May 23, 2022

To: State Clearing House, Responsible & Trustee Agencies,
Property Owners and Interested Parties.

Notice of Preparation and Scoping Meeting
of an Environmental Impact Report for the Topanga Lagoon Restoration Project

This Notice of Preparation (NOP) has been prepared to notify agencies and interested parties that the California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR) will be the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Topanga Lagoon Restoration Project. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) will be the lead agency under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and will prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project.

The Topanga Lagoon Restoration Project is a multiagency plan that seeks to restore ecological values of the coastal lagoon by expanding the existing footprint from its current condition of less than 1 acre to 7 – 10-acres. The project would improve the ecological condition and hydrologic functions of the lagoon to more closely resemble a natural condition. As part of the Project, the existing Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) bridge over Topanga Creek would be reconstructed with a longer span to accommodate a wider lagoon. The project would also improve coastal access and recreation in a way that supports and enhances biological and cultural values. The project background, location, description, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials. More information regarding the proposed project is available at: https://www.rcdsmm.org/resources/topanga-lagoon-restoration/.

The CDPR is soliciting comments from responsible and trustee agencies as well as interested parties as to the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the EIR. In accordance with CEQA, agencies are requested to review the proposed Program description provided in this NOP and to provide comments on environmental issues related to the statutory responsibilities of each responsible or trustee agency.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, **your response must be sent at the earliest possible date, but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice. Please send your comments to:** TopangaLagoonRestorationProject@esassoc.com **and provide the name and contact information for a contact person in your agency.**

Please note we will be holding a Public Scoping Meeting via Zoom on June 11th at 10am. Your response to the email above will allow us to send you login information prior to the meeting.

We look forward to your comments on this NOP. If you have any questions, you may contact Sr. Environmental Scientist Danielle LeFer at Danielle.LeFer@parks.ca.gov, or 818.857.2498.

Thank you,

Craig Sap, Interim District Superintendent
Angeles District, California Department of Parks and Recreation
1925 Las Virgenes Road, Calabasas CA 91302

Attachments: Project Background, Location, Description, and Potential Environmental Effects

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Topanga Lagoon is located at the mouth of Topanga Creek, which drains the Topanga Creek watershed within the Santa Ana Mountains. The lagoon is currently approximately 1 acre in size, and is crossed by the PCH. The Topanga Lagoon is disconnected from the ocean by a sand berm for long periods of time. The sand berm is breached during large storm events. The historic lagoon area has been filled and developed over the years with buildings and hard-scape infrastructure. The beach adjacent to the lagoon hosts millions of visitors per year and is an important regional coastal access and recreation location.

Despite the existing use patterns, Topanga Lagoon still hosts resources considered important at the regional, state, and national levels. A population of the federally endangered tidewater goby (*Eucyclogobius newberryi)* has been documented in the Topanga Lagoon since 2000. The only currently reproducing population of the federally endangered steelhead trout (*Onchorynchus mykiss,* Southern California DPS) within the Santa Monica Mountains is also present, although at very low levels. A wide range of other important species use the greater area such as protected nesting birds, state sensitive species like the arroyo chub (*Gila orcuttii*), western pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*), and two-striped garter snake (*Thamnophis hammondii*), among others. The beach supports a significant run of California grunion *(Leuresthes tenuis*).

The northern portion of the lagoon area is owned by the CDPR as part of Topanga State Park. It includes remnants of the historic Topanga Ranch Motel and associated beach parking. Visitor services include a parking lot and restroom along with several active businesses located along the PCH that are State Park concessions including Cholada; Wylie's Bait and Tackle; Rosenthal's Wine Bar and Patio; Topanga Ranch Motel; Reel Inn; Oasis Imports; and Malibu Feed Bin.

The PCH bridge owned by California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) bisects the lagoon and constrains the size of its mouth and channel. The lifeguard tower, beach, restrooms, and parking areas south of the PCH are managed by Los Angeles County Department of Beaches and Harbors (DBH) and are currently experiencing impacts from coastal erosion and storm surges.

PROJECT LOCATION

The project encompasses 59 acres of Topanga State Park and Topanga Beach located on the coastal slope of the Santa Monica Mountains, west of the intersection of Topanga Canyon Boulevard (TCB) and State Route 1 PCH in unincorporated Los Angeles County (**Figure 1**). This is within the Topanga, CA U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute quadrangle, Township 1S, Range 16W. The project area is located within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) but is owned and managed by three public entities: CDPR, DBH and Caltrans.

Figure 1. Project Location and Planning Area.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Three alternatives will be considered in the EIR/EA to restore the Topanga Lagoon in addition to a No Project Alternative. Each of these alternatives provides a different approach to restoring the lagoon area and adjacent seasonally wetted and riparian habitats, buffering its resources from future sea level rise, providing visitor serving functions and meeting the project goals.

Alternative 1, No Project Alternative

The EIR/EA will evaluate a No Project Alternative that will consider that no improvements would be conducted at the location. The EIR/EA would assume that project site would continue to function under existing conditions.

Alternative 2, Maximum Lagoon Habitat, Removal of Motel. (9.5 wetted acres, with 27.8 riparian/transitional/upland acres restored and beach expansion to 4.39 acres).

This alternative provides the maximum increase in lagoon, wetland, and riparian bank habitats. The project would include a substantial amount of grading and soil removal to re-contour the creek and lagoon to provide for a wider lagoon, refugia, and improved fish migration. The project includes restoration of more natural side channels connected to the western side of the existing lagoon based on historic topography and would allow the lagoon system to evolve to accommodate changing sea level and storm surge conditions.

The Topanga Ranch Motel and all current onsite business leases would be removed from the project area and would be replaced with riparian and transitional habitats. There is sufficient space along the TCB to replace all of the parking that currently exists.

The existing Caltrans bridge would be replaced with a longer one along the same road alignment in order to span the widened lagoon. The span of the new bridge would total 460 feet (200-foot primary span, with secondary/side spans of 130 feet each). This alternative includes ADA disabled parking spaces on the beach level, with additional recreational parking at the PCH upper level on the south side of PCH only.

The lifeguard headquarters, beach restroom and helipad would be demolished and rebuilt closer to the realigned access road and to each other on the same beach level.

Construction of this Alternative would be expected to last approximately 24 months.

Alternative 3, Limited Lagoon Habitat Expansion, Retention of Motel. (7.7 wetted acres, with 29.47 riparian/transitional/upland acres restored and beach expansion to 4.42 acres).

This alternative would expand the lagoon, wetland, riparian and transitional habitat in the west part of the existing creek channel, but not as extensively as Alternative 2. Grading and soil removal would be less extensive, and only the existing main channel within the lagoon area would be restored. Twenty-one Topanga Ranch Motel structures would be restored in their historic configuration, including relocation of some of the structures from the west side that is currently experiencing flood and bank erosion. One existing concession (restaurant lessee) would be remodeled and continue operation in place. However, no other business leases would remain. Additional parking on the north side of PCH may be retained. There is sufficient space along TCB to replace all of the parking that currently exists.

All of the changes to the new 460-foot Caltrans bridge (200-foot center span, with secondary/side spans of 130 feet each) would be the same as for Alternative 2. However, the access road alignment would be slightly to the east.

The lifeguard headquarters and beach restroom would be rebuilt closer to the realigned access road moving slightly east to enhance sight lines along the beach, and the helipad would be located at PCH with a gated separation from the west end of the parking lot on the same level.

Construction of this Alternative would be expected to last approximately 24 months.

Alternative 4, Maximum Managed Retreat, Partial Motel Retention. (7.6 wetted acres, with 29.48 riparian/transitional/upland acres restored and beach expansion to 4.56 acres).

Under Alternative 4, the alignment of PCH would be moved northward, curving inland over the lagoon and expanding the maximum amount of beach area. The portion of the historic Topanga Ranch Motel east of the current motor court access lane, which includes 17 structures, would be retained. Adjacent parking would be adjusted and a remodeled restaurant lessee would continue to operate. This alternative would provide an expanded lagoon, wetland, riparian and transitional habitats, primarily on the west side of the existing channel due to removal of all fill in that western area. No other business leases would remain. Partial or full relocation or replacement of public parking, business leases and overnight accommodations from the current location on the north side of PCH to the west side of TCB in the expanded project area could be developed in a subsequent design phase. There is sufficient space along TCB in that location to replace all of the parking that currently exists.

Due to the curve of the alignment under Alternative 4, the Caltrans bridge roadway approach has the greatest length of all the Alternatives, though the actual span lengths are similar to the other alternatives with a total of 460 feet consisting of a 200-foot long center span and a 130-foot side span on each side. Shoulder parking would be eliminated on the bridge spans, but would retain beach side parking spaces.

The helipad and lifeguard headquarters would be rearranged with parking for staff, emergency vehicles, and ADA disabled parking with sight lines required for the expanded recreational beach area. This Alternative would maximize managed retreat, recreational beach area (and/or living shoreline features such as dunes) and provides the most sea level rise resilience.

Construction of this Alternative would be expected to last approximately 24 months.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The proposed project is anticipated to have a net benefit to the environment as it a restoration project that seeks to protect and enhance existing biological, cultural and visitor services resources, and proactively address the threat of future climate change and sea level rise. However, the project has the potential for short- or long-term environmental effects. Potential environmental impacts from the project could result in the following resource topics:

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology /Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards & Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology / Water Quality
- Land Use / Planning
- Noise
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation/Traffic
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities / Service Systems

Impacts are not anticipated in the following areas:

- Agriculture and Forestry Resources
- Mineral Resources
- Population / Housing

The EIR/EA will assess the level of impact to all environmental resources from the proposed project alternatives and identify measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to the maximum extent feasible.