

Good news for lagoon

Grant: Study may be turning point for restoration.

If Long Beach's Colorado Lagoon is one day transformed into something more than a polluted swimming hole and that prospect is now looking better and better it may trace the renaissance back to Wednesday, when the state Coastal Conservancy awarded a grant to study lagoon improvements.

The \$200,000 grant, which will be used to scientifically study the lagoon and develop plans for its multi-use restoration, was a significant and crucial step. Once the study is complete, with cost estimates, city officials and lagoon activists can begin working to secure state bond money earmarked for exactly this type of wetland restoration and park project.

Without the grant it was unlikely that Friends of Colorado Lagoon the neighborhood group that has outlined a preliminary restoration plan would have been able to raise enough money to fund the study. The group had already decided, rightly, that approaching the city of Long Beach for money during its budget crisis would probably be futile.

The state-funded study will examine different ways to improve water quality, remove pollutants, restore fish and wildlife habitats, and better handle flood drainage, among other projects at the lagoon.

The study is expected to examine the feasibility of much of FOCL's master plan; for example, improving tidal flow by dredging parts of the lagoon's toxic sediment and adding a new channel between the lagoon and Marine Stadium. The study will also explore adding filters and various systems to divert polluted street runoff that now empties into the lagoon.

The group also hopes to restore the lagoon's natural saltwater wetlands in the far-west and northern areas, while maintaining the central area for swimming and recreation. Under FOCL's plan, a now-abandoned snack shop would be converted into a marine science education center to serve the nearly 5,000 public school students in the immediate area. And, importantly, a storm water management system would be developed to protect communities against flooding while maintaining the integrity of the lagoon's ecosystem.

As we've said before, these are worthwhile, achievable plans (FOCL has purposefully left them general enough to allow scientific studies to shape final drafts). The lagoon makes an attractive candidate for voter-approved bond money because there are few urban wetlands remaining in California, and even fewer in such close proximity to so many schoolchildren.

Thanks to FOCL's efforts, proposed Colorado Lagoon improvements have been steadily gaining community and political support. The Coastal Conservancy's grant may very well be the catalyst that puts them in motion.