



Spam

Massive effort under way to restore lagoon

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By Scott Landheer

Construction has begun on the massive 150-acre San Dieguito Lagoon Restoration Project in Del Mar that is expected to take three years and more than \$85 million to complete.

The clock is ticking for Marathon Construction Corp., general contractor for the construction phase of the project, to clear as much vegetation as it can before Feb. 15, when birds are expected to begin nesting in the area and would cause project delays.

Jon Ruth, project manager for Marathon, said he is hopeful that birds won't want to nest in the areas under construction if the vegetation is gone, so crews will be able to continue grading the site.

Ruth said there have been no big snags so far in terms of construction, but they are still awaiting final approvals on some of the permits. They involve some minor remaining issues that Marathon has been working with different agencies and the owner to resolve.

The permits should be released within the next 30 days, but there has been "enough open to us now to be productive," Ruth said.

The lagoon was once the largest in San Diego before filling for projects such as Highway 101, the Del Mar Fairgrounds, two dams on the San Dieguito River and residential development led to a complete closure of the lagoon mouth in the 1940s.

Since the 1970s, the city of Del Mar has been trying to revitalize the lagoon through various projects, with this most recent project being planned since 1992.

Once grading of the site is finished and the wetland modules have been completed, there will be a waiting period before plants and wildlife are introduced to study the tide cycles and measure water conditions to make sure the lagoon is going to function properly.

"Once the newly constructed wetlands are complete, the inlet will be opened for a year of flushing and then planting will occur," said Destree Lazo, public involvement associate for Collaborative Services. "We anticipate Sept. 15, 2008, to open the inlet."

Subcontractor RECON Environmental Inc. is well known as a plant biology specialist and is currently conducting studies on seeds taken from the site to determine if they are viable to be grown and transplanted to the site as areas become available.

Pete Tomsovic, senior restoration biologist for RECON, said that about six months before the date when plants will begin to go in, RECON will start to grow plants to transplant at its 15-acre nursery in the Tijuana River Valley.

About 2 million cubic yards of dirt will be moved by the end of the project.

Excavation equipment loads about 20-30 cubic yards of material at a time into trucks that haul it away. About 240



Crews use construction equipment to excavate dirt Jan. 15 from the W-1 wetland module of the San Dieguito Lagoon restoration. (Photo by Scott Landheer)



Birds wade in an inlet Jan. 21 that will eventually go all the way to the lagoon.. (Photo by Scott Landheer)

"Eventually the footpaths along the perimeter of the lagoon will be connected to the San Dieguito River Park Coast to Crest Trail," said Dawn Rawls, chairwoman of the San Dieguito Lagoon Preservation Committee. "This trail will one day extend from the beach at Del Mar to Volcan Mountain near Julian."

The completion of the project is a condition put on utility Southern California Edison when it received the permit to operate the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station. The intent was to offset any negative impact the power plant would have on the marine environment.

The San Dieguito Lagoon was chosen from several other locations because it presented the best opportunity to meet the objectives required by the permit. The project is being done in cooperation with the San Dieguito River Park Joint Powers Authority.

loads travel over the haul roads each day, so there are vehicles that perform constant maintenance to keep the roads in working order, according to Ruth.

Along with the wetland modules being dug, nesting sites will be created for the Least Tern, an endangered bird. In addition to protecting and promoting endangered species and a variety of other animals and plants, the lagoon will also serve as an anchor for the greater San Dieguito River Park, a 55-mile open space and trail system.

Once the project is complete, SCE will be responsible for maintaining the mouth opening and other aspects of the lagoon for the life of the San Onofre plant, which is expected to be about 40 years, according to Samir Tanious, project manager for SCE.

For more information, visit <http://www.sdlagoon.com>.

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