

**State Water Resources Control Board and Regional Water Quality
Control Boards
Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) Proposal Form**

Name of Project: Laguna Ocean Foundation Tidepool Docent / Tidepool Educators Program Enhancement

Project Applicant: City of Laguna Beach / Laguna Ocean Foundation

Addresses: 515 Forest Avenue, Laguna Beach CA 92651 (City) / 1278 Glenneyre Street, #133, Laguna Beach, CA 92651

Contact Person and Title: Dave Kiff, City Manager (City) / Ed Almanza, Vice-Chairman, Laguna Ocean Foundation

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Project Category (check one or more):

- ☐ Public Health
- ☐ Pollution Prevention
- ☐ Pollution Reduction
- ☒ Environmental Restoration and Protection
- ☐ Assessments and Audits
- ☐ Environmental Compliance Promotion
- ☐ Other project with environmental and/or public health benefits

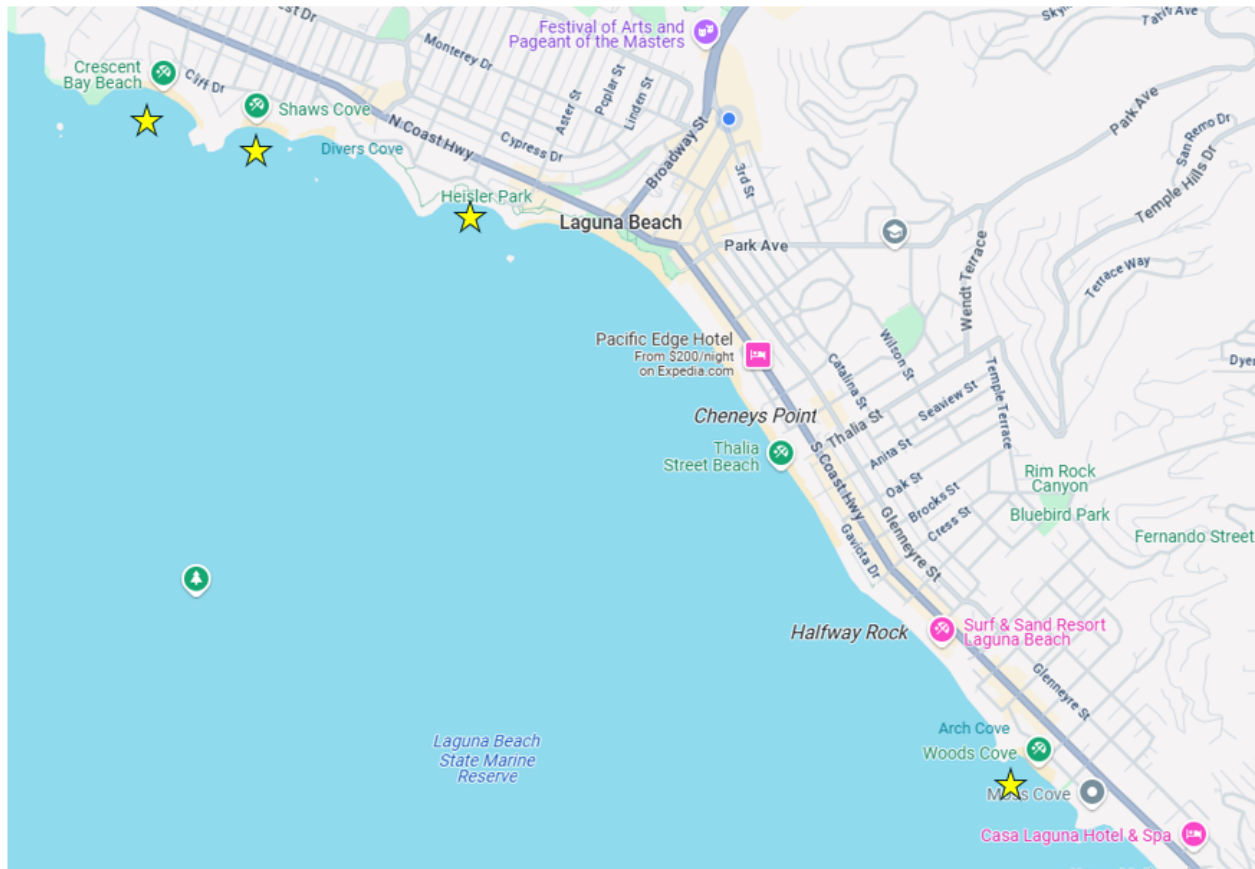
Project Location(s) (include, as appropriate, city, county, address, waterbody)

