

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
December 2, 2004

**Bay Area Ridge Trail Planning**

File No. 04-085  
Project Manager: Abe Doherty

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$1,200,000 to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council to perform planning activities for future Bay Area Ridge Trail projects.

**LOCATION:** Various locations comprising the Ridge Trail alignment within the nine San Francisco Bay Area counties (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: Project Location

Exhibit 2: Support Letters

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-64 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council of an amount not to exceed one million and two hundred thousand (\$1,200,000) for planning and feasibility studies, data collection and resource evaluation activities for future construction and development of new Ridge Trail segments and the acquisition of interests in real property. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, schedule and budget, and the names and qualifications of any subcontractors that it intends to employ for this planning work.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The project is consistent with the purposes and criteria set forth in Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31164 regarding the Conservancy's mandate to address the recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay Area.

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2. The project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c) 3 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”

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### PROJECT SUMMARY:

The proposed authorization would provide disbursement of up to \$1,200,000 to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (BARTC) to perform planning activities necessary for the acquisition and development of new Bay Area Ridge Trail (Ridge Trail) segments. The BARTC is working towards the goal of creating a 500-mile multi-use, continuous ridgeline trail around San Francisco Bay. To date, 267 miles of the Ridge Trail are open and dedicated for public use. The Ridge Trail serves all nine Bay Area counties and helps to create an interconnected system of open space and trails to provide recreation and scenic views to the public. The BARTC is effectively assisting the Conservancy in meeting its statutory and strategic goals of improving access around the San Francisco Bay Area ridgetops.

Since its inception in 1987, the primary purpose of BARTC, a non-profit organization, has been to plan, promote, acquire, build and maintain the Ridge Trail. The Council’s governing structure was designed to ensure an ongoing public-private partnership with public agencies and trail enthusiasts. The BARTC has a membership base of approximately 3,000 people and over 100 volunteer workers who regularly participate in the work of the Council. These aspects of the BARTC make them uniquely qualified to carry out activities necessary to develop or make accessible new segments of the Ridge Trail.

This authorization would advance the future completion of Ridge Trail segments, by identifying the trail route, negotiating and developing agreements for the acquisition of property (including through fee title and trail easements) from willing sellers, designing trails and Ridge Trail sign plans, preparing environmental review documents, maps and permit applications, and construction planning.

**Project History:** This authorization to fund BARTC to further the goal of completing the Ridge Trail is consistent with the Conservancy’s prior involvement and support for the Ridge Trail. In August 1998, following the first appropriation of funds for the San Francisco Bay Program, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$300,000 to BARTC for work such as preparing trail construction plans and negotiating trails easements to make eight specific Ridge Trail segments open to the public.

On December 7, 2003, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$3,427,800 to BARTC. \$1,527,800 of this authorization was used for planning and other work to support projects. The remaining \$1,900,000 was authorized for construction and acquisition grants for individual projects, which have been brought to the Conservancy Board for environmental review and findings under CEQA. These funds resulted in the opening of 47 miles of Ridge Trail to date, with an additional 18 miles expected to be opened in the next year and 17 miles of trail corridor preserved through acquisitions. The proposed new authorization of funding will enable BARTC

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to build on the momentum created by the previous Conservancy grants and support from diverse partners in order to complete gaps in the Ridge Trail.

### **PROJECT FINANCING:**

|                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Coastal Conservancy            | \$1,200,000                    |
| Other sources (see text below) | <u>\$1,000,000 (estimated)</u> |
| <b>Total Project Cost</b>      | <b>\$2,200,000 (estimated)</b> |

The Conservancy's contribution to the proposed project is expected to come from Proposition 40, the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002. The Proposition 40 legislation (PRC Section 5096.650(b)(8)) allocated funds to the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program for the acquisition and development of land, air, and water resources, in accordance with the particular provisions of the statute creating the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy. This project is consistent with the Proposition 40 legislation since it helps to implement one of the goals stated in the statute creating the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program (PRC 31162), which is to improve public access to and around ridgetops, through completion of Ridge Trail systems.

The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, as a private non-profit organization, relies on a mix of funding sources to support its work. In calendar year 2004, BARTC anticipates securing approximately \$450,000 to match approximately \$500,000 of support provided by the Conservancy, through its previous Proposition 12 grant. Over the next three years, BARTC estimates that it will raise \$300,000 from membership support, \$450,000 from individual giving, and \$250,000 from foundation support. Thus, it is likely that BARTC will be able to provide approximately \$1,000,000 to match the Conservancy's grant for multi-year funding at approximately 80% of the total grant.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

This project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code (PRC) Sections 31160-31164, to address recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.

PRC Section 31162 authorizes the Conservancy to undertake projects and award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area in order to achieve specified goals. Awarding a grant to the BARTC for this project, which is located entirely within the designated nine county San Francisco Bay Area, is consistent with goal 31162(a), since it improves public access around the ridgetops, by contributing towards the completion of regional Ridge Trail systems. As required by 31162(a), the project is consistent with the rights of private property owners, since the Ridge Trail segments are only built with the permission of owners of property over which the trail is located. The Ridge Trail projects will be designed to not have a significant impact on agricultural operations, environmentally sensitive areas, or wildlife, which will be confirmed through subsequent CEQA review of individual projects developed pursuant to this grant. As described below in the "Consistency with Adopted Regional and Local Plans" section, the

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project meets the requirement of Section 31162(a) that it be consistent with locally and regionally adopted plans.

