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\$600K will help revive San Diego wetland habitat

By [Lily Leung](#), UNION-TRIBUNE

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/ US Fish and Wildlife Service

The Otay River Delta, in San Diego County.

New state funding will help restore receded wetlands in south San Diego Bay, an ambitious effort to help fish and wildlife displaced by farming and development.

Conservationists want to return the barren area to what it once was: a coastal habitat for native wildlife. Among the animals that could benefit from restoration is a federally endangered songbird called the least Bell's vireo.

What's seen in San Diego is part of a troubling national trend. The U.S. has lost about 90 percent of wetland area over the past century.

Southern California alone has lost tens of thousands of acres of coastal wetlands since the mid-1800s.

The California Wildlife Conservation Board last week approved a \$600,000 grant to restore about 65 acres of habitat near the mouth of the Otay River on the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

The targeted area is west of Interstate 5 on the south San Diego Bay near Chula Vista.

The plan is to clear the area of weeds, and install a variety of plants and drip irrigation system. The plants will be monitored for three years.

"Literally none of the native tree community that lived there exists anymore," said Andy Yuen, project leader at the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

He said the restoration of the "highly disturbed site" is part of a larger plan that includes turning some sections of San Diego Bay salt production ponds back to tidal wetlands.

Efforts to restore the wetlands of south San Diego Bay began in 1999. Since then, experts have debated whether restoration would be effective. Some say it's impossible to return nature to what it once was, while conservationists argue it's possible.


The \$600,000 grant is a piece of the \$21 million handed out by the conservation board to help fish and wildlife. The money is from voter-approved bond measures.

Union-Tribune reporter Mike Lee contributed to this blog.

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