



## HIKE, EXPLORE, LEARN, PROTECT (HELP) CHULA VISTA

### NEED

Chula Vista is located at the center of one of the richest cultural, economic and environmentally diverse regions in the United States. It is the second-largest city in San Diego County with a population of 265,000. Chula Vista boasts more than 50 square miles of coastal landscape, canyons, rolling hills, mountains, quality parks, and miles of trails. Recently the city launched a campaign entitled “This is Chula” to familiarize members of the community with the many recreational and cultural amenities that can be found within the city. “This is Chula” was launched in response to survey commissioned by the City of Chula Vista that found that residents and community members were not aware of the amazing array of recreational opportunities available within the city.

The purpose of “This is Chula” is to inform and encourage community members take advantage of Chula Vista’s cultural and outdoor resources. Citing the need and benefit of emphasizing the use of outdoor spaces, the San Diego Foundation’s “Parks for Everyone” states the need for family focused outdoor recreation is “Fun is not frivolous; children have the right to the simple joys of playing in safe ... green spaces.” Parks provide a place for social support and an opportunity for self-determination—both important factors in lowering anxiety and improving a person’s overall mood. Parks and outdoor spaces satisfy our need for social interaction by enticing residents into public spaces with trees, greenery, and venues for sports and active recreation. Parks become a source of community building, pride, and inspiration for further neighborhood improvements and revitalization. Social interaction and neighborhood spaces have been identified as key facets of healthy communities.

In the spirit of true community building, an outdoor lifestyle should be strongly reinforced, not just as an individual value, but as a family value too. This is reinforced through findings of study authored by the Physical Activity Council<sup>1</sup> which states that building the critical connection to nature at an early age is vital to the enjoyment of the outdoors later in life. Further, youth report spending time with family and friends as a top reason why they enjoy the outdoors. We intend to offset the trends indicating that kids are spending more hours than ever before in front of screens instead of outside. Providing opportunities for families to spend time outdoors allows them to experience the natural world around them and inspires positive attitudes towards the environment. So, to engage urban youth and entire families, we must emphasize the importance of the outdoors as a lifestyle choice to foster a generation of passionate outdoor enthusiasts and committed stewards to Chula Vista and beyond.

## SITE ACCESS

According to the National Institute of Health, participation in physical activity in parks can be influenced by numerous factors, including their proximity to where people live, the number and condition of facilities and amenities, park safety, aesthetics, and program offerings, fees, and levels of supervision<sup>2</sup>. Accounting for these factors, proposed sites that were selected offer free admission, are accessible, offer ample free parking and are in close proximity to public transportation and bike trails. Below are the sites selected along with accessibility attributes:

Sites	Entrance Fee	Public Transportation	Free Onsite Parking	Wheel Chair/Stroller Accessible
Sweetwater Marsh – San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge	None	Bus, trolley, and bike trails, complimentary shuttle to the site	Yes	Yes

<sup>1</sup> [www.physicalactivitycouncil.com/pdfs/current.pdf](http://www.physicalactivitycouncil.com/pdfs/current.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4082954/>

Sites	Entrance Fee	Public Transportation	Free Onsite Parking	Wheel Chair/Stroller Accessible
Mother Miguel (Rock House Trail)	None	Bus	Yes	Yes
D-Street Landfill (Clean-up Site)	None	Bus, trolley, and bike trails	Yes	No
Morrison Pond	None	Bus	Yes	Yes
Sweetwater River Channel (Clean-up Site)	None	Bus	Yes	No
J-Street Marina & Park	None	Bus and bike trails	Yes	No

All sites offer both easy and moderate terrain to challenge every age and meet every physical limitation. Each site’s features and conditions will be advertised prior to each event and will also be listed on event registration. Clean-up activities can be tailored to each person’s capacity to participate – ranging from extremely easy to moderate.

Financial barriers have been eliminated with free admission to each site. In a day when a family of any size has very little recreational options because of costs, it is our policy to offer every opportunity at no charge. Further, supplies such as water and snacks will be provided through community donations in order to eliminate any possible financial burdens. As incentives for families to participate, the Living Coast Discovery Center will offer complimentary passes for admission to their world-class aquarium and animal exhibits.

