

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

May 24, 2007

WEST CAMPUS BLUFFS TRAIL

File No. 07-022

Project Manager: Bob Thiel / Moira McEnespy

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$175,000 to the Associated Students of the University of California, Santa Barbara, to reconstruct the West Campus Bluff Trail, a segment of the California Coastal Trail.

LOCATION: West Campus Bluffs, on the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara, and west of the unincorporated community of Isla Vista, in Santa Barbara County.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Photographs](#)

Exhibit 3: CEQA Documentation: 3a Draft EIR

3b Appendix A-H

3c FEIR Volume 3

[3d EIR Addendum](#)

Exhibit 4: [Notice of Determination](#)

Exhibit 5: [Letters of Support](#)

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 authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred seventy-five thousand dollars (\$175,000) to the Associated Students of the University of California, Santa Barbara to construct the West Campus Bluffs trail, subject to the condition that no Conservancy funds shall be disbursed until the Executive Officer has reviewed and approved in writing:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.
2. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to carry out the project have been obtained.
3. A signing plan for the project acknowledging the Conservancy's participation and the site's function as a segment of the California Coastal Trail."

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 Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code regarding public access.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's "Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development."
4. The project will serve greater than local needs.
5. The Conservancy has independently reviewed the "Final Environmental Impact Report for the Faculty and Family Student Housing, Open Space and Habitat Management Plan, and Long Range Development