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Long-awaited restoration of San Elijo Lagoon kicks off

By Joshua Emerson Smith Contact Reporter

The more than \$100 million restoration of the San Elijo Lagoon in Encinitas is getting underway.

The project, expected to be completed by early 2021, is part of the \$6 billion North Coast Corridor Program, which includes the widening of Interstate 5 and double-tracking the adjacent rail corridor from La Jolla to Oceanside.

The larger 30-year program includes about \$200 million in total spending to preserve and restore coastal habitats.

“You are going to see the start of efforts that have been 20 years in the making,” Doug Gibson, executive director of the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, said in a press statement. “This grassroots and collaborative endeavor has helped us realize the Reviving your Wetlands Project.”

The first phase of the lagoon’s restoration includes clearing vegetation and building dikes along its main channel to control water quality and levels.

Workers will then dredge a pit in the central basin, removing sand that will be used to nourish shorelines at Fletcher Cove and Cardiff State Beach. The hole will be filled with lagoon sediment.

“Our work will improve tidal circulation in the lagoon and enhance the lagoon’s habitat in order to ensure prosperity and longevity for many of the lagoon’s native plants and animals,” Gibson said.

The end goal is to create wetland habitat and pedestrian trails within the lagoon.

The project is being paid for using revenue from the half-cent sales tax known as TransNet and administered by the San Diego Association of Governments.

The San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy helped design the restoration, which is helping to offset impacts from new bridges being built under the North Coast Corridor Program.

Unlike other North County lagoons, San Elijo has never been extensively dredged. The mouth of the lagoon is routinely dug out to allow stagnant water to flow back into the ocean, but sediment still gets trapped in lower lying areas.

The restoration project was initially proposed in the 1990s, but wasn’t able to secure funding until now.