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San Dieguito River Park Begins Del Dios Gorge Riparian Restoration Project

*Intermittent lane closures will occur along Del Dios Highway between
November 2011 and January 2012*

San Diego, CA – The San Dieguito River Park Joint Powers Authority announces today it will begin the next phase of a riparian restoration project in Del Dios Gorge the week of November 14, 2011. The work is funded through a \$1,049,368 grant from the California Natural Resources Agency's River Parkways program received in 2010 for enhancements to the River Park's Coast-to-Crest Trail and habitat restoration along the San Dieguito River in the scenic gorge below the Lake Hodges dam. The project will be carried out in phases between November 2011 and January 2014 and will involve the removal of invasive, non-native species and revegetation with native plants. The current phase will conclude March 15, 2012, to avoid the Spring bird breeding season.

The San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy began the habitat restoration project in 2009 with funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and U.W. Fish & Wildlife Service. The new grant award allows the project to continue between the Lake Hodges dam and Calle Ambiente. Work will consist of removal of eucalyptus, palms and other non-native species heavily impacting native habitat in this reach of the river. Because of the density of eucalyptus and difficult terrain, the trees will be removed using cranes and other large equipment from access points along Del Dios Highway.

Closure of the eastbound lane of Del Dios Highway is anticipated **intermittently** through January 15, 2012, from Camino de Estrellas to the trail bridge 0.7 miles to the east in order to remove trees next to the road. Lane closure on those days will occur between the hours of 9:30am and 3:30pm. While the project will attempt to minimize impacts to commuters, residents and commuters are advised to choose an alternate route when lane closures occur. A helicopter will be used on 4-5 days over the course of this two-month phase to move tree trunks out of the narrow river channel to an area where the biomass can be processed and moved off site.

Eucalyptus effectively displace native vegetation, eliminating the dense cover upon which resident and migratory riparian bird species depend for forage and nesting habitat. The restoration work is expected to benefit several listed bird species, including least Bell's vireo, yellow warbler and yellow-breasted chat. Removing the eucalyptus will also improve fire safety in the narrow gorge, which is a primary traffic and evacuation route, and significantly enhance

the scenic value of the area for trail users. The San Dieguito River Park and San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy are partnering with the County of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department, Rancho Santa Fe Fire Protection District and Rincon Consultants on the project.

The grant's recreational element is also funding improvements along the portion of the Coast-to-Crest Trail which passes through Del Dios Gorge, including a viewing platform overlooking the Lake Hodges dam, shaded picnic tables, benches and signage. The River Park began work on the unique viewing platform, which is nearly complete, in October, and images can be viewed at www.sdrp.org.

"We are excited to be starting on the next phase of this challenging, high priority restoration project, which will improve native habitat for several sensitive species and benefit trail users and residents as well," stated Leslie Woollenweber, Conservation Programs Director for the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy. Information about the project, including a fact sheet, can be found at www.sdrvc.org/current/invasives-management/.

About the San Dieguito River Park

Established in 1989, the San Dieguito River Park is a 94,000-acre open space greenway of regional significance in San Diego's North County, stretching more than 55 miles from the ocean at Del Mar to Volcan Mountain near Julian, and home to a diverse array of sensitive animal and plant species, many of special status. The River Park's mission is to protect the natural and cultural resources, sensitive lands and waterways in the San Dieguito River Valley and provide compatible recreational opportunities for hikers, bikers and equestrians. For more information, including trail maps and activities, visit www.sdrp.org.

About the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy

Established in 1986, the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to implementing the vision of the San Dieguito River Park and preserving the natural resources of the San Dieguito watershed through land acquisition, citizen involvement and public outreach. With the support of more than 1,200 members, the Conservancy works with many partner organizations and public agencies to implement programs to protect sensitive ecosystems and develop compatible recreational opportunities for the public. For more information, visit www.sdrvc.org.

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