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Newport Beach, Army Corps of Engineers Request Stimulus Funding for Local Projects
Projects Involve Bay Dredging, Marsh Restoration

NEWPORT BEACH, Ca. -- City of Newport Beach representatives met with federal officials in Washington, D.C. last week in an effort to assist the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) in obtaining Stimulus funding for three Corps' projects critical to the region.

Two projects involve bay dredging. A top priority of the Corps is to complete the \$48.5 million Upper Newport Bay Ecosystem Restoration Project. This project has been underway for more than three years, but needs another \$13 million to be completed. The funding is needed to finish the dredging work, wetland restoration, island creation and other improvements to protect endangered and threatened species.

Upper Newport Bay is one of the last remaining coastal wetlands in Southern California and plays a significant role in providing critical habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds and endangered species of birds and plants.

A second effort of the Corps, and a key priority of the city, is to dredge the federal channels within Lower Newport Bay. The third project involves repair and restoration of the Santa Ana Marsh (along the Santa Ana River), along with the dredging of the Seminouk Slough, in part to mitigate the impacts of the Santa Ana River Mainstem Flood Control project.

City Council Member Leslie Daigle and Assistant City Manager Dave Kiff met with members of the Orange County congressional delegation including U.S. Representatives John Campbell, Ed Royce and Ken Calvert. They also met with staff members from the offices of U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer and with a staff member from the Senate Appropriations Committee's subcommittee on Water and Energy.

Commenting on the importance of completing the Upper Bay project, Councilwoman Daigle said, "The

Upper Bay is an integral part of the Pacific flyway and thus the benefits go way beyond the region."

The Upper Bay project qualifies for Stimulus funding as a Corps project and because it is underway now -- yet underfunded. It employs a private-sector contractor based in Northern California (with affiliates in Oregon), and therefore the economic effect of increasing this contractor's work will have a direct result on private-sector employment.

"This is money well spent in an age where every penny counts," said Daigle.

The city also requested members of Congress to provide \$15 million to the Corps to dredge the Lower Newport Bay. Portions of the Lower Bay have not been dredged since the harbor's creation more than 70 years ago. Dredging the Lower Bay is an ongoing obligation of the Corps, but the President's budget (in almost every recent administration) has not allocated any funding to do the work. City officials believe that this is the year, given the Corps' increased appropriations, to get the project funded.

The project itself is still in the planning stages and several hurdles must be cleared before dredging can begin. Scientific studies are underway to analyze the quality of the sediment in the harbor and to identify locations to dispose of the sediment, whether it be the offshore disposal site at "LA-3" or an inland site or a "Confined Aquatic Disposal" location.

Immediately upon returning to Southern California, Daigle and Kiff joined a meeting that included Mayor Ed Selich, Council Member Nancy Gardner and representatives of the L.A. District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The purpose of the meeting was to initiate a joint-planning process to resolve the technical issues and obtain the required regulatory permits for the project.

The city welcomes the Corps' technical expertise and resources to assist in the planning and permitting of a Lower Newport Bay dredging project.

"We are excited about strengthening our partnership with the Army Corps to accomplish this long-anticipated project," Daigle said. "Increased shoaling in the Lower Bay impacts navigability. Improving the depths of the harbor will enhance recreational opportunities for the entire region."

The city also requested funding for the Santa Ana River Marsh project where nearly \$2 million is needed to restore 92 acres of coastal wetlands.