Projects will be conducted on weekends to provide optimal opportunity for everyone to participate. The time commitment to participate is extremely responsive to many people’s busy schedule. Project duration will range between 1 -3 hours.

Cultural and Community Building is one of many aspects of this program. HELP Chula Vista is about bringing communities, families, and multiple cultures together to connect with local parks and wildlife areas. The program will be marketing all over the city to encourage diverse backgrounds to engage in the various activities offered throughout the year.

## STAKEHOLDERS

To create a truly all-inclusive and collaborative public initiative, the city of Chula Vista and Living Coast Discovery Center will build on existing collaborations with local businesses, non-profits, and agencies. The Living Coast has an existing network of community groups, school districts, and volunteers that will expand our reach to the urban families of Chula Vista. Larger parties who are anticipated to participate are major community partners such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, the County of San Diego and the Unified Port of San Diego. Community partners such as scout troops, civic groups, nonprofits, and school districts will refer participants and/or volunteer to facilitate this multi-faceted project.

Having operated since 1987 and formally an asset run by the City of Chula Vista, the Living Coast Discovery Center will take the lead in implementing and coordinating the outdoor events. The Living Coast has an impressive track record of providing environmental education in outdoor spaces to nearly 20,000 kids annually. The Living Coast also hosts additional activities such as nature hikes, outdoor day camps, and a broad range of environmental education all focused on out-door recreation, bio-diversity, conservation, wildlife and ocean preservation, gardening and composting and many other environmental topics.

With over 30 years of collaboration, the City feels confident that The Living Coast and expert staff can design and execute all the programs in this application. To ensure active input as to program design and implementation, we will incorporate comments from initial pre-surveys through the registration process. With these surveys, as well as personal narratives and comments, our team will be able to make decisions about the program and make further improvements to fulfill the needs of the community.

## APPLICANT CAPACITY

The City of Chula Vista has successfully administered numerous state and federally-funded projects, and has consistently received exemplary performance ratings. The Living Coast Discovery Center has a long record of successful public grants and projects in addition to the long-term operating agreement with the City. The City of Chula Vista maintains a sound financial management system that complies all grant compliance needs with the applicable financial, accounting, and reporting departments. This closely monitored management systems allows for accurate financial reporting to reflect expenditures in accordance with the terms of the grants being administered.

In addition, the Living Coast Discovery Center has extensive experience in managing various government grants, understanding the need for timely results, reporting, providing steps to complete measurable goals and outcomes with strict adherence to timeline and required performance.

Because the City has longstanding relationship with the Living Coast, we have first-hand knowledge of their vast, multi-year experience in conducting similar projects with common elements – engaging Chula Vista participants in various outdoor activities. Each organization has the capacity coordinate and to meet the goals of this project. Partners will provide input and cooperate in the evaluation process, but the Living Coat will take the lead in administering evaluation and make recommendations to incorporate new innovative ideas and flexible course corrections if needed. Project partners are firmly committed to submitting status reports, grant outcomes, and project details within their scope of responsibility.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

HELP Chula Vista will challenge families to explore the local parks and open spaces and provide interpretation programs on relevant environmental topics through guided hikes and community clean-up projects throughout the city. In partnership with the City of Chula Vista, the

Living Coast Discovery Center will create, implement, and evaluate HELP Chula Vista to connect the local community with local parks and wildlife areas, learn how to be safe in these areas, and discover how they can make an impact to protect and conserve wildlife.

This program is designed to inspire and educate residents through up-close and personal exposure to the biological diversity located in Chula Vista and the greater San Diego region. HELP Chula Vista will conduct 120 interpretive hike programs and 48 community clean-up projects and serve up to 4,200 people (approximately 500 different families) from underserved communities over four years.

The emphasis behind this project are not the activities but the opportunity to offer environmental education that is relevant to each site.

**Project Elements:** We feel that multiple experiences will reinforce the participant's appreciation to local wildlife areas. Families will be challenged to participate in 4 unique activities within 12 months:

- 1 walk in a local Refuge, and
- 1 clean-up in their community

**Marketing and Promotion:** In partnership with the City, the Living Coast will promote this project to reinforce the City's marketing campaign "This Is Chula". HELP Chula Vista will be promoted online, in traditional and social media, and at community events. The Living Coast Discovery Center will coordinate and manage marketing of the program. The Living Coast will also track participation and award certificates of completion after a family has finished the challenge. Families will receive a family four-pack to visit the Living Coast Discovery Center, a world class non-profit zoo and aquarium. Through visits to local wildlife areas and refuges, participants will have the unique experience of viewing endangered species and other wildlife thriving in their natural habitats.

