

# Bolsa Chica Conservancy Urges Approval of Restoration Plan as Proposed Mitigation for Desalination Project

*Updated Plan Calls for Improved Water Flow and Expansion of Restoration Acreage from 21 to 84 acres in Muted Tidal Basins, in Addition to Dredging of the Inlet*

HUNTINGTON BEACH, CA, USA, April 18, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Bolsa Chica Conservancy, which is dedicated to the protection, preservation and restoration of the Bolsa Chica Wetlands has urged the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality

Control Board to approve the Huntington Beach Seawater Desalination Project's proposed Bolsa Chica Coastal Habitat Restoration Plan as mitigation for the proposed project.



The updated coastal habitat plan, proposed by project proponent Poseidon Water, enhances the previously released Bolsa Chica plan that was recommended for approval in July 2020 by the Regional Water Board staff. Members of the Regional Board asked Poseidon and its staff to work together to enhance elements of the plan, which now includes nearly doubling the number of mitigation projects from three to five, including four at the Bolsa Chica wetlands. The specific projects include:

- Keeping the tidal inlet open and functioning;
- Making improvements to the water flow in the Muted Tidal Basins;
- Quadrupling of restoration acreage of the Muted Tidal Basin from 21 acres to 84 acres;
- Restoration of the intertidal shelf in the Full Tidal Basin; and
- Restoration of the artificial reef off of Palos Verdes.

Poseidon will take all reasonable steps to secure the permits and approvals necessary to implement the habitat restoration projects before the desalination facility begins operating and will provide financial assurances and pay stipulated financial penalties if the company does not meet habitat project development deadlines within its control.

“Habitat mitigation for the proposed desalination plant should be advanced as quickly as is feasible,” said Patrick Brenden, CEO of the Bolsa Chica Conservancy. “As we have seen throughout the lengthy permitting and regulatory process for this project, obtaining the permits necessary to implement the proposed mitigation may take time, but if this project does not move forward, we stand to lose out on these critical Bolsa Chica habitat restoration features for the foreseeable future.”

In May 2020, the Bolsa Chica Conservancy published a video of Poseidon’s proposed habitat restoration plan on its website and sent a letter to Lt. Governor Kounalakis and members of the state legislature bringing to their attention the urgent need for Poseidon’s proposed Bolsa Chica habitat restoration plan.

The Conservancy’s May 22, 2020 letter stated, “Absent the implementation of Poseidon’s Bolsa Chica preservation plan there is no identified long-term funding sources to ensure this valuable coastal habitat is preserved and enhanced in the future ... State Lands Commission funds dedicated to maintaining Bolsa Chica and its ocean inlet have been exhausted and the Commission is now forced to rely on an annual appropriation of state funds. In fact, the Commission has a pending application for a one-time appropriation of \$2 million in Vehicle License Fees. The desalination project now qualifies as providing multiple public benefits – a climate resilient, drought-proof drinking water supply and an environmental preservation project that will enhance the largest coastal wetlands complex in the Southern California Bight and one of the state’s critical Marine Protected Areas.”

According to the State Lands Commission’s 2020 application for state funds to maintain the Bolsa Chica ocean inlet: “Closure of the inlet would have catastrophic impacts to the wetland habitat, its endangered species, and other valuable public resources, resulting in a significant net loss to the state’s coastal wetlands and endangering the \$151 million investment; closure may also cause flooding in the adjacent neighborhood and a pre-existing on-site oil operation, a significant liability to the state ... An inability to maintain the system due to insufficient funding will result in the eventual failure and loss of critical habitat and a valuable public resource, a significant loss to the state’s goal of preserving our coastal wetlands, as well as an investment of over \$150 million. It could also have significant impacts to the state in the form of financial liabilities caused by the failure of the project.”

“The eventual closure of the Bolsa Chica inlet is no longer a slow-moving disaster”, said Brenden. “It is time for the Water Board to approve Poseidon’s proposed Bolsa Chica preservation plan. We do not have a day to waste,” he said. The Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board will review and consider approval of Poseidon’s proposed habitat restoration plan at their upcoming board meeting in April. The Bolsa Chica Conservancy encourages the board to approve the mitigation plan as proposed without further delay.

Established in 1990 by a coalition of government, community, business and environmental leaders, the Bolsa Chica Conservancy, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, provides services that inspire and connect all generations through community involvement and leadership in hands-on restoration and education in wetland science, watersheds, coastal ecology and environmental sustainability.

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