way
Imperial Beach, CA 91932
Phone (619) 575-3613
Hours: W-Su, 10:00AM to 5:00PM *

** Hours may differ due to COVID19 restrictions. Call to verify.*

VIRTUAL SCOPING MEETING: Public scoping meetings will be held virtually on **Wednesday, June 16, 2021**; one from **2:00pm to 4:00pm** and another from **6:00pm to 8:00pm**. The meeting links can be found at: https://trnerr.org/about/public-notices. A recording of the scoping meeting will be available on the same website a few days following.

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF COMMENTS:
Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

FIGURE 1 – Regional Map
FIGURE 2 – Project Location Map

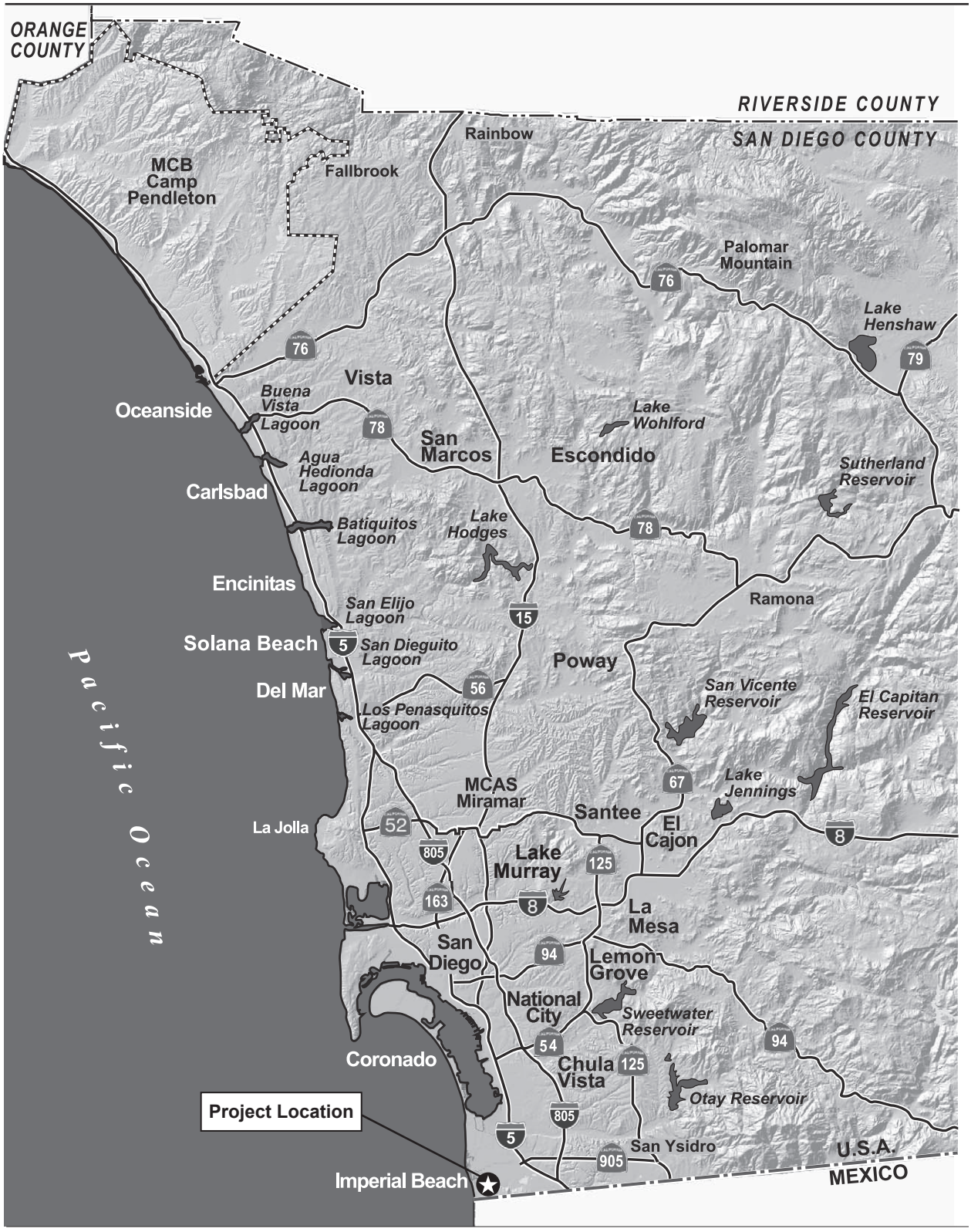
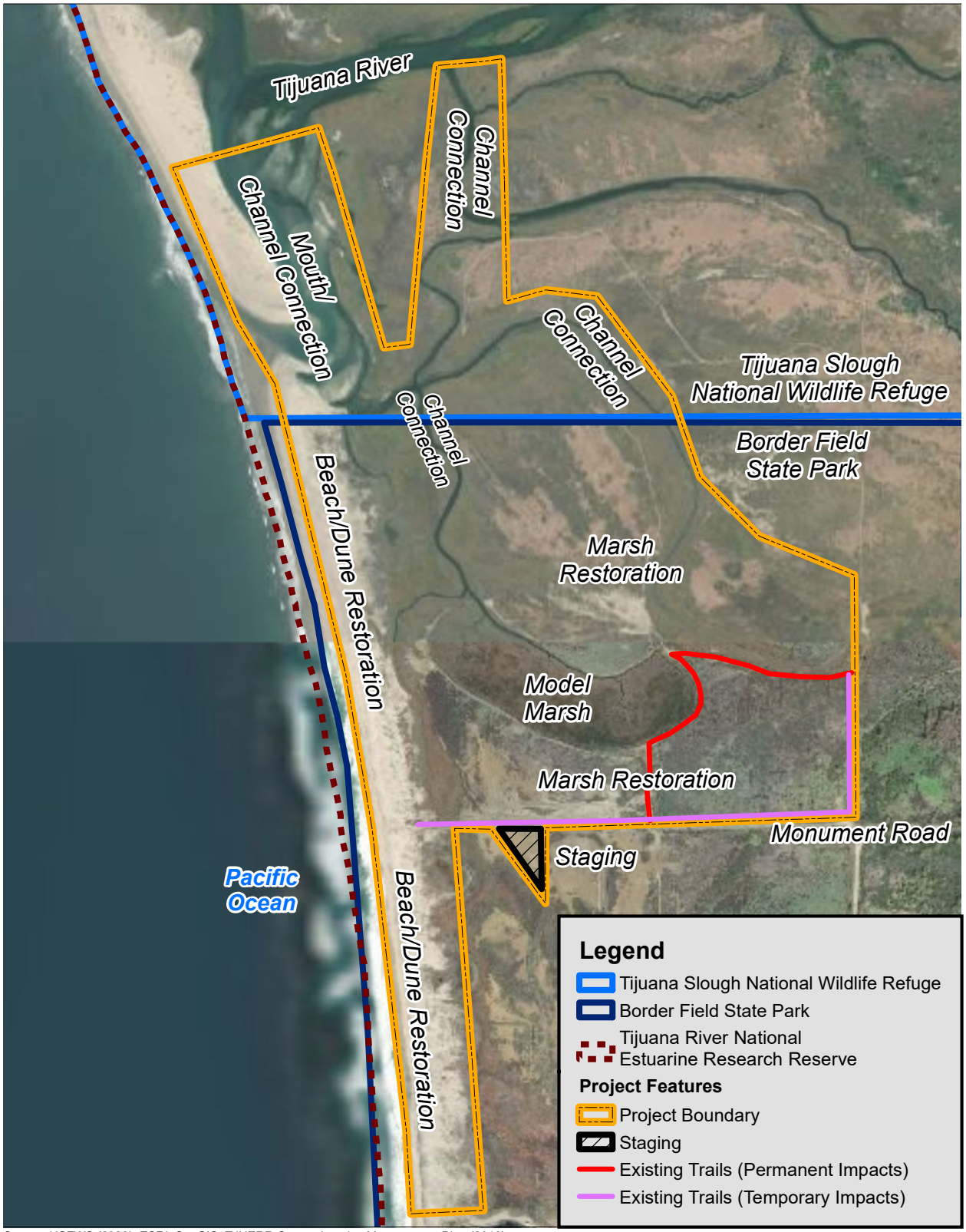


Figure 1
Regional Map



Source: USFWS (2020), ESRI, SanGIS, TJNERR Comprehensive Management Plan (2010).

1,150 0 1,150 Feet

Scale: 1:13,800 1 in = 1,150 feet

Figure 2

Project Location Map