Work will be done in the below locations, all within the County of Orange, the city limits of the City of Laguna Beach, CA (505 Forest Avenue, Laguna Beach, CA 92651) and all at tidepool sites of the Pacific Ocean shoreline in within the boundaries of the Laguna Beach State Marine Reserve and the San Diego Regional Board and known as:

- Crescent Bay
- Shaw's Cove
- Heisler Park (Rockpile and Picnic Beaches)

- Woods Cove

See map on the following page - the starred areas represent the four beaches.



Project Description

Laguna Ocean Foundation's Tidewater Docent Program began over twenty (20) years ago as a program of volunteer docents which was overseen and managed by volunteers. For many years the recruitment, training, scheduling, and supervision of docents, along with documentation and reporting of the program's results and effectiveness, was performed by Board members assisted by other volunteers. The Foundation currently funds one of our docents at the low level of 300 hours per year to assist with docent scheduling and training. However, the tasks of recruiting, training, cultivating, scheduling and supervising a robust Docent Team, especially one that is sufficiently active to meet current tidepool visitor demands, is from 0.5 to 1.0 Full Time Equivalent positions (FTEs). SEP funds will enable the Foundation to increase the capacity for Docent Coordination to up to 1,560 hours per year (the equivalent of 0.75 FTEs) dedicated entirely to coordinating the Tidewater Docent Program.

SEP funds provided by the City will be used by Laguna Ocean Foundation ("LOF" or "Foundation") to build upon and increase the LOF's deployment of Tidewater Docents at four (4) key areas ("Additional Sites") of sensitive rocky intertidal sites ("tidepools").

The Docents' educational and advisement efforts will aid in lowering human and canine impacts to the areas, leading to restoration and protection of local coastal habitats. Through the educational and informational presence of our Tidewater Docents, these vulnerable habitats will benefit from measurable reductions in direct and indirect human impacts from the beach-going public.

The use of SEP funds will enhance the potential recovery and long-term sustainability of regionally important habitats by substantially reducing a major source of impacts (people and dogs) to their health, diversity and viability. Reducing human impacts enacts a form of passive restoration that is environmentally beneficial to local coastal habitats, addressing at least two beneficial uses identified in the San Diego Region Basin Plan¹. This action supports the State Water Board's mission and conforms to Category D, *Environmental Restoration and Protection*, of the State Water Regional Control Board's *Policy on Supplemental Environmental Projects* (SEP) (2017)².

Laguna Ocean Foundation's Tidewater Docent Program has been active since 2001. Use of SEP funds will augment the Program to enhance its environmental benefits to the local coast. Funds will be directly applied to the recruitment, training, supervision and management of volunteer docents by the Foundation's professional staff. These funds will contribute to and expand upon the Laguna Ocean Foundation's *in situ* education and outreach programs which include the activities of paid and volunteer personnel at several sites of sensitive intertidal habitat frequently visited by the public.

The Tidewater Docents educate the public at the tidepools with two goals in mind: to prevent impacts to the tidepools, and to enhance the visitors' experience and appreciation of the tidepools and marine life. Our docent messages include:

- Look rather than touch. Even the gentlest intrusion into the tidepool habitat can be harmful, adding sunscreen, oils, and other harmful products to the immediate environment.
- Don't scavenge - a discarded shell is a future home or future mineral resource for other marine life.
- Step carefully - each step around a tidepool has the potential to harm small sea life.