This project is appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in PRC Section 31163(c), for the following reasons:

- (1) The project is supported by adopted local and regional plans (see “Consistency with Local and Regional Plans” section).
- (2) The project is multi-jurisdictional and serves a regional constituency by contributing toward the completion of the Ridge Trail system throughout the nine counties of the Bay Area.
- (3) The project can be implemented in a timely manner, since the authorization will support BARTC in continuing to perform work that is already on-going and funded partially by previous Conservancy authorizations.
- (4) The project provides benefits that could be lost if the project is not quickly implemented, since there is momentum that has been built from the work supported by the previous Conservancy grants and many of the remaining gaps in the Ridge Trail are located on private lands, which are subject to competing development projects inconsistent with the Ridge Trail.
- (5) This project is supported by matching funds from several sources, both public and private.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

The authorization to fund BARTC’s work in advancing Ridge Trail projects is consistent with **Goal 11** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, which is to improve public access, recreation, and education facilities in and around the San Francisco Bay, coast, ridge tops, urban open spaces, and natural areas. By performing activities necessary to complete new Ridge Trail segments, the authorization contributes towards successful implementation of **Objective A of Goal 11**, which is to implement approximately 20 projects that increase the amount of land that is accessible to the public, or provide recreational facilities such as trails. Providing funding for this project also assists the Conservancy in meeting **Objective B of Goal 11**, which is to complete approximately 60 miles of the Ridge Trail and 100 miles of regionally significant public access trails and corridors, linking the Bay, Ridge, and coastal trails to urban open spaces. In fact, strategy number one listed in the Strategic Plan for achieving Objective B is to “continue assistance and collaboration in trail planning and construction with the Ridge Trail Council”.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

#### **Required Criteria**

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy’s statutory programs and purposes:** See the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section above.

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2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The California State Legislature passed a resolution in 1990 to “recognize the value of the Bay Area Ridge Trail to the people of the Bay Area, and encourage the creation of trails in the San Francisco Bay Area.” Eight of the nine San Francisco Bay Area counties have passed resolutions of support for the Ridge Trail. Each of the nine Bay Area counties has an active Ridge Trail county committee working on implementation of the Ridge Trail. The BARTC has a membership base of over 3,000 and over 100 volunteers regularly participate in the work of the council. Refer to support letters in Exhibit 2.
4. **Location:** BARTC will work on completing gaps in the Ridge Trail, which is located exclusively in the nine counties that make up the San Francisco Bay Area (Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma), which is entirely within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
5. **Need:** The Conservancy has played a major role in supporting completion of the Ridge Trail and without Conservancy participation, the majority of BARTC’s work could not occur.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** By providing recreational opportunities for the public in all nine Bay Area counties, BARTC’s work toward completion of the Ridge Trail serves a greater-than-local interest. In addition, the spectacular scenic views, opportunities for extended trips and connectivity to other trail systems, parks and natural areas enhances the appeal of the Ridge Trail as a destination for visitors from outside the Bay Area.

### **Additional Criteria**

7. **Urgency:** Since the majority of the gaps in the Ridge Trail are located on privately-owned land, competing development interests make it urgent that the BARTC gets support now to secure landowner agreements to allow construction of the Ridge Trail.
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
12. **Readiness:** BARTC has been successfully performing work towards the completion of the Ridge Trail for over 16 years and is prepared to continue this work with this new grant.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** “See “Project History” and “Consistency with Conservancy’s Strategic Plan Goal(s) & Objective(s)”, above.
15. **Cooperation:** BARTC has a demonstrated history of working with diverse partners to achieve its goals, and intends to continue to do so. These partners have included local, regional, state and federal public agencies, non-profit organizations, private foundations, local businesses, community groups and recreational enthusiasts.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LOCAL AND REGIONAL PLANS**

Some local and regional governments, including the East Bay Regional Park District, Santa Clara, San Mateo, Solano and Marin counties and the cities of American Canyon, Benicia, Fairfield, Napa, Novato, Petaluma, Santa Rosa, Vallejo, and Yountville, specifically incorporate the Ridge Trail in their adopted plans. A multitude of other adopted local and regional plans throughout the Bay Area include support for the development of public recreational trails, even if

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they do not reference this particular trail system. The proposed authorization is also consistent with, and supports implementation of, Gap Plans adopted by BARTC in 1993 and 1996, which provide strategies to complete the Ridge Trail

### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed authorization is to fund the preliminary planning work necessary to advance Ridge Trail projects, including identifying the trail route, negotiating and developing agreements for the acquisition of property, designing trails, preparing environmental review documents, maps and permit applications, and construction planning. The project is statutorily exempt pursuant to California Code of Regulations Section 15262 (“Feasibility and Planning Studies”), since it is for possible future actions which the Conservancy has not approved, adopted, or funded. These planning studies will include consideration of environmental factors.

Part of the project consists of basic data collection and resource evaluation activities, including those necessary for planning, designing, and preparing environmental review documents for Ridge Trail projects. These information-collecting activities will be designed and implemented in a manner that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource and are thus categorically exempt from CEQA review, under CCR Section 15306 (“Information Collection”).

Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the project.