

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
January 27, 2005

**AÑO NUEVO MARINE EDUCATION CENTER**

File No. 04-106  
Project Manager: Marina Cazorla

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$350,000 to the California State Parks Foundation to construct a new Marine Education Center at Año Nuevo State Reserve.

**LOCATION:** Año Nuevo, near Pescadero, San Mateo County (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Education and Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map
  - Exhibit 2: Marine Education Center Exhibit Locations
  - Exhibit 3: Letters of Support
  - Exhibit 4: Mitigated Negative Declaration
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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400-31409 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed three hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$350,000) to the California State Parks Foundation (Foundation) to be used for the construction of the Marine Education Center at Año Nuevo State Reserve, in San Mateo County, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds for construction, the Foundation shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
  - a. A work program, including project schedule and budget, and the names of any contractors and/or subcontractors to be employed on the project; and
  - b. Evidence that all permits and approvals necessary to implement the project have been obtained.

2. The Foundation shall enter into an agreement with the Conservancy sufficient to protect the public interest in any improvement or development constructed as part of this proposed project in accordance with the requirements of Public Resources Codes Section 31116(c).”

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 proposed project is consistent with the purposes and criteria of Sections 31400-31409 of the Public Resources Code regarding public coastal access.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The California State Parks Foundation 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 Public Resources Code.
4. The Conservancy has (1) independently reviewed and considered the project’s record and the Mitigated Negative Declaration and concurs with the Final MND prepared and adopted by the Department of Parks and Recreation on June 1, 2004; (2) finds that there is no substantial evidence that the project, as fully mitigated, may have a significant adverse effect on the environment; and 3) finds that there is substantial evidence based on the administrative record before the Conservancy that the project will not have a potential for adverse effects on fish and wildlife resources as defined in California Fish and Game Code § 711.2 and 14 California Code of Regulations § 753.5(d).”

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### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The Marine Education Center project at Año Nuevo will create the first state-of-the-art coastal education and docent training facility on the San Mateo coast. It will provide more than 200,000 annual visitors with valuable hand-on opportunities to learn about California’s central coast and marine wildlife, as well as increase the number of school children able to experience Año Nuevo firsthand. The Año Nuevo State Reserve offers a tremendous educational opportunity for Bay Area youth and visitors due to its unrivaled marine wildlife and proximity to more than seven million people in the greater San Francisco and San Jose metropolitan areas. In winter breeding months alone (mid-December through March), 50,000 visitors, including 15,000 school children, visit Año Nuevo State Reserve to participate in interpretive walks and viewing of the world’s largest mainland breeding elephant seal colony. Approximately 200,000 visitors attend annually.

Unfortunately, existing facilities at Año Nuevo are unable to serve increasing numbers of visitors. It is estimated that approximately one-half of the schools that attempt to make reservations to view the northern elephant seal rookery are turned away due to limited space. Año Nuevo State Reserve also has a wealth of ecology and history that currently lacks adequate interpretation. Current exhibits on the Reserve’s ecology fail to tell the complete story of the Reserve’s complex ecosystem and inhabitants. In addition, there is no facility within the State Park system along the San Mateo coast which contains adequate space for daily public orientations and docent trainings. The new Año Nuevo Marine Education Center will enable thousands more chil-

dren each year to benefit from this invaluable educational resource, including students in underserved communities throughout the greater San Francisco and San Jose metropolitan areas.

The Dickerman Barn, which currently serves as the main visitor center, will be upgraded to provide space for interpretive exhibits and presentations, as well as expanded educational facilities. New classroom space will allow for science-based, hands-on lessons about the coast and its ecology. Exhibits, interpretive panels, and web cam monitors will help visitors connect with the Reserve and learn about the area's marine life, ecosystem, and cultural history. (Exhibit 2) The Dickerman Barn will also continue to sell tickets and will house the bookstore.