¹ The two beneficial uses are Marine Habitat and Preservation of Biological Habitats of Special Significance. See *San Diego Region Basin Plan*, Table 2-3.

² "Environmental restoration and protection projects include those that benefit surface or groundwater quality and enhance the condition of the ecosystem or immediate geographic area adversely affected by the violation. Examples include, but are not limited to: water or soil treatment; habitat restoration or enhancement; wetland, stream, or other waterbody protection, restoration, or creation; conservation easements; stream flow or water quality augmentation; watershed management facilitation services; and non-point source program implementation." SDRWQCB, *Policy on Supplemental Environmental Projects*, page 6.

- Leave no trace. Treat the habitat as a special place, never impaired because of human interaction.
- What you do at home affects tidepools - runoff from activities at home can make it all the way to your favorite tidepool.
- Learn about the specific creatures in the tidepools - what they eat, how they live, how they reproduce, how long they live, their biological family, and more.

Brief work plan containing tasks, deliverables, milestones, and schedule. The deliverables must include quarterly progress reports and a final completion report

The SEP funds will be used to complete the following tasks:

Task 1: Add to Hours and Locations Staffed. The SEP will add to hours and locations to enhance the overall Program by supporting greater capacity to grow and fully deploy the volunteer Tidewater Docent Program. With this increased capacity LOF will provide docent coverage at four (4) Additional Sites, including:

- Shaw's Cove (75 hours per month, at 25 designated low tide periods)
- Heisler Park (60 hours per month, at 20 designated low tide periods)
- Crescent Bay (60 hours per month, at 20 designated low tide periods)
- Woods Cove (30 hours per month, at 10 designated low tide periods)

Additionally, we anticipate deploying members of the Docent team on a roving basis to enable us to respond to visitor levels and patterns in accordance with real-time needs.

Task 2: Reporting. We propose to document the measured success of SEP-funded actions in Quarterly Progress Reports (every three months) and a Final Completion Report at the close of the twelve-month funding period. The report will document funded actions using three quantified metrics of success:

- (1) Number of hours and targeted time slots worked at the Additional Sites by the Docent Team.
- (2) Number of total hours spent in docent coordination (including recruitment, training, scheduling, managing, and recording and reporting on Docent activities).
- (3) Number of tidepool visitors overall at each shift (a best possible estimate), as well as the number of visitors with whom the Docents interacted (at each Additional Site).
- (4) Number of likely Marine Protection Act violations prevented (at each Additional Site).

All four metrics will be broken down by location and month. We will also include anecdotal observations and any other information provided by the docents to indicate success, concerns,

or other perspectives. The Final Completion Report will provide analysis and discussion of methods, achievements, effectiveness of the program, and recommendations for future actions, including potential modifications to the program.

Deliverables: The reporting parameters listed above will be included in the Quarterly Progress Reports and summarized in a Final Completion Report in accordance with the stipulated order.

Total project cost and amount of SEP money requested (if there are other funding sources, indicate if the funds have been committed and whether there are any restrictions on the funds).

Laguna Ocean Foundation provides coverage through a combination of paid Educators who are highly qualified with graduate or undergraduate degrees in marine biology or related fields, and our volunteer docents who are trained by the foundation in tidepool ecology and the skills required to interact with the visiting public. Expansion of the volunteer docent program, enabled through SEP funds, will enable the Foundation to deploy more volunteers, thereby optimizing the ratio of volunteers to paid educators. Volunteers and Educators work different locations, but often work in tandem to cover peak visitation levels as needed. The Proposed Total Budget (\$170,000), with combined City funds, City in-kind contribution and SEP funds, establishes an effective funding level for the program to cover key tidepool sites at a sufficient level to ensure a significant reduction in impacts. While most of the City funds (\$80,000) will support management, supervision and scheduling of the paid Tidepool Educators, SEP funds will be entirely devoted to the volunteer Tidewater Docent Program. The SEP will be used to greatly increase the Foundation's capacity to develop, manage and sustain the Tidewater Docent Program. Coordination of the program includes oversight and reporting of Docent activities, as well as recruitment and training of Docents. A portion of the SEP funds will support administrative tasks, overhead expenses and field equipment and supplies associated with the Tidewater Docent Program. The City in-kind contribution of Office / Storage Space is critically important, as it provides a staging area for both Educators and Docents, and a location for the Foundation's managing staff to closely monitor and oversee Docents and Educators in an adaptive management mode.

