

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
February 3, 2006

**White Point Nature Preserve Interpretive Center**

File No. 05-012  
Project Manager: David Hayes

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

Authorization to disburse up to \$100,000 to the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy to redevelop the former Nike Missile Assembly and Testing Building in Los Angeles into the “White Point Nature Preserve Interpretive Center”.

**LOCATION:** White Point Park and Nature Preserve, San Pedro Community, City and County of Los Angeles.

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Environmental Education

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: Regional Location Map

Exhibit 2: Project Location Map

Exhibit 3: Proposed Floor Plan

Exhibit 4: Site photographs

Exhibit 5: Letters of Support

Exhibit 6: Draft EIR for the White Point Nature Preserve

Exhibit 7: Final EIR for the White Point Nature Preserve

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31000 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy to redevelop a former Nike Missile Assembly and Testing Building into the White Point Nature Preserve Interpretive Center, subject to the following conditions

1. Prior to disbursement of any funds, Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

- a) A Board resolution approving the terms of the grant from the Conservancy for the project;
- b) Evidence that the Conservancy has obtained all necessary permits and approvals and has conducted all necessary environmental review.
- c) A final work plan (including the names of any subcontractors to be used in the completion of the project), and a project schedule and budget.
- d) Evidence that the grantee has secured the necessary funding to complete the project.

2. The improvements shall be maintained by the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy consistent with its White Point Park operating agreement with the City of Los Angeles.

3. The Grantee shall insure compliance with mitigation measures A-4 and A-5 regarding interpretive displays and maintenance and monitoring procedures, Final EIR § 4, p. 4 (Exhibit 6).

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 set forth in Section 31119 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code regarding awarding grants for purposes of undertaking educational projects that relate to the preservation, protection, enhancement, and maintenance of coastal resources; and
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 25, 2001.
3. The Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy is a nonprofit organization, existing under the provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, whose corporate purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.
4. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the project’s record, the City of Los Angeles Environmental Impact Report, certified on December 12, 2001. Conservancy finds that the project as designed avoids, reduces or mitigates the possible significant environmental effects to a level of insignificance, and that there is no evidence that the White Point Nature Preserve Interpretive Center project may have significant adverse effects on the environment.
5. The Conservancy finds the project as proposed will not have adverse effects on fish and wildlife resources as defined in California Fish and Game Code Section 711.2 and 14 California Code of Regulations Section 753.5(d).”

**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy (PVPLC) is requesting funding in the amount of \$100,000 to assist with redeveloping a former Nike Missile building into the White Point Nature Preserve Interpretive Center. The PVPLC is a nonprofit organization formed to preserve open space and ecologically sensitive land for educational, ecological, recreational, and scenic purposes. Additionally, the PVPLC operates the White Point Preserve under a 25-year lease with the City of Los Angeles. The existing Preserve lacks facilities to provide

environmental, educational programming for adults or students. When completed, the new interpretive center will provide a much needed facility for interpretive exhibits and classroom/assembly room and will emphasize local natural history and environment in three themes: environmental wildlife education, conservation ecology, and the preservation of historical resources.

The project will adapt the former Nike Missile Assembly and Testing Building to become the White Point Nature Preserve Interpretive Center, because of its size and location near Paseo Del Mar, a primary roadway along San Pedro's coast. Surrounding the project building will be a native plant demonstration garden. The interpretive programming will enhance the visitor experience by offering educational exhibits depicting the continuum of the sites history and the current story of community preservation and ecological restoration. This will include the history of the Gabriellino Indians, coastal land use, history of the resident Japanese abalone fisherman and farmers, occupation by the military for coastal defense of the region, as well as a biogeographical interpretation of the site.

The PVPLC is a nonprofit organization establishing its 501 ( c )(3) in 1988, with a geographic Palos Verdes Peninsula domain; it includes the communities of Palos Verdes Estates, Rancho Palos Verdes, Rolling Hills, Rolling Hills Estates, San Pedro, and parts of Wilmington and Torrance. The PVPCL has two areas of programming: Youth Education that includes classroom and field-based sessions and Outdoor Education programming consisting of community-based nature walks led by trained walk leaders and preserve planning, including volunteer habitat restoration activities and maintenance. The PVPLC also actively manages several land preserves for local jurisdictions within the Palos Verdes Peninsula. Under the stewardship program are two activities; restoring native habitat and propagation of native plant species. Additionally, to ensure community involvement in stewardship the planning process, the White Point Nature Preserve Steering Committee was created in 2000. The committee was appointed by the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks and Los Angeles 15<sup>th</sup>/ District Council Office, consists of thirteen volunteers from the various communities. They represent a cross-section of community members from Palisades Residents Association, Point Fermin Residents Association, World War II veterans, South Bay Chapter of the Audubon Society and other area organizations.

