

For Immediate Release: June 4, 2022

Jennifer Bright, Nature Collective Associate Director
858.704.4560 jennifer@naturecollective.org

San Elijo Lagoon Restoration Ends, Environmental Monitoring Continues Nature Collective Leads a 50-Year Study of San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve

ENCINITAS, CA—Today Nature Collective, supporters and stakeholders for San Elijo Lagoon Restoration ceremoniously gathered to cut the ribbon for a wetland restored to more optimal health. In the distance, songbirds called from the trees and herons and egrets patiently stalked prey in tidal inlets. Breezes across the tidal channels, now wider, deeper and extending farther inland, carried the scents of brackish water—a mix of salt and fresh—uniquely important to coastal life.

What is restoration success and how will we measure it? This is the focus now for Nature Collective. The award-winning nonprofit is the land trust for the lands and waters of San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve, and beyond. Celebrating its 35th year of inspiring everyone to connect with, experience and protect nature.

The San Elijo Lagoon Restoration is one of the largest wetland restorations in California. Enhanced wetland habitats and new trail connections are benefiting nature and community, following the environmental enhancements made possible by the Build North Coast Corridor (Build NCC) highway and railroad improvements that began in fall 2017. The half-cent Transnet tax funded this \$120 million undertaking.

“Thirty-five years ago, we had this vision that San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve could be restored,” says Doug Gibson, Nature Collective Executive Director and Principal Scientist. “This area is a jewel in the crown of the San Diego region, and it’s our duty to protect it as best as we are able. Nature Collective and the TransNet Environmental Mitigation Program investment will support stepping stones for all to enjoy for many generations.”

We are monitoring the transition zones designed for a wetland for tomorrow. Gradual slopes in the lagoon allow for plants and the animals dependent on these zones to move higher as sea levels rise.

“Think of the main tidal channels as the lungs of the lagoon,” adds Nature Collective’s Doug Gibson. “With every incoming tide, it’s like the lagoon takes a deep breath and today, three times as much water is coming in than before restoration.”

For three of the five years of marine and near-shore monitoring we are studying the beach replenishment projects that occurred on Cardiff State Beach and Solana Beach for a report to California Coastal Commission in two years.

Some Early Successes in restoration monitoring:

- Nature Collective conducted the most comprehensive surf monitoring study pre- and post- sand replenishment that’s ever been done in California in association with monitoring the effects of beach replenishment using dredged lagoon sands, and lagoon restoration.

- Wave quality sustains our surfing communities and economies. Nature Collective’s scientist-surfers surfed 2,800 waves in two years using GPS-attached surfboards to measure take-off zones, wave heights and rides—our study showed not only the complexity of monitoring this recreation, but that we saw no change between pre- and post-project conditions.
- A successful grunion run occurred on Cardiff State Beach following sand replenishment.
- Eelgrass is now thriving in San Elijo Lagoon, an indicator revealing that what was restored is working. Prior to restoration we observed one patch of this marine plant. Today there are 150 patches. Enhanced tidal flow is making it possible to naturally propagate.
- Nature Collective scientists observed the first octopus in the lagoon channels since work began here more than three decades ago, and five new fish species never before seen.

Plant and animal diversity and abundance are measured; and water quality and oxygen levels, now greatly improved with increased tidal flows. General species abundance in birds is observed as well as specific monitoring on individual endangered species, such as the Belding’s Savannah Sparrow, Ridgway’s Rail and California Least Tern.

Now through 2031 Nature Collective, with post-construction funding from SANDAG, will continue to monitor the elevations of refuges, species, and tides of the lagoon as a wetland prepared for a future of sea level rise and climate change. Nature Collective continues to lead big things as they envision more healthy lands and waters and nature experiences. Fields of the Future are coming soon, this new vision includes an expanded Native Plant nursery where we will welcome the community to help in the propagation of plants indigenous to the area. When fully grown these plants will help restore lands throughout San Diego County.

News Editors: Download images at thenaturecollective.org/media. Interviews with Executive Director Doug Gibson and Science Director Tim Stillinger can be arranged.

For more information, visit NatureCollective.org/Restoration and the public is invited to join tours and events, at NatureCollective.org/Events.

###

Nature Collective’s vision is a world where everyone can connect with, experience, and protect nature.
NatureCollective.org