With the additional capacity and expanded program, the Foundation expects to increase the pool of active docents from the current level (approximately 20 to 30) to a targeted goal of 80 to 100 active docents. Some of these newly activated docents will be new recruits, others will be docents who were previously recruited but have become inactive due to a shortfall in the Foundation's ability to fund the necessary level of effort required to sustain an active docent program. With the increased pool of active docents supported by the SEP funds, we estimate the ability to provide approximately 2,700 additional docent hours over the course of twelve (12) months at the four (4) locations. Today, without this enhancement, we are limited to providing approximately 690 docent hours over a twelve month period at one location

(Treasure Island). With this program, we will continue to provide the same level of Docent services to the Treasure Island location.

The City was able to identify and offer \$100,000 in new funds (for Fiscal Year 25-26) towards this program, but as noted in this proposal, more is needed – as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Proposed Budget

Proposed Budget	City Funds	SEP Funds
Paid Field Staff (2 PT)	\$ 80,000	
Docent Coordinator Wages (1 FTE - Field and Office Position)		\$ 41,000
SEP Oversight and Reporting	\$ 20,000	\$ 7,500
Field Equipment and Supplies		\$ 1,500
Office / Storage Space (City in-kind)	\$ 20,000	
<i>Totals (City and SEP) =</i>	\$ 120,000	\$ 50,000

This allocation will result in the LOF being able to coordinate up to 100 volunteer docents across the 2,700 hours, which is four times more than the active docents that LOF has today.

Project readiness, including status of CEQA, permits, and landowner agreements

The project component is categorically exempt under Section 15322 (Educational or Training Programs involving no physical changes) of Article 19 (Categorical Exemptions) of Chapter 3 (CEQA Implementation Guidelines) of Division 6 (Resources Agency) to Title 14 (Natural Resources). Section 15322 applies to educational or training programs that involve no physical alteration in the area affected - this project provides a marine education and conservation program without any physical changes in the affected region.

Expected benefits or improvements to water quality or beneficial uses

The expected benefits include, but are not limited to:

Marine Habitat (MAR) - Includes uses of water that support marine ecosystems including, but not limited to, preservation or enhancement of marine habitats, vegetation such as kelp, fish, shellfish, or wildlife (e.g., marine mammals, shorebirds). Each of the four areas proposed for this SEP (all are Marine Habitat) will benefit from less human impacts.

Preservation of Biological Habitats of Special Significance (BIOL) - Includes uses of water that support designated areas or habitats, such as established refuges, parks, sanctuaries, ecological reserves, or Areas of Special Biological Significance (ASBS), where the preservation or enhancement of natural resources requires special protection.

ASBS are those areas designated by the State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) as requiring protection of species or biological communities to the extent that alteration of natural water quality is undesirable.

Per the Basin Plan, the following areas have been designated Areas of Special Biological Significance in the San Diego Region: • Irvine Coast, Orange County • **Heisler Park, Orange County** • La Jolla, San Diego County • San Diego-Scripps, San Diego County. The proposed SEP directly affects the ASBS in and around Heisler Park, at Rockpile and at Picnic Beach. With less human impact, the ASBS areas should be able to recover and prosper.

Is the project located within, or does it benefit, an Environmental Justice community, a Disadvantaged Community, or a community that has a financial hardship? If yes, describe

No.

Will this project further the State Water Board's core value of the human right to water? If yes, describe

Not applicable for this project.