The Horse Barn has the greatest potential for increased public use. It will be designed and upgraded to contain two floors of training rooms and support space for the approximately 220 volunteer docents who lead interpretive tours out into the Reserve's elephant seal colony. The volunteer docent interpreters are the backbone for the Reserve's world renowned eco-visitor interpretive program. This program ranks third in the State Park System for the most hours of public education and is the only program of its size that uses only volunteers to help educate the public. The new Marine Education Center will enable the Reserve to increase the docent staff by 25% and to offer more interpretive walks. The Horse Barn will also contain media rooms for public orientations and space for a night-time lecture series for the public. Audio visual equipment, including screens, projectors, amplifiers, video disc players, sound systems, lighting and equipment controls are included in this renovation process. Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act will ensure accessibility to all programs within this building.

The Creamery was originally constructed as a residence and later converted for dairy production and will become the Reserve's administrative center. In addition to housing administrative offices, the two-story structure will contain volunteer meeting rooms and restrooms. Conservancy funds will not be used for the Creamery renovation portion of the project.

The California State Parks Foundation has contributed more than \$116 million in land, funds, and artifacts to California State Parks since its inception in 1969. Contributions come from members, corporations, foundations and government grants, and are used for state park projects such as historic site renovation, trail restoration, park cleanups, education programs, native species protection, and public education. The State Parks Foundation, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the San Mateo Coast Natural History Association are committed to building the new Marine Education Center for the benefit of millions of future visitors.

**Site Description:** Año Nuevo State Reserve is situated 50 miles south of San Francisco and 20 miles north of Santa Cruz, on California State Highway One. It is comprised of approximately 4,000 acres of rocky coastline, windblown sand beaches, migrating sand dunes, marine terraces and rock outcroppings. The Reserve's historic structures and remains include the Steele Ranch complex, a designated State Historical landmark; the Año Nuevo Island Lighthouse complex; and the remains of Waddell's Wharf.

The Reserve is a designated Wildlife Protection Area that is home to the largest mainland breeding colony of northern elephant seals in the world. Once hunted to the brink of extinction during the 1800's, northern elephant seal populations have made a heroic come back thanks to focused conservation efforts and protection of the natural resources. In 1977, only 16 elephant seal births were recorded on the mainland of the Reserve. Since then, over 20,000 births have been re-

corded. Año Nuevo is internationally renowned for its eco-visitor interpretive program.

**Project History:** In 2001, the California State Parks Foundation, in conjunction with California State Parks and the San Mateo Coast Natural History Association, initiated a campaign to raise approximately \$3 million to create a new Marine Education Center at Año Nuevo. The project is being conducted in three phases: The Preliminary Planning Phase, the Working Drawings Phase, and the Construction Phase.

During the Preliminary Planning Phase, State Parks evaluated the structural integrity of the three existing historic structures that will house the Center and developed the overall project site plan, schematic drawings for the architectural and engineering design, and specification outlines for project documents. State Parks also evaluated the project for compliance with CEQA, and in July 2004 completed the CEQA Notice of Determination and Historic Structures Report.

The project entered the Working Drawings Phase in July 2004. Since July, State Parks has been preparing the final architectural and engineering designs for the construction bidding documents and working to obtain all necessary regulatory approvals. They expect to receive their final permit for the project, the Coastal Development Permit from San Mateo County, in spring of 2005.

During fall 2004, State Parks worked to develop interactive, state-of-the-art exhibits, interpretive panels, and high-tech web cam and audio visual equipment for the new Marine Education Center. The Marine Education Center's interpretive plan is currently 75% complete. The Construction Phase is scheduled to begin on time in April 2005, with ground-breaking taking place in September 2005. The facility is expected to be completed in October 2006.

The Conservancy has a history of support for projects at Año Nuevo. In 2004, the Conservancy funded a habitat restoration project at Año Nuevo Island to protect threatened colonies of rhinoceros auklets. The project involved re-vegetation and soil stabilization and has been successful in replacing auklet breeding habitat.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

The entire project is expected to cost approximately \$3,022,000 including the restoration of the three historic structures, new ecological and historical exhibits, training space for Año Nuevo docents, new classroom and presentation space, and site improvements. The Conservancy's contribution would be about 12% of the total cost.