## Goal and Objectives

- **Goal 1:** Our primary goal is to engage community members in the most interactive and innovative ways so that their natural outdoor experiences and our conservation focused education is retained throughout their lives.
  - **Measurable Objective:** To capture input from a variety of stakeholders the Living Coast will seek community participants to provide input regarding the overall project.
  - **Measurable Objective:** The Living Coast will create pre-and post-evaluation surveys and a 3-month post project survey to be taken electronically or during registration by each participant. These surveys are intended to measure connection to wildlife, knowledge retention of safe practices to do in a wildlife area, and any change in attitudes towards the protection and appreciation for outdoor wildlife areas.
- **Goal 2:** Guided interpretive hikes will take place in the following locations: Otay Valley Regional Park (OVRP), Rice Canyon, Mother Miguel, Morrison Pond, and Sweetwater Marsh on San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge, where the Living Coast is located.
  - **Measurable Objective:** The Living Coast will conduct 48 programs onsite at Sweetwater Marsh and 72 programs offsite at other locations in Chula Vista. A total of 120 events over 48 months.
  - **Measurable Objective:** This program will recruit and serve up to 3,000 people through outreach using social media, email newsletters, and networking with local businesses, community and service clubs, and nonprofits.
- **Goal 3:** Community clean-up projects will take place at Sweetwater Marsh and at several locations in and around Chula Vista including D Street Landfill, J Street Marina, and Sweetwater Channel.

- **Measurable Objective:** The Living Coast will conduct 48 community clean-up projects, engaging up to 1,200 people over 48 months
- **Measurable Objective:** Clean-up events will remove approximately 24,000 pounds of debris from local parks and waterways.
- **Measurable Objective:** The Living Coast will provide interpretive education at the events to show participants the impact of their actions on local wildlife. The Living Coast will create pre-and post-evaluation surveys and a 3-month post project survey to be taken electronically or during registration by each participant. These surveys are intended to measure connection to wildlife, knowledge retention of safe practices to do in a wildlife area, and any change in attitudes towards the protection and appreciation for outdoor wildlife areas.

**Target Population:** Families and children of all ages, ethnicities and compositions are our primary target population. HELP Chula Vista will engage people with lower economic status to be aware of the local wildlife area habitats. We will increase awareness among residents of the access to and recreational activities available in local parks and wildlife refuges which will in turn encourage appreciation and awareness of our natural resources. The Living Coast participates in over 60 community events where HELP Chula Vista can be promoted to target populations.

**Long-term Community Impact:** Because we engaging with children and families, we aim to deliver a variety of outdoor experiences coupled with relevant environmental education to provide a life-long appreciation of the outdoors as a “first choice” source of recreation. We hope to reverse the trend of most youth whose lives revolve around television and electronics. According to the No Child Left Behind Legislative Study of 2009, kids that participate in restoration and stewardship activities relate to the environment and develop vital attitudes, knowledge, and skills. They learn about



science, history, language arts, math, art, and music outside in nature. When children go outdoors to learn, they study site history, measure and observe the Earth's wonders, analyze soil, and learn the biology of native ecosystems. Plainly speaking, they learn about science and become interested in STEM topics that prepares them to succeed as adults. Additionally, we will show families and youth the value of wildlife areas and the benefits of safely engaging in activities in such parks. Through interpretive hikes and clean-up projects families will learn essential life lessons such as personal preparedness, safety practices for wildlife area activities, and the amazing impact of community collaboration for the restoration of important wildlife habitats. Essentially our very future relies on every citizen becoming wise stewards that treasure and protects the environment to sustain everyone, including future generations.

## SITE LOCATION AND ACTIVITIES

Each location was selected carefully to represent a variety of parks and wildlife areas found throughout the City of Chula Vista. All sites were considered for their access, popularity, and importance to the community. The hike sites were also considered for their relative connection to local wildlife areas and environmental topics of interest. The clean-up sites occur in and around the City of Chula Vista in strategic locations. Most of these locations are also adjacent to San Diego Bay and therefore affect both land and aquatic ecosystems.

