

On May 22, 2020, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) approved a project for restoring the Buena Vista Lagoon in Oceanside, CA. This is a historic event, an almost 20-year effort in the making. Buena Vista Lagoon lies in North County San Diego, covering approximately 220 acres with most of the area owned and managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) as the state's first Ecological Reserve. Buena Vista Audubon Society manages a nature center at the edge of the lagoon's north shore.

Buena Vista Lagoon has been slowly filling up with reeds and sediment since it was dammed in the early 1970s by a weir at the mouth. Historically, the lagoon was both a saltwater and freshwater environment, depending on the influence and timing of ocean tides and upland streamflow. If nothing is done, the lagoon will eventually become a wet meadow and North County will lose an important piece of habitat for resident and migratory birds.

In 2004, CDFW led efforts to restore the lagoon; however, stakeholders failed to agree and the efforts stalled. Property owners near the lagoon's mouth hold easement rights to the weir and also own a small portion of the lagoon. Fearing that removing the weir would drain the Lagoon and replace it with mud flats, they insisted that it remain a freshwater system, with the weir kept in place. Conservation groups, including the Buena Vista Audubon Society, advocated for the weir's removal in order to become a saltwater environment. Removing the weir would allow the lagoon to connect to the ocean and to maintain a variety of saltwater habitats, subject to tidal influences. Currently there are no mud flats along the lagoon's edges. Mud flats are being lost elsewhere due to sea-level rise and thus a saltwater lagoon would provide this critical habitat for shorebirds. A saltwater lagoon would also function as a nursery for ocean fish, improve water quality, reduce severe infestations of mosquitoes, and reduce flooding.

In 2011, Buena Vista Audubon Society's Andy Mauro and Oceanside City Councilmember Esther Sanchez travelled to Sacramento and met with the Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency, requesting that the project be restarted. Their efforts were successful; in 2012, SANDAG took the lead on lagoon restoration efforts.

SANDAG created a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIR) in 2015 and a Final EIR in 2018. The EIR presented three alternatives (besides no action): saltwater, freshwater, and hybrid. Last November, SANDAG was poised to vote on an alternative but delayed a decision for six months in order to work out an agreement with homeowners who threatened to sue if the saltwater alternative were selected. The homeowners, CDFW, and SANDAG ultimately agreed on a modified saltwater alternative, which keeps a portion of the lagoon (a small basin owned by the homeowners) intact as a freshwater system, with ocean saltwater bypassing this portion. The weir will be removed and the lagoon dredged and engineered to allow tidal flushing of ocean water.

Buena Vista Audubon Society supports the modified saltwater alternative and is committed to working with SANDAG as the next steps unfold. These steps include developing engineering plans, acquiring regulatory permits, creating a Master Agreement

with property owners who currently hold easements to the weir, and obtaining funding for the project.

[Please follow this link](https://www.keepsandiegomoving.com/buena_vista_lagoon_intro.aspx) for Buena Vista Audubon Society's stance on the lagoon. For more information on the project (environmental analysis documents) please see https://www.keepsandiegomoving.com/buena_vista_lagoon_intro.aspx.