Conservancy funds will be used for repairing and renovation of the building's interior, for the classroom and exhibit area to meet current building codes. Construction work will consist of installation of heating systems, refinishing wall surfaces, flooring, restoring the large roll-up doors, window replacement, lighting fixtures and installing cases for interpretive exhibits, with minimal changes to the original historic structure. When completed, the White Point Nature Preserve Interpretive Center will serve as the environmental wildlife education center for the 100-acre White Point Preserve.

**Site Description:**

The project site is located in the community of San Pedro, along the Pacific Ocean bluffs at the southerly base of the Palos Verdes Hills. The intact 102 acre site is enclosed on the west side by Western Avenue, the ocean facing the south side bordered by Paseo Del Mar Avenue and bordered on the eastern edge of the property by the Los Angeles Air Force Base officer's housing. (Exhibit 2) The first low marine terrace is parallel to the coastline at about 125 feet above sea level; with steep slopes on the north-side bluffs reaching approximately 360 feet above sea level. The historic White Point and Nature Preserve is mostly open fields, now populated

with non-native grasses and a few post Nike-era ornamental trees, however it is the focus of an extensive native habitat restoration effort by the Palos Verdes Land Conservancy.

The White Point Preserve, formerly military property, fills a critical need for urban parkland within the city of Los Angeles; it is located in a densely populated, culturally diverse community of San Pedro. This preserve is open to the public, and accessible to the 14 million people with in a one hours drive. Approximately 90 acres has already been undergone habitat restoration to restore the native coastal sage scrub, coastal bluff scrub, and perennial bunch grass communities. Located in the center of the Preserve is a four-acre area that is designated in the Master Plan to be a native plant demonstration garden. Within the center of demonstration garden is the historic Assembly Building from the Cold War era. This project proposes to adaptively reuse the assembly building to provide a coastal educational nature/ history center, classroom for children, public restroom, and interpretive programming space for the Preserve.

**Project History:**

The PVPLC has a 25-year operating agreement with the City of Los Angeles to manage the Preserve and has a maintenance plan for restoration of the property. In 2002, historical preservation architects of M2A and Associates researched the Nike Missile Assembly and Testing Building and concluded that its restoration and reuse was ‘highly feasible’. In 2004 through a Los Angeles Grant and the Getty Program Grant, the PVPLC developed a feasibility study to determine the costs for historic preservation and building reuse as part of the Nike Missile Site Preservation Plan within the White Point Preserve. The existing structure was built in 1962 as was used to assemble and maintain Nike Hercules Missiles as part of the national air defense system. Since the base was decommissioned in 1997, it has not been used. The project feasibility study was completed as part of the White Point Master Plan. The architectural firm of Milofsky and Michali Architects provided the reuse design and construction cost estimates. The PVPLC has also obtained an Urban Recreation Grant for the City of Los Angeles which will provide approximately \$205,000 towards the construction work.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	\$100,000
City of Los Angeles	<u>\$205,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$305,000</b>

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding is the appropriation from the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal Beach Protection Fund of 2002 (Proposition 50). Proposition 50 requires that a part of these funds be used for the development of facilities to promote public access and participation in the conservation of land, water and wildlife. Eligible projects under Proposition 50 include nature centers, like the proposed project, that are in or adjacent to watersheds and wetlands and provide wildlife viewing, outdoor experiences, and conservation education programs (California Water Code Section 79571). Priority is to be given to nature center projects operated by a nonprofit organization that provide educational opportunities to children from urban areas that lack access to such opportunities. Consistent with these requirements, the PVPLC will provide a facility for education, focusing on habitat and coastal resource conservation, including cultural history and cultural uses of historic habitat. The PVPLC provides educational programs for K-12 students from throughout the Los Angeles south

bay area, including students from inland schools/or low-income school districts who otherwise would not have access to coastal natural areas and associated educational programs.

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

“The proposed project is consistent with the San Pedro Local Coastal Program as described in the Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies below. “ This proposed project would be undertaken pursuant Chapter 3 of Public Resources Code Section 31119 (regarding K-12 grade education projects).

Section 3119(a)(1), within Chapter 3 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, enables the Conservancy undertake educational projects and programs for pupils in kindergarten to grade 12, inclusive, relating to the preservation, protection, enhancement and maintenance of coastal resources,” and to “award grants to nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and public agencies for those purposes.” The proposed project will enhance the existing educational programs offered by the PVPLC which currently serves K-12th grade students in the South Bay and in-land communities, and it would provide a destination with classroom demonstration areas and interpretive exhibits not now available within the White Point Nature Preserve.