Site locations, conditions, and the purpose of site selection is captured in the following table:

Site	Amenities	Topic for Education/ Reason for site selection
Sweetwater Marsh at San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge	Walking trails throughout Refuge, pollinator garden, animal exhibits, natural protected habitats, outcomes of conservation, opportunities to observe endangered species and a wide variety of animals in their natural habitats. Complimentary shuttle to site. Close to bus and trolley lines. Living Coast Discovery Center is located within Sweetwater Marsh.	The main topic for this area is birds and Refuges. The site itself is a living breathing teaching tool to show participants the need to protect wildlife areas and the benefits it provides to the community. Due to the number of migratory and local bird species that visit the marsh year-around, this location is ideal for observing birds including species, such as the endangered light-footed Ridgway's rails and their nesting sites.
Otay Valley River Park	Multiple trails and popular park with ample parking and close to public transportation. The walking trails here are relatively easy and flat. They can accommodate wheel chairs and strollers in certain areas. There is ample parking and proximity to public transportation.	The main educational topic for this area is native wildlife – how to identify and respect local animal species. The pond serves as a great place to observe fish, turtles, and birds, making it an ideal location to talk about different kinds of wildlife and how they are affected by urban traffic.
Rice Canyon	The walking trails here are relatively easy and with mild incline (only 100 feet elevation change throughout the whole 3 miles). Trails can accommodate wheel chairs and strollers in most areas. We will include a short (about 1 mile) and longer hike (2-3 miles) option through the canyon. There is ample parking and proximity to public transportation.	Education topic for this area will be native plants – how to identify and respect local plant species. The plants in the canyon during bloom season are incredible, making it a great spot to teach families about local plants and their importance to wildlife areas bordered by urban ecosystems
Mother Miguel	The hiking trail here is medium to difficult with steep inclines (900 feet elevation change throughout the whole 4.5 miles). There is ample parking and proximity to public transportation.	Education topic is watersheds and how urban areas affect local wildlife with its trash and pollution. The views of the City of Chula Vista will be a great teaching point to demonstrate how water helps connect all areas – both urban and native alike – as water travels through a watershed.

Site	Amenities	Topic for Education/ Reason for site selection
Morrison Pond	The walking trails here are relatively easy and flat. They can accommodate wheel chairs and strollers in most areas. We will include a short (about 1 mile) and a longer hike (2-3 miles) option around the pond. There is ample parking and proximity to public transportation.	The main education topic for this area will be native wildlife – how to identify and respect local animal species. The pond serves as a great place for fish, turtles, and birds, making it an ideal location to talk about different kinds of wildlife and how they are affected by urban traffic.
J Street Marina D Street Landfill Sweetwater Channel (Clean-up sites)	The channels feed into the San Diego Bay and is subject to tidal influences throughout the day. The rise and fall of the sea level brings in thousands of tons of trash. There is ample parking and proximity to public transportation. Lots of commercial activities and businesses close by. Proximity to bike paths.	Teaching topics include the impact trash has on San Diego Bay, where variety of families frequent for recreational purposes, and the impact families can make on local wildlife areas. Educators will emphasize the need to preserve natural resources and prompt a discussion on the impact of pollution in both urban and wildlife ecosystems.

### PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The City of Chula Vista and Living Coast Discovery Center have partnered stakeholders with extensive expertise in environmental education and knowledge of local wildlife areas. The partners will participate in creating a well-rounded program to promote the variety of wildlife area habitats available within the city limits. The Living Coast has its own audience through which they will recruit volunteers and community participants, as well as existing partnerships in Chula Vista and beyond. The Living Coast meets the criteria extremely similar to the vision goals of California Department of Parks and Recreation's Office of Grants and Local Service (OGALS):

- Committed to providing quality customer service in every interaction and transaction as honest, knowledgeable, and experienced grant administrators.
- Sensitive to local concerns while being mindful of prevailing laws, rules and regulations and culture and traditions of the residents of Chula Vista.

