**CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT**
**RESPONSIBLE AGENCY**
**STATEMENT OF FINDINGS**

**Project Title:** Santa Barbara County Debris Basin Removal and Fish Passage Project

**State Clearinghouse Number**: SCH#2001031043

**Project Location**: Santa Barbara County, San Ysidro and Rattlesake Creeks

**Description of Project**:
This project is being proposed by the Beach Erosion Authority for Clean Oceans and Nourishment (BEACON) in conjunction with the Santa Barbara County Flood Control and Watershed Conservation SBCFCWCD (SBCFCWCD).

The proposed project is a natural infrastructure restoration effort that will remove two fifty-year old concrete debris dams from streams in the foothills behind the City of Santa Barbara. The dams are located on Rattlesnake and San Ysidro Creeks in Santa Barbara County. These creeks form part of the watershed for the Santa Ynez Mountains and in the past served as important sources of coastal beach sand and pathways for migrating steelhead fish. Removing the two dams will restore these natural functions, contributing positively to coastal watershed and habitat restoration, sustainable fisheries, regional sediment management and climate change adaptation.

The debris basins on Rattlesnake and San Ysidro Creeks were designed and built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1964 following the Coyote Wild Fire. The purpose of the dams was to intercept the downstream movement of heavy debris before it could plug the creeks and cause flooding in adjacent urban areas. However, new approaches to post-fire flood protection have made the debris basins unnecessary. Both basins continue to act as barriers to coastal sediment supply and steelhead migration. The proposed project will remove the two dams and restore the adjacent creek areas to their natural (pre-dam) condition.

The proposed project incorporates watershed and habitat restoration best practices to support more sustainable sediment transport down the two creeks and ultimately to the coastline. Steelhead, unlike salmon, can spawn in a range of creek locations along the south coast of Santa Barbara County. The project increases spawning gravel areas and reduces creek bed erosion resulting in a healthier creek environment and retention of vegetation along the creek banks.

The proposed project incorporates habitat and watershed restoration and natural infrastructure elements as part of an adaptive management plan with long-term benefits (50 plus years). It is important to note that the project is consistent with the priority goals of “The Inventory of Barriers to Fish Passage in California's Coastal Watersheds” (State Coastal

Conservancy, 2004), the "Work Program of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (SCWRP)" (SCWRP, 2016).

The proposed project will incorporate emerging best practices for removing fish passage barriers. These best practices and outcomes will be monitored and documented so as to share the results and experiences learned with others. A best practices how-to guide/user-friendly manual will be developed detailing the demolition and removal of concrete structures, aquatic and terrestrial habitat restoration techniques and technologies, and processes to plan, fund, and implement projects. Consultants will prepare the manual in conjunction with BEACON and SBCFCWCD staff and will assist in organizing workshop training.

**Findings:**
Pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21002.1(d) and CEQA Guidelines Section 15096(g) and (h), the Ocean Protection Council (OPC), as Responsible Agency, has reviewed and considered the following documents prepared by the Lead Agency (CEQA):

The San Barbara County Flood Control District, *Final Program Environmental Impact Report, Update Routine Maintenance Program* SCH#2001031043. November 2011.

Using its independent judgment, the OPC makes the following finding:

> The above listed document: a) adequately addresses the potential impacts of the project and b) is adequate for use by the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) for assessing the potential impacts of funding the grant request now before the OPC for approval.

The OPC hereby makes the following findings regarding the significant but mitigable environmental impacts of the proposed project, pursuant to Public Resources Code 21081 and Section 15091 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

<u>Hydrology</u>

- <u>Preventing a Build-up of Channel Resistance May Increase Velocities.</u> Channel resistance is reduced by brushing, mowing, spraying, and discing to remove obstructive and/or silt-trapping vegetation; and by removing storm debris and obstructive sandbars. These actions can result in higher velocities, which in turn could theoretically cause minor and localized channel degradation that contributes to bank erosion in the affected reach. To ensure that this impact is avoided under the current program, the SBCFCWCD has conducted an "engineering analysis" to determine the need, nature, and extent of maintenance activities each year along maintained drainages, and give full consideration of incidental adverse hydraulic effects associated with channel maintenance. In addition, post maintenance channel bed treatment would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.
- <u>Reduced Bank Stability Due to Giant Reed Removal.</u> Removal of large stands of Giant