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

**Consistent with Goal 2 Objective D** of the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan, the proposed project will increase coastal recreation opportunities for residents and visitors by enhancing the White Point Preserve with The White Point Interpretive 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:** This project is supported by the Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Department, the Los Angeles Council District 5<sup>th</sup>/ Supervisor’s Office and a wide varies of community organizations.
4. **Location:** “The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of City of San Pedro/Los Angeles, Los Angeles County.”

5. **Need:** The Palos Verdes Land Conservancy with a grant has raised \$205,000, towards the reuse redevelopment. Funding from the Coastal Conservancy would allow them to proceed with the detailed architectural activities in early 2006, with construction beginning in the fall of 2006/7.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** As discussed in the “Project Financing” and “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” sections above, the PVPLC provides environmental education programs for school children from inland areas from through out Los Angeles County. The White Point Nature Preserve also attracts the general public from inland areas as well. With the completion of the new White Point Nature Preserve Interpretive Center, visitors are expected to increase because of the increased breath of interpretive programming and additional habitat restoration activities and the completion of the native plant garden that will encircle the White Point Nature Preserve Interpretive Center.

### **Additional Criteria**

7. **Resolution of more than one issue:** When completed the White Point Preserve interpretive center will provide; a facility for educational exhibits and programming, a central destination for visiting groups and students, and operational base for onsite personnel.
8. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
9. **Innovation:** This project will promote reuse of existing buildings, (former military-Cold War Nike Assembly Building) as well as an unusual marriage of cultural history with ecological and cold war era history interpretive programming.
10. **Readiness:** If authorized the proposed grantee can start construction as early as fall of 2006.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** “See “Project History” above.”
12. **Cooperation:** As discussed under “Required Criteria” and “Project History” above, fundraising for the proposed project has involved the participation of many individuals in fundraising, the White Point Preserve Public Steering Committee, the City of Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Department and other community organizations. In addition to financial contribution, the PVPLC also collaborates with other organizations to develop and run its educational programs and activities.

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

The project is located within the San Pedro Coastal Land Use Plan area. It is consistent with the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks policies for open space and recreation #s 1-3, and coastal zone objective #2: “ to protect, maintain, and where feasible enhance and restore the overall quality of the coastal zone environment and its natural and manmade resources”; objective #3: “to assure the orderly and balanced utilization and conservation of Coastal Zone resources, taking into account the social and economic needs of the people of the region; objective #4: to maximize public access and recreational opportunities to and within the Coastal zone consistent with sound resource conservation principals . . .” and objective #6: “to preserve existing scenic views of the ocean and harbor from designated highways and scenic view sites”.

Also, the proposed project is consistent with Open Space and Resource Conservation objectives in the San Pedro LUP in that it assures the preservation of open space lands to serve the

recreational, environmental, educational, and aesthetic needs of the community, establishes a system of open space buffers around the periphery of San Pedro. Then project “preserves ecologically important areas which provide scientific and educational opportunities to study coastal and offshore environment of San Pedro”.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

This project has undergone extensive environmental review both through CEQA and the coastal permit planning process. The Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks has reviewed the former Nike Missile Assembly Buildings as an Interpretive Center as part of the White Point Nature Preserve. The EIR addressed the possibility of impacts from proposed Interpretive Center. In the EIR that was approved and certified by the Los Angeles City Council on December 12, 2001, the adaptive reuse of the Nike Assembly Building addressed in Alternative 3, was chosen as the most feasible and the environmentally superior alternative because it would eliminate a significant unavoidable adverse impact from the destruction of a listed historic building.

The proposed center will be built within the former Nike Assembly Building and will be subject to the review and approval of plans by the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks to ensure that the implementation of all mitigation measures for the treatment of the historic features of the building are in accordance with the adopted Mitigation Monitoring Plan. Public comments in response to the draft EIR expressed concern for the loss of some of these historic buildings. In response to these public comments and as mitigation for impacts to this historical buildings the Mitigation and Monitoring Plan requires interpretive displays of the historic resources removed (Mitigation Measure A-4) and assurance that grounds maintenance are in compliance with the Department of Interior’s “Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties” (Mitigation Measure A-5). Compliance with both of these measures is a condition of Conservancy funding.

Staff recommends the Conservancy adopt the White Point Park Preserve Final Environmental Impact Report. The project, as designed and mitigated, avoids, reduces or mitigates the possible significant environmental effects to a level of insignificance, and that there is no evidence that the White Point Nature Preserve Interpretive Center project may have significant adverse effects on the environment.

Staff further recommend the Conservancy find that the project as proposed will not have adverse effects on fish and wildlife resources as defined in California Fish and Game Code Section 711.2 and 14 California Code of Regulations Section 753.5(d).