Committed Funding Sources

State Parks Prop. 40 Matching Funds	\$1,475,000
Individual Donors	\$ 107,568
Private Foundations	<u>\$ 590,000</u>

Total committed funds: \$2,172,568

Anticipated Funding Sources

Anonymous Individual Donor	\$ 500,000
<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b><u>\$ 350,000</u></b>
 Total anticipated funds:	 <u>850,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost:</b>	<b>\$3,022,568</b>

The expected source of Conservancy funds for this project is the FY 04/05 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 50). Proposition 50 authorizes the use of funds for development of facilities to promote public access to and participation in the conservation of land, water, and wildlife resources (Water Code, Section 79571(b)). Eligible projects under § 79571 include both research facilities for watershed protection and conservation and nature centers that are in or adjacent to watersheds and wetlands and provide wildlife viewing, outdoor experiences, and conservation education programs. Funding priority is to be given to nature center projects operated by a non-profit organization that provide educational opportunities to children from urban areas that lack access to such opportunities.

Consistent with these requirements, the Año Nuevo Marine Education Center will provide facilities for research and education, focusing on marine habitat, wetlands, water quality, and related issues on the San Mateo County coast. It will provide educational opportunities for students and children from San Mateo County, the Bay Area, Santa Cruz, and the entire state.

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

This education and public access project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Sections 31400-31409.

Under Chapter 9, the Conservancy is to have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public coastal accessways. In undertaking that role pursuant to Section 31400.1, the Conservancy may award grants to a nonprofit organization to develop, operate, or manage lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. In addition, Section 31400.3 states that the Conservancy may provide such assistance as is required to aid nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet that objective.

Consistent with Section 31400.2, staff recommends approval of this project after evaluating the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy in light of the total amount of available for coastal public accessway and urban waterfront projects, the fiscal resources of the grantee, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible projects, and the application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority. The proposed authorization would leverage matching funds by providing twelve percent of the amount needed to complete the renovation project.

The Marine Education Center, a facility located on and an integral part of the Año Nuevo State Reserve and coastal accessway, will be able to offer improved public access and programming because of the expanded useable interpretive space within the three historic buildings that will compose the Center, as well as the addition of new state-of-the-art interpretive exhibits. It will

fully accommodate people with disabilities, including hands-on research and interpretive facilities, will expand public access opportunities along the San Mateo coast, while increasing the public's knowledge of important resource protection needs for the ocean and shore.

The proposed project is consistent with the County of San Mateo Local Coastal Program as described in the Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies section below.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective B**, the proposed project will improve public access at Año Nuevo State Reserve by improving public facilities that will better serve individuals with various physical limitations.

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective D**, the proposed project will result in increased recreational opportunities for residents and visitors by completing the construction of a regional environmental education center.

**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.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The project is supported by Senator Dianne Feinstein, Senator Barbara Boxer, Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, former State Senator Byron Sher, Assemblyman Leland Yee, State Senator S. Joseph Simitian, San Mateo County Supervisor Richard Gordon, Ruth Coleman (Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation), the Trust for Public Land, and the Peninsula Open Space Trust (Letters of support Exhibit 3).
4. **Location:** The project is located within the coastal zone of San Mateo County.
5. **Need:** Funding from the Conservancy is needed to bridge the existing gap left in construction funds. The Conservancy's proposed grant represents only about 12 percent of the total cost of the project.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Marine Education Center is located at Año Nuevo State Reserve, which is a state, national, and international tourist attraction.

**Additional Criteria**

7. **Urgency:** After years of planning and fundraising, the project is entering its final phase, the Construction Phase, and is scheduled for completion by the end of 2006. The funding gap that remains must be closed within the next few months.

8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The project will resolve both the need for additional and improved coastal public access and marine educational facilities. The project will also restore and preserve three historically significant structures on the property.
9. **Leverage:** The project is highly leveraged, with approximately 88 percent of the funds being provided by sources other than the Conservancy.
11. **Innovation:** Building a new marine education facility and interpretative exhibits within historic wooden structures called for innovative approaches, both in building design and historic preservation.
12. **Readiness:** The grantee has finalized plans, prepared a CEQA document, is working to obtain all necessary permits, and has raised almost all of the funds. Construction of the new facility is scheduled to begin in 2005.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See the "Project History" section above.
15. **Cooperation:** The project represents an excellent example of a cooperative effort between private donors, local and state agencies, and a dedicated nonprofit organization staff.

