

# ***SAN ELIJO LAGOON CONSERVANCY /SANDAG/CALTRANS NEWS***

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## **State and Local Leaders Break Ground on San Elijo Lagoon Restoration Project**

San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), and Caltrans joined local and state leaders today at the San Elijo Lagoon Nature Center in Encinitas to break ground on the \$102 million restoration of the San Elijo Lagoon.

The San Elijo Lagoon Restoration, also known as the Reviving Your Wetlands Project, is part of the first phase of construction for the North Coast Corridor (NCC) Program, known as Build NCC. Today's groundbreaking is the result of two decades of grassroots planning and a collaboration between San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, Caltrans, San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), local cities, resource agencies, and community members.

Phase I of a three-year effort will include:

- Clearing vegetation and constructing a series of dikes along the main lagoon channel and inlet to control water elevations and turbidity
- Creating a 40-foot deep overdredge pit in the central basin. Approximately 450,000-cubic yards of high-quality sand will be removed and used for beach sand replenishment at Fletcher Cove and Cardiff State Beach
- Refilling the overdredge pit with lagoon sediment

Work includes dredging various channels within the lagoon to increase tidal flow and improve the overall health of the lagoon, establishing new wetland habitat for the lagoon's diverse wildlife, and creating new pedestrian trails within the lagoon.

"Beginning next month, you are going to see the start of efforts that have been 20 years in the making," said Doug Gibson, San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy Executive Director and Principal Scientist. "This grassroots and collaborative endeavor has helped us realize the Reviving your Wetlands Project. Our work will improve tidal circulation in the lagoon and enhance the lagoon's habitat in order to ensure prosperity and longevity for many of the lagoon's native plants and animals."

The San Elijo Lagoon Restoration was made possible in part to the NCC Program, a \$6 billion 40-year investment in the region's transportation network. Build NCC, or the first phase of construction on the NCC Program, represents the balanced approach SANDAG and Caltrans are taking in the improvement of the region's transportation system while addressing the needs of the environment.

"Today represents an important day for not only the region, but California," stated Caltrans Acting Chief Deputy Director Laurie Berman. "The San Elijo Lagoon Restoration provides an example of Caltrans' and the region's commitment to enhancing and protecting the environment and livability of adjacent communities, while building projects that provide additional transportation choices. This collaborative effort should be the model for all future projects moving forward – when agencies and communities come together, we can accomplish a great deal."

Additionally, the NCC Program has already preserved and enhanced more than 200 acres of sensitive habitat.

"The San Elijo Lagoon Restoration marks a significant milestone for preserving and enhancing our coastal resources," stated SANDAG Vice Chair, Terry Sinnott. "As Vice Chair of SANDAG's Board, I am encouraged by the collaborative approach this group has taken to transportation improvements in the region and I can assure you that SANDAG remains committed to finding solutions throughout the region that balance the needs of the environment and the needs of the transportation system."

In addition to the San Elijo Lagoon Restoration, two other transportation projects within the lagoon area are doing their part to increase the health of the lagoon. As part of Build NCC, construction crews are replacing the highway bridge over the lagoon, which will nearly double the width of the lagoon channel. Additionally, work is underway on the San Elijo Lagoon Double Track Project, which includes replacing the rail bridge over the lagoon inlet with fewer support columns. Both projects will help increase tidal flow and improve the lagoon's overall health.

Restoration efforts have been developed to consider current environmental conditions and to ensure birds will have accessible nesting areas where they feel safe. Studies indicate that sufficient alternate habitat is available for species to move within the lagoon basins and to temporarily move to other lagoons, if needed. This short-term disruption will result in wetlands that are expected to revive and thrive in the long-term.

Following restoration, public access and education opportunities will expand. As managing partners of San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve, County of San Diego Department of Parks & Recreation, San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, and California Department of Fish & Wildlife will continue to protect sensitive natural resources.

### **About San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy**

*San Elijo Lagoon* CONSERVANCY is the nonprofit land trust for San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve.

Its VISION is a world where biodiversity is preserved and people act to conserve nature and embrace it as central to a healthy community. Its MISSION is to protect and restore the resources of the 1000-acre San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve, its watershed, and related ecosystems for the benefit of current and future generations.

More information on the San Elijo Lagoon Restoration is available at: [SanElijo.org/RevivingWetlands](http://SanElijo.org/RevivingWetlands)

**About Build NCC**

Build NCC is a collaborative effort between SANDAG, Caltrans, and United States Department of Transportation. The first phase of construction in the cities of Solana Beach, Encinitas, and Carlsbad as part of the North Coast Corridor Program. Build NCC includes extending the existing carpool lane on I-5 in each direction from Lomas Santa Fe Drive to State Route 78, double tracking the rail line at the San Elijo Lagoon, replacing the highway and rail bridges at the San Elijo Lagoon, restoring the San Elijo Lagoon, and constructing nearly 10 miles of new bike and pedestrian trails. Construction on Build NCC began in early 2017 and will be complete by 2021. To learn more about NCC, visit: <http://keepsandiegomoving.com/BuildNCC>

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