

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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W28a

April 23, 2009

FROM: Peter Douglas, Executive Director
Susan Hansch, Chief Deputy Director
Christiane Parry, Public Education Program Manager
Sylvie B. Lee, Grants Program Coordinator

SUBJECT: Proposed Awarding of \$25,000 in Unallocated Grant Funds from Sales of the WHALE TAIL License Plate (for Coastal Commission Meeting on May 6, 2009)

SUMMARY OF STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Approve the following 3 grants, which total \$25,000.

- (1) Algalita Marine Research Foundation (\$8,350)
- (2) Laguna Ocean Foundation (\$8,300)
- (3) San Diego Canyonlands, Inc. (\$8,350)

Motion: I move that the Commission approve the 3 grants recommended by staff for WHALE TAIL License Plate funding (FY2008/09), and authorize the Executive Director to enter into the appropriate agreements.

Introduction

The Coastal Commission's WHALE TAIL License Plate was established as a mechanism through which the public can contribute funds to coastal and marine education programs in California. For each new plate that is sold, approximately \$15.00 is deposited in the California Beach and Coastal Enhancement Account (CBCEA). Annual renewal fees deposit \$20.00 per plate into the account. A portion of sales and renewal fees of the Whale Tail Plate also are deposited in the Environmental License Plate Fund (ELPF), which supports environmental programs in other state agencies. According to DMV reports, as of March 2009 a total of 180,702 WHALE TAIL Plates have been sold. Sales and renewal fees (plus miscellaneous other small fees) have contributed \$13.9 million to the CBCEA, and \$32.6 million to the ELPF. The additional fees that are charged for personalized plates go to the ELPF.

Previously Awarded Grants for FY 2008/09

At its September 2008 meeting, the Commission voted to allocate the \$743,000 FY2008/09 grantmaking budget as follows: six targeted grants totaling \$314,000, a temporary reserve of \$25,000 to be awarded later in the fiscal year, and the remaining \$404,000 for the competitive grantmaking program. Of the targeted grant funds, \$2,000 ended up not being needed by the six targeted projects, so that amount was reallocated to the competitive grants budget, increasing the total amount available for competitive grants to \$406,000. At its March 2009 meeting, the Commission approved 24 competitive grants totaling \$406,000.

Before now, no action had yet been taken on the \$25,000 temporary reserve. These funds had been set aside to be available for potential opportunities which could arise, but to date they have not been needed by any other project. Therefore, the staff recommends funding three additional worthy projects that had applied for competitive grant funding during this fiscal year but were originally declined due to lack of available funds.

The staff recommends that the Commission fund the three programs listed below, totaling \$25,000.

1. Algalita Marine Research Foundation \$8,350

Project Title: *GIS Public Education*

Project Location: *Worldwide*

Project Timeline: *June 2009 to May 2010*

Total Project Budget: *\$38,248*

Estimated number of people served by the project thousands of members of the public

The Algalita Marine Research Foundation (AMRF) focuses on research and education regarding plastic pollution in the Pacific Ocean. The organization is based in Long Beach and is perhaps best known for studies in the so-called “Garbage Patch” of the ocean’s North Pacific Gyre, which concluded that there were six times the mass of plastic as plankton in those waters, somewhat resembling a “plastic soup.” Since the publication of these research findings in 2001, there has been an increasing amount of public interest in the North Pacific Gyre and the problem of floating plastics in the ocean. With this rise in interest, discussions, and publications has come some misunderstandings and conflicting accounts of the nature of the “Garbage Patch” and what the research actually shows.

In this project, AMRF would develop and post a website featuring research maps and research results using geographic information system (GIS) technology. The website would illustrate what is known about the quantity and concentration of plastic debris in the Pacific Ocean. AMRF would be able to visually communicate the results of current research on the topic of plastic marine debris to students, the general public, and the media. The goal of the website would be to communicate to a range of age groups, while at the same time providing high-quality technical data that could be used by other researchers. The website would support AMRF’s educational programming in which students track research voyages and communicate with researchers, and it would also include suggestions of how viewers can help keep plastic debris from entering the ocean.

2. Laguna Ocean Foundation **\$8,300**

Project Title: *Tidepool Education Program*

Project Location: *Laguna Beach*

Project Timeline: *June 2009 to May 2010*

Total Project Budget: *\$13,340*

Estimated number of people served by the project: *18,000*

The Laguna Ocean Foundation operates a volunteer docent program at several tidepool locations in Laguna Beach. The purpose of the program is to speak with visitors to the tidepools to teach them about the organisms that live there and how to protect them during their visit. The excellent tidepools at Heisler Park State Marine Reserve are the most heavily visited in the county, often by people who are not familiar with how fragile a tidepool ecosystem is and how easy it can be to harm the organisms living there. Because of the volume of people needing tidepool education at Heisler Park is so high, the Laguna Ocean Foundation has a difficult time recruiting volunteer docents because they report feeling overwhelmed.

The Foundation is therefore requesting funding to support paid tidepool educators to speak with Heisler Park visitors to prevent the tidepool animals from getting handled, collected, trampled, or otherwise harmed. The Foundation already uses paid tidepool educators at the Treasure Island Seashore and has found that program to be quite effective. A grant from the Coastal Commission would support instructors to work on weekends over the course of one year. An estimated 20,000 people would visit the Marine Reserve during those days. The grant would also pay for field materials including educational resources about tidepool life to distribute to visitors.

3. San Diego Canyonlands **\$8,350**

Project Title: *Coastal Canyon Education and Restoration Project*

Project Location: *San Diego*

Project Timeline: *June 2009 to June 2010*

Total Project Budget: *\$9,900*

Estimated number of people served by the project: *500-1,000*

San Diego Canyonlands is a relatively new nonprofit organization started by staff experienced in leading the San Diego Canyons Campaign for the Sierra Club. The organization works to promote, protect and restore the natural habitats in San Diego County canyons and creeks by fostering education and ongoing community involvement.

This education and restoration project would focus on two canyons with the impaired Chollas Creek running through them on its way to the ocean. The two canyons are located in the underserved urban area of City Heights, San Diego. San Diego Canyonlands plans to educate community members by offering educational guided tours and conducting other bilingual outreach, with the goal of creating two "Friends" groups to adopt their neighborhood canyons, with at least 30 volunteers in each group. The guided tours would include information on the role of creek vegetation in filtering polluted runoff, riparian wetlands and coastal sage scrub habitats, watersheds, and beach closures as a consequence of upstream pollution.

The organization would train both groups and help establish group leadership and create cleanup and restoration plans. Each Friends Group would receive help in conducting at least two creek cleanup or creek habitat restoration events during the project period, with the goal of having ongoing independent stewardship of their canyons. San Diego Canyonlands also plans to recruit an additional 250 adult and 200 youth community members to help with cleanup and restoration activities. Each event would include informational talks and handouts describing the benefits of healthy natural open space to different species, the water quality, and the coastal environment.