

Colorado Lagoon gets money

Funds: \$200,000 goes to study restoration of polluted water body.

By Paul Young, Staff writer

LONG BEACH The California Coastal Conservancy approved a \$200,000 grant on Wednesday that will allow officials to take a long-awaited step toward restoring the beleaguered Colorado Lagoon.

The unanimous decision gives the city funds to hire a private contractor and conduct a study looking at the pros and cons of restoring water quality and animal and plant life in the lagoon.

"This is a big deal because funding is so tight (right now),' said Tom Leary, clean water director for Long Beach. "Up until this point, there's really been no real money to specifically look at improving the fish and wildlife habitat.'

It's no secret that the lagoon, located near the corner of Colorado Street and Park Avenue, is polluted.

In a 1998 study, researchers found nearly 60 percent of sediment taken from the west end of the 13-acre lagoon was significantly toxic to shellfish.

It is also named on the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Water Act Section 303(d) list, which establishes where water officials should concentrate their efforts to identify sources of harmful chemicals and waste material. In the lagoon's sediments and marine life are elevated levels of lead, DDT and zinc.

What's more, storm runoff, which usually includes trash, chemicals and other pollutants, flows into the lagoon every time it rains.

The study, which is expected to begin early next year, will look at a number of ways to improve water quality and habitat in the lagoon. That would include examining whether a channel between the lagoon and Marine Stadium would improve water circulation and tidal flow and whether dredging the lagoon floor would be an effective way to remove harmful, polluted sediments. In addition, it will examine the possibility of restoring the lagoon's natural salt water wetlands.

The city, meanwhile, is also using \$500,000 in additional grant money awarded earlier this year to study the feasibility of diverting dry-weather runoff from the storm drain into a sewer system. The sewer system does not dump into the lagoon.

Much of the recent push to restore the lagoon can be attributed to a neighborhood group called Friends of the Colorado Lagoon. Friends found its

way into the environmental scene late last year, when the County of Los Angeles was embarking on a controversial project called the Termino Avenue Drain.

While the project included some measures to improve the lagoon, it also would have emptied a large amount of water into the lagoon during storms.

Friends saw several environmental problems with this and fought it in court, convincing a judge in July that the county had not conducted a thorough environmental impact study. The project was put on hold.

Friends leaders, who were in Oakland on Wednesday for the Conservancy's vote, were thrilled with the grant decision. Their master plan for the lagoon coincides with many of the possibilities being explored in the study.

"Without this money, we'd be hard-pressed to find money for this restoration,' said Friends board member Ray Thorn. "We'd have to go out and ask for private donations because the city just doesn't have the money to help us.'

Assemblyman Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, added that lagoon restoration would not just improve water quality, but would also serve as an educational tool and a major asset for the surrounding neighborhoods.