Reed could destabilize banks and result in increased local bank erosion and downstream sedimentation. Hydraulic impacts would be localized. Using the least invasive removal techniques and stabilizing the banks using biotechnical methods that include native plants would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

- Effect of Equipment on Channel Bed. For large maintenance projects, the movement of equipment in the channel bed can disrupt any armored layer on the channel bed and loosen sediments. It may also reduce the channel topographic diversity, which imparts a certain resistance to flow, thereby increasing flow velocities and sediment transport capacity. To ensure that this impact is avoided under the current program, the SBCFCWCD has conducted an "engineering analysis" to determine the need, nature, and extent of maintenance activities each year along maintained drainages, and give full consideration of incidental adverse hydraulic effects associated with channel maintenance. In addition, post maintenance channel bed treatment would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

Water Quality

- Potentially Adverse Herbicide Concentrations. There is a potential for localized elevated concentrations of glyphosate in drainages due to excessive application of herbicides or poor application methods that result in overspray which would degrade water quality. Responsible application of herbicide, water quality monitoring, reporting water quality incidents, and reducing overall herbicide use would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.
- Accidental Spills and Leaks. Accidental leakage or spill of fuel and/or oil from heavy equipment working within or directly adjacent to the watercourse or in a debris basin can cause discharge of pollutants to the creek, which would degrade water quality. Mixing and dispensing herbicides and equipment fueling outside the channel or basin, developing spill containment procedures, training field personnel and equipping all field vehicles with appropriate spill containment materials would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

Wetlands, Riparian Habitat, and Rare Plants

- Access Ramp Habitat Impacts. Construction or maintenance of access ramps could temporarily reduce the amount of riparian habitat. The distance between access ramps shall be minimized and placed in areas with minimum potential for erosion. Ramps shall be sited, constructed and maintained in a manner that minimizes disturbance to flora and fauna. Ramps shall be removed if unneeded. Infrequently used ramps shall be seeded. These mitigation measures would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

- Temporary Habitat Disturbance. Disturbance of channel banks and bed from heavy equipment during channel shaping, placement of bank protection, desilting operations, ramp construction, and repair of bank protection and grade stabilizers could temporarily remove wetland, riparian and aquatic habitats in work areas. These areas shall be restored with native plants after maintenance is completed. This mitigation measure would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.
- Displace Sensitive Plants. Disturbance of channel banks and bed from heavy equipment during channel shaping, placement of bank protection, desilting operations, ramp construction, and repair of bank protection and grade stabilizers could remove regionally rare plant species. This same impact could occur due to clearing pilot channels and outlet works in debris basins, as well as removing sediments from basins. The SBCFCWCD shall conduct pre-construction biological surveys to identify sensitive plant and animal species. The SBCFCWCD shall modify maintenance activities to avoid sensitive species. If sensitive species cannot be avoided, they shall be relocated with the help of experts. All maintenance activities shall be monitored daily to ensure that sensitive species are avoided or protected to the maximum extent feasible. These mitigation measures would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

Fish, Aquatic Species, and Wildlife

- Displace Wildlife for New Access Ramps. Construction or maintenance of access ramps could temporarily reduce the amount of riparian habitat. This action could adversely affect nesting, cover, and foraging habitat for riparian-dependent bird species, as well as cover for riparian amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. The SBCFCWCD shall provide compensatory habitat for impacts associated with the construction of new access ramps. This mitigation measure would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.
- Displace or Remove Sensitive Fish and Wildlife. Disturbance of channel banks and bed from heavy equipment during channel shaping, placement of bank protection, desilting operations, ramp construction, and repair of bank protection and grade stabilizers could remove and displace sensitive fish and wildlife species, depending upon location and time of year. This same impact could occur due to clearing pilot channels and outlet works in debris basins, as well as removing sediments from basins. The SBCFCWCD shall conduct pre-construction biological surveys to identify sensitive plant and animal species. The SBCFCWCD shall modify maintenance activities to avoid sensitive species. If sensitive species cannot be avoided, they shall be relocated with the help of experts. All maintenance activities shall be monitored daily to ensure that sensitive species are avoided or protected to the maximum extent feasible. The SBCFCWCD shall also provide compensatory habitat for impacts associated with maintenance. These

