

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

April 27, 2006

PIEDRAS BLANCAS ACCESS

File No. 04-077

Project Manager: Steve Horn

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: Authorization to amend the Conservancy's May 18, 2005, authorization to disburse additional funds of up to \$100,000 to the Trust for Public Land for the management of public access to two sandy beaches and associated trails and parking area on a parcel of approximately 20 acres located west of Highway 1 at Piedras Blancas, San Luis Obispo County.

LOCATION: Between State Highway 1 and the ocean shoreline, approximately 6 miles north of W.R. Hearst State Beach (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Area Map

Exhibit 2: Aerial photograph depicting property lines

Exhibit 3: May 18, 2005, Conservancy Staff Recommendation

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby amends its May 18, 2005, authorization to disbursement an additional amount not to exceed one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to the Trust for Public Land (“TPL”) for management and operation of public access to and along the ocean shoreline, as more particularly described in Exhibits 3 to the accompanying staff recommendation, subject to the conditions contained in its May 18, 2005, authorization.

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 the proposed project remains consistent with its May 18,

2005, authorization regarding consistency with its enabling legislation, project selection criteria and guidelines, strategic plan and goals, the local coastal plan, and CEQA.

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The Piedras Blancas site includes one-half mile of privately-owned oceanfront property located in the middle of the 13 linear miles of State Park land that was acquired in 2004 from the Hearst Ranch in San Luis Obispo County. The site has a motel structure, not currently in operation, with a large paved parking area, and it includes two sandy beaches.

The 20-acre property is currently owned by the nonprofit conservation organization The Trust for Public Land (TPL) and it is subject to a purchase option held by the Coastal Conservancy. A public purchase of this site would avoid the impacts of private development and would have great potential for public access and recreational uses. With its existing parking lot and safe entry road from Highway 1, the site could provide immediate public access to the State Parks' property that extends for many miles on either side of it. Public acquisition could enable the completion of the California Coastal Trail (avoiding what would otherwise be a half-mile gap), and the public could gain permanent access to two substantial sandy beaches. Because the site is relatively level and is currently developed, it may be a more feasible location for any support facilities needed for State Parks' management of the recent Hearst Ranch acquisitions than would be adjacent undeveloped lands that are owned by the State but are subject to conservation easements.

In May 2005 TPL purchased the property from the owner and operator of the commercial facilities, in order to provide the opportunity for a future public purchase. The site has been open to the public since that time. The recommended action would provide funds to continue the present public access services and to make minor improvements to facilitate public use.

Site improvements in support of public access that have taken place during the first year of TPL management include: installation of fencing that directs public access away from the eroding bluff edge; installation of signing informing the public of sensitive site resources and the rules for use of the access area; removal of overgrown vegetation to minimize public risks and increase ocean views; and installation of temporary restroom facilities at the trailhead. Services provided include an on-site manager and an agreement with the State Parks Department to provide emergency services as needed. To coordinate the provision of these services, during the last year TPL staff have met on numerous occasions with State Parks, local conservation groups, County staff, Coastal Commission staff and federal wildlife agencies, in addition to arranging and managing the necessary improvements described above.

During the period that TPL owns the property, the public will be permitted to access the shoreline under the same conditions that governed the private commercial access prior to the TPL acquisition. Relatively few improvements are necessary to provide for continued use of the pre-existing parking area and dirt trails.

Site Description: See Exhibit 3.

Project History:

In May 2005 the Conservancy authorized a grant to TPL to provide the services needed to manage public access to these beaches prior to a public purchase of the property. TPL immediately opened the property to public use and has continued to manage it for public access for the past year. Principal categories of expenditure have included: fencing, signs and gates; site utilities; site cleanup and restoration; liability insurance; environmental testing; onsite property manager salary; and TPL staff expenses. The initial grant funds will have been expended by the end of April 2006.

The Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land have also entered into a contingent option agreement for State purchase of the property. It is anticipated that all of the funds necessary to accomplish this public purchase will be raised within the next year and that the State Public Works Board will authorize purchase of the property by the Department of Parks and Recreation. The recommended grant should provide for continued operation of the public access facilities through that period.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Grant for Public Access Management	<u>100,000</u>
Total:	\$100,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for the recommendation is the “Coastal Access Account”. Pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 30620(c)(2), the Coastal Access Account may be used for grants to nonprofit organizations for the development, maintenance and operation of new or existing facilities that provide public access to the shoreline.

These sections remain consistent with the Conservancy’s May 18, 2005, authorization:

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION

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

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES

CONSISTENCY WITH THE LOCAL COASTAL PLAN

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA