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Coastal Commission Approves Permit for Community Iceplant Removal Project on Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve

Ballona Wetlands 5-Year Monitoring Report is Released, Confirming the Need for Restoration

March 11, 2016 (LOS ANGELES, CA) The Coastal Commission yesterday approved a permit for The Bay Foundation's (TBF) project, in partnership with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), to remove invasive iceplant from a targeted three-acre area within the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve (Reserve). The project, which is based on community participation, will utilize solarization techniques to desiccate the iceplant over a two-month period, by spreading black tarps over patches of iceplant to dry it out and give native species a chance to grow in its place.

Removing iceplant (*Carpobrotus spp*.), which is widely known as a creeping invasive plant, will help protect the remaining native flora that will be critical to reestablishing vegetation on the Reserve in the future. Iceplant reduces biodiversity and competes directly with native wetland species. Its removal, and subsequent introduction of native wetland species, will increase the health and condition of the wetland habitats in the Reserve.

"We are so thankful for the widespread support and enthusiasm for this important interim stewardship project, and look forward to working with the community in low-impact restoration efforts at the Reserve," states Karina Johnston, TBF's Director of Watershed Programs.

The Bay Foundation also published today the "Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve: Comprehensive 5-Year Monitoring Report". In 2009, TBF initiated a long-term monitoring program to assess the ecological condition of the Reserve with support from State Coastal Conservancy and CDFW. The program was developed to comprehensively survey the biological, chemical, and physical characteristics needed to inform the state's restoration planning process at the Reserve, as well as to develop baseline information and data to assist long-term and regional monitoring programs.

TBF has published two comprehensive baseline reports (2011, 2012), as well as supplemental technical memoranda, publications, and documents. This final, five-year report presents data collected during all five years of the monitoring program and compares results across years to evaluate trends over time.

The report's overriding conclusion drawn from the data is that the Reserve is *experiencing slowly deteriorating conditions* across most of the areas that are hydrologically disconnected from tidal influence. In other words, wetlands need water. These areas are disconnected largely due to the presence of the Ballona Creek levees, along with the large amount of sediment—approximately 3.1 million cubic yards—dumped on what was historic wetlands. These two key negative impacts have caused a lack of connection to water sources that would normally flow in and out of wetlands, and a continued influx of non-native and invasive vegetation, such as mustard and iceplant.

Despite the fact that some wetland habitats still exist in specific areas of the Reserve, many of the areas received extremely low condition scores, comparable with some of the lowest publicly recorded scores in the State of California, scientifically strengthening and supporting the need for active restoration. The Reserve remains the largest opportunity for significant coastal wetland restoration in the Los Angeles region.

Additional conclusions based on more than five years of data collection at the Reserve, literature reviews of previous site evaluations, and input from scientists throughout California indicate long-term trends:

- The areas that have had some restoration management actions over the last several decades (i.e. the tidal channels in Area B) received higher relative condition scores and were dominated by primarily native vegetation.
- The limited tidal channels provided muted tides that did not support the same fish nursery functions as a fully tidal system or allowed access to the marsh plains; however, fish species commonly found during monitoring (e.g. topsmelt, California killifish, arrow gobies) are representative of Southern California estuarine marsh systems.
- The tidal wetlands at the Reserve, even in their degraded state, provide natural water purification reducing bacteria levels over time.
- Steep banks and channel bank berms restricted water and limited the areas with native wetland vegetation. Inundation surveys captured the maximum extent of tidal inundation within Area B of approximately 15 acres out of the 577 total Reserve acres.
- Evaluations of the water quality data showed a consistent lack of eutrophication in the tidal channels, which, if present, would lead to excessive algal growth and low dissolved oxygen in the water.
- The proximity of major roadways to the Reserve increased roadkill incidents, and increase the potential costs and environmental impacts associated with those incidences.

Adds Johnston, "Some areas of the Reserve that have experienced restoration, like the tidal channels and western dune habitat, were doing fairly well, including native vegetation and some rare species; however, the areas disconnected from water will continue to degrade over time without significant restoration actions."

"What we've learned through the rigorous and comprehensive scientific study of the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve is that most of it is in terrible condition. The potential for impactful ecological restoration of Ballona is tremendous and will undo the harms of the past 150 years, letting wildlife and an ecosystem return to health," states Tom Ford, TBF's Executive Director. "I want to thank the Coastal Commission Staff and Commissioners for their support for a three acre restoration project to start this year. I'm looking forward to getting out onto the Reserve with

members of the community and students to start the healing. In the past people turned their backs on the wetlands, now we have a chance to embrace them. I hope everyone will join us!"

For the latest information on the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project, or to get involved, please visit http://ballonarestoration.org/.

Direct link to the 5-Year Report: http://ballonarestoration.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/TBF-Ballona-Wetlands_5-Year-Report_FINAL_web.pdf

About The Bay Foundation (TBF)
The Bay Foundation (TBF) is a 501(c) 3 non-profit environmental group founded in 1990 to contribute to the restoration and enhancement of the Santa Monica Bay (LA-Ventura county line to the Palos Verdes Peninsula) and local coastal waters. TBF and the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission are partners in the Santa Monica Bay National Estuary Program (SMBNEP), one of 28 entities that comprise the National Estuary Program established pursuant to Section 320 of the Clean Water Act. TBF raises and expends funds for research, education, planning, cleanup efforts and other priorities identified in the SMBNEP's *Bay Restoration Plan*. As advocates for the Bay, TBF works collaboratively with a broad group of stakeholders, including government agencies, industry, environmental groups, and scientists, to implement innovative policies and projects that clean up the waterways, create green spaces and natural habitats in the Los Angeles region. TBF conducts research and mentors student interns and volunteers through its Center for Santa Monica Bay Studies at Loyola Marymount University. (www.santamonicabay.org)

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