mitigation measures would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

- Fish and Wildlife Exposure to Herbicide There is a potential, albeit very remote, that adverse herbicide concentrations may be temporarily present in aquatic areas immediately after spraying due to excessive or poor application. Responsible application of herbicide, water quality monitoring, and reducing overall herbicide use would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.
- Fish Passage Impacts from New Grade Stabilizers A new or reconstructed stabilizer could create a vertical drop, which may become a fish passage impediment or barrier over time, depending on the height of the vertical drop. The SBCFCWCD shall repair existing or construct new grade stabilizers such that they do not create an impediment for fish. This mitigation measure would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

Air Quality

- Equipment Emissions. Temporary emissions of reactive organic compounds (ROC), particulate matter, and NOx associated with gasoline and diesel-powered heavy-duty maintenance equipment, as well as employee vehicles and trucks transporting excavated materials to and from maintenance sites. The SBCFCWCD shall implement APCD approved measures for each piece of heavy duty diesel construction equipment to minimize NOx emissions. This mitigation measure would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.
- Fugitive Dust Emissions. Temporary emissions of fugitive dust (particulate matter) due to earth moving activities during maintenance, including channel shaping, desilting, bank stabilization by placing fill or grading banks, bank protection construction or repair, pilot channel construction, and access ramp construction. The SBCFCWCD shall implement the APCD's approved measures to minimize fugitive dust emissions. This mitigation measure would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

Noise

- Maintenance Equipment Noise. Maintenance activities that require the use of heavy equipment, such as channel shaping and desilting, could temporarily increase the ambient indoor and outdoor noise levels for noise-sensitive receptors located in close proximity to the watercourse where maintenance work is conducted. This impact would be limited to weekdays between 7:30 AM and 4:30 PM, with a limited duration of several days at any one location. In addition, maintenance equipment shall be equipped with properly functioning muffler systems and noisy operations shall be conducted as far as possible from sensitive receptors. These mitigation measures would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

Cultural Resources

- Disturb Cultural Resources. There is a remote potential for certain earth- disturbing maintenance activities to disturb buried prehistoric and historic archeological sites and isolated artifacts. This impact would occur only on undisturbed upland sites outside watercourse channels and basins due to incidental excavation grading banks for stabilization, installing or repairing bank protection, and constructing access ramps. The SBCFCWCD shall consult with a qualified archaeologist if cultural materials are discovered during maintenance activities. In addition, the SBCFCWCD shall conduct an archaeological investigation in areas that may be disturbed by excavation. These mitigation measures would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

Recreation

- Potentially Adverse Herbicide Concentrations. There is a potential for localized elevated concentrations of glyphosate in drainages due to excessive application of herbicides or poor application methods that result in overspray which would degrade water quality, and affect recreational users along creeks. Responsible application of herbicide would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.
- Impacts of Reduced Sediment Supply to Beaches. Periodic removal of the sediments from the basins contributes to the reduction in overall sediment supply to local beaches. Suitable sediments removed from debris basins or other maintenance operations shall be disposed of at the beach. This mitigation measure would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

Visual Resources

- Visual Impacts in Channels. An adverse visual impact would occur if maintenance activities resulted in the removal of substantial amounts of riparian vegetation or very large specimen trees (such as oaks, sycamores) and/or substantially modifies the banks and bed of a watercourse such that the affected reach is clearly characterized as a man-altered landscape feature. The SBCFCWCD shall minimize brushing in the channel bottom, minimize removal of bank vegetation, incorporate natural channel dimensions during channel reshaping, restore all temporarily disturbed areas with native riparian trees and shrubs, and use biotechnical methods with riparian vegetation for bank protection and repair, as feasible. These mitigation measures would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

**Certification:**
I hereby certify that the statements furnished above present the data and information used to support the findings made herein pursuant to the California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15091 or 15096(h), and the facts, statements and information presented herein, are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature_____ Date_____

Name Deborah Halberstadt Title Executive Director