#### **Consistency with Conservancy Access Standards**

The proposed Marine Education Center facilities will be consistent with the Conservancy's "Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development." In particular, the new facilities will be accessible to persons with disabilities (Standard 13) and will be constructed within the footprint of existing structures at Año Nuevo, so as to minimize any impact on coastal resources or landforms (Standard 1).

#### **CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The proposed Marine Education Center at Año Nuevo is consistent with San Mateo County's Local Coastal Plan (LCP), which encourages policies that provide greater coastal access, provide recreation/visitor-serving facilities, and protect sensitive habitat areas. In rural areas, such as Año Nuevo, the LCP encourages the preservation of natural resources and providing outdoor recreation (Section 1.6). It also promotes education and research in marine habitats (Section 7.23). The new Marine Education Center is consistent with the LCP because it will utilize existing buildings, in order to protect ecologically sensitive areas at the Reserve. It will also provide marine education and recreational opportunities for hundreds of thousands of visitors and school children each year. The LCP also contains a wildlife provision which specifically refers to protecting elephant seals. According to Section 7.47, the LCP is designed to, "encourage affected public agencies to control access to areas where elephant seals congregate." The new Marine Education Center complies with this section by helping control the flow of visitors during the elephant seal viewing period, as well as throughout the year.

The project is also consistent with the San Mateo County General Plan (GP), which regulates development to increase public access to the shoreline and along the coast. The GP also promotes programs and projects that, "Support, encourage and recognize volunteer and docent programs to help maintain and operate County park and recreation system and to educate the public in the understanding and appreciation of its facilities." (Section 6.34) Año Nuevo has a thriving docent program that helps educate the public about the Reserve's outstanding wildlife and natural

and cultural resources. The Marine Education Center project complies with San Mateo County's GP by providing an on-site docent training facility that will help expand the docent program and provide the public with increased interpretive programming.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

On June 1, 2004, the California Department of Parks and Recreation adopted and approved the Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the Año Nuevo State Reserve Marine Education Center under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), having determined that the project will not have a significant effect on the environment once all proposed mitigation measures have been implemented.

The MND found no potential for impacts on agricultural resources, land use and planning, minerals, and recreation. Potential adverse impacts that were found to be less than significant included: population and housing, transportation and traffic, and utilities and service system. The MND did identify potential project-related adverse impacts in the areas of aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, noise and public services. However, the MND also identified mitigation measures to address the potential adverse impacts in these categories, and all of the proposed mitigation measures were incorporated into the project's scope of work and will be fully implemented by the Department of Parks and Recreation.

The Department of Parks and Recreation paid the required filing fee to the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) for its review of the MND for CEQA compliance. CDFG generally concurred with the MND except for its mitigation conclusions regarding the San Francisco garter snake and Townsend's big-eared bats. CDFG recommended additional biological monitoring to ensure effective mitigation to prevent impacts to the San Francisco garter snake during construction. In addition, CDFG found that the proposed renovation of the historic Creamery and Dickerman structures would likely eliminate habitat for the Townsend big-eared bat. Given the potential lack of natural replacement habitat in the area, CDFG recommended additional mitigation through creation of artificial bat habitat in consultation with CDFG should this become necessary. The Department of Parks and Recreation agreed with all of CDFG's additional proposed mitigation measures and incorporated them into the final MND. With the addition of these supplemental mitigation measures, potential impacts will be fully mitigated.

Conservancy staff recommends that the Conservancy: (1) find that Conservancy staff has independently reviewed the project's record and the Mitigated Negative Declaration and concurs with the Final MND prepared and adopted by the Department of Parks and Recreation on June 1, 2004; (2) find that there is no substantial evidence that the project, as fully mitigated, may have a significant adverse effect on the environment; and 3) find that there is substantial evidence based on the administrative record before the Conservancy that the project will not have a potential for adverse effects on fish and wildlife resources as defined in California Fish and Game Code § 711.2 and 14 California Code of Regulations § 753.5(d).

All supporting documents and the final MND for the project are available at the Conservancy's office for review. Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination for the project.