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Local News

Federal funds go to nature groups

Torrance, RPV sites targeted

By Nick Green
STAFF WRITER

Nearly \$60,000 in federal grants will support restoration efforts on private land in Torrance that harbors a rare butterfly species and a 20-acre nature preserve in Rancho Palos Verdes that is home to a threatened bird, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service announced Thursday.

“This is a great opportunity to do some real hands-on restoration work,” said Jane Hendron, a spokeswoman for the conservation agency. “There were only 48 grants awarded nationwide and to get two of them in Los Angeles County we thought was not only an excellent indication of the quality of the projects, but how important these projects are.”

The agency awarded \$20,305 to the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy for a habitat restoration effort at the Lunada Canyon Preserve, which the respected nonprofit has managed since 1990.

The preserve is adjacent to the 50-acre Agua Amarga Canyon, which supports the largest population of California gnatcatchers on The Hill.

The group will restore native habitat in an effort to increase the population and range of the bird and the Palos Verdes blue NATURE/B2 Nature an insect thought to be extinct until its 1994 rediscovery in San Pedro.

“Coastal sage scrub is disappearing in Southern California and this project allows us a chance to roll back the clock on habitat loss,” said Keith Leonard, the conservancy’s executive director.

Los Angeles-based nonprofit The Urban Wildlands Group will receive \$37,300 to work with 20 to 25 private landowners to revegetate steep bluffs overlooking the ocean in the Hollywood Riviera area south of Torrance Beach.

As much as a quarter mile of cliff-top is home to the smallest of three isolated populations of the El Segundo blue butterfly, an endangered species.

The relatively new conservation group will work with landowners to eradicate non-native invasive plants that are crowding out the coast



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buckwheat, a plant the butterfly relies upon as a food source and to reproduce.

“They rely on this one plant and there's hardly any of those plants left,” said Kevin Clark, a biologist with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. “We think it's the smallest population (of butterflies) and the one in the most danger of going extinct, so it's the one we want to work on in terms of bolstering the population.”

El Segundo blues are about the size of a quarter. The species is in the same family as the Palos Verdes blue, although they are not closely related.

Populations of the El Segundo blue also exist near Los Angeles International Airport and in El Segundo on the grounds of the Chevron oil refinery.

The grants were allocated under the Endangered Species Act Landowner Incentive Program, a 3-year-old Congressional initiative designed to provide financial assistance and incentives to private property owners willing to help conserve listed animal and plant species. Much habitat for rare species exists on privately owned land throughout the nation.

The grants allow the development of a “safe harbor” program, a conservation tool aimed at alleviating the concern of private property owners who discover their land is home to rare plants or animals.

The program establishes a base condition for the quality of the habitat and prevalence of a species on a given property.

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