- Responsive to the needs of partners such as nonprofits, businesses, civic organizations and schools while working to improve the quality of life for residents of Chula Vista.

The Living Coast has established a 30-year presence in Chula Vista and has staff, expertise, track record and ability to serve each participant. The Living Coast has scientific, botanical, wildlife, and geographic and terrain, recreation and conservation specialists on staff who are experts in the local ecology, wildlife, and environmental issues regarding this area. Additionally, they have the capacity to meet the goals of the project having conducted hundreds of similar projects engaging local people in the outdoor events every year. The Living Coast has offered access to their 300+ volunteers to facilitate the implementation of the project. The Living Coast is also the area's hub of environmental education by providing wide range of environmental education programs designed to reach people of all ages. Match funding for HELP Chula Vista was awarded to the Living Coast from the Port of San Diego environmental education grant through 2022. Partnering organizations will contribute to the planning and offer expertise as to content of the environmental education. Further, the Living Coast will continue to seek community resources to ensure this project is continued and could be replicated well beyond the terms of the grant.

#### PRE-ACTIVITY KNOWLEDGE EVALUATION

The Living Coast Discovery Center staff will review all pre, post and 3-month evaluations to ensure that programs adapt to meet the program's established goals and objectives. Additionally, we will share this information with the participants, schools, researchers, stakeholders and donors or funders who want to inspect our programs processes and outcomes.

The Living Coast will send targeted surveys to guests/families that pre-register for an upcoming HELP Chula Vista event (whether it is for the onsite hike, offsite hike, or a clean-up). These surveys will be optional, but will include questions about the guest's experience in wildlife areas, their

opinion on the need for wildlife areas, and their comfort level participating in proposed activities. These pre-surveys will also be available at registration of each activity for guests that did not preregister or did not wish to participate in the survey online. Each party will be highly encouraged to take the survey as part of their activity.

In addition to formal surveys, staff members will be directed to ask informal questions to the entire group and poll them on their comfort, knowledge, and experience levels of the activity (i.e. wildlife watching, hiking, and/or clean-ups and habitat restoration). Staff will report the general responses of the group after the completion of their program.

Quantitative data analysis will be conducted on both the formal survey and informal surveys by our staff members. We will also gather narratives from staff, volunteers, and guest participants to analyze qualitatively the experiences our participants are having and assess the degree of their understanding of the information being taught.

## POST-ACTIVITY KNOWLEDGE EVALUATION

The Living Coast will conduct both informal and formal surveys to guests/families that participated in a HELP Chula Vista event (whether it was for the onsite hike, offsite hike, or a clean-up). The informal survey will be a quick poll done by our staff, to assess the degree by which the group understood the messages given during the hike/clean-up and if they will participate again in future events. The Living Coast has a track record of success in conducting surveys among participants with a 90-95% return rate on surveys administered. These post-evaluation surveys will include questions about the persons overall experience in the event, their understanding of the impact urban ecosystems have on wildlife ecosystems, their opinion on the need for wildlife areas, and their comfort level participating in future outdoor activities. These post surveys will also include follow up questions to understand the guests' retention of the information taught during a hike or clean-up

activity, including their understanding of personal preparedness and safety practices for such activities.

Quantitative data analysis will be conducted on both the formal survey and informal surveys by our staff members. We will also gather narratives from staff, volunteers, and guest participants to analyze qualitatively the experiences our participants are having and assess the degree of their understanding of the information being taught.

**3 Month Follow-Up Survey:** The Living Coast will send targeted surveys to guests/families that participated in a HELP Chula Vista event (whether it was for the onsite hike, offsite hike, or a clean-up). These surveys will be sent approximately three months after their participation in the event. These post-evaluation surveys will include questions about the persons overall experience in the event, their understanding of the impact urban ecosystems have on wildlife ecosystems, their opinion on the need for wildlife areas, and their comfort level participating in future outdoor activities. These post surveys will also include follow up questions to understand the guests' retention of the information taught during a hike or clean-up activity, including their understanding of personal preparedness and safety practices for such activities.

Quantitative data analysis will be conducted on the formal survey. We will also gather narratives from guest participants in the form of social media and electronic (e-mail) communications. These will be analyzed qualitatively to assess their personal experiences and the degree of their understanding of the information taught during the programs.