

NEWS

Residents get a look at river project

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DEL MAR — Curious residents mingled with environmental experts in the Powerhouse Community Center on Jan. 31 for the first San Dieguito Wetlands Restoration Project town hall meeting.

The meeting was hosted by Collaborative Services, the community outreach company hired by the project's manager and contractor Southern California Edison and Marathon Construction Corporation.

Two more town hall meetings will take place during the construction, near the mid-point of construction and just before completion.

"The meetings are more of a courtesy than an obligation," said Samir Tanius, project manager for Southern California Edison. "Many residents expressed an interest in the project, and many have become very involved with it over the years."

The town meeting included nine different display stations of information about the project from the biology and habitat of the area to the types of construction equipment that will be used.

Collaborative Services is also publishing a quarterly newsletter and a Web site about the project, which is expected to be up and running in the next few weeks.

The restoration project, which was approved by the California Coastal Commission late last year, will restore 150 acres of coastal wetlands in the San Dieguito River Valley.

According to Tanius, the project's construction will begin within the year and is expected to take three years to complete. Within three years of completion, the area's tidal flows, natural habitat and vegetation will be completely restored.

Mike Furby, project manager for Marathon Construction, laid out the estimated timeline for the project and its impacts on the city of Del Mar.

Construction will begin in the southwestern quadrant of the river valley nearest to the racetrack, then over to the south and north areas east of the Interstate 5, and ending up along the beach area of the San Dieguito River Mouth.

Portions of the Grand Avenue Bridge will be fenced off during the duration of the project so that all construction machinery and materials can be kept on site and off of surface streets.

Marathon Construction also owns B&B Heavy Equipment Rentals, giving the company more than 330 pieces of machinery at its disposal.

According to Furby, the traffic impacts of the project will mostly come from workers traveling to and from the site.

"The interesting thing about this project is that most of the materials we will be using, like clay and sand, will be created and distributed within the site itself," Furby said.

Several other environmental and engineering companies are serving as consultants on the project, including RECON Environmental Services and the San Diego Natural History Museum.

RECON archaeologist Russ Colett is one of several archaeologists and paleontologists that will be monitoring the project's excavation site.

Colett said that they are expecting to find prehistoric flake and hammer tools, along with several marine shellfish beds from thousands of years ago.

"There are several thousand years of occupation in the San Dieguito River Valley," Colett said.

"And it's all just out there in the dirt waiting to be found."

Colett said that highland areas overlooking river valleys are prime locations for excavation sites because of the constant tidal flows and sediment mixing.

"Our job will be to identify the things that nobody knew were there," Colett said.

Tanious is optimistic about the project's success and said he is looking forward to working with the community over the next three years.

"We all want this project to be successful," Tanious said. "And I know it will be because so much preparation from so many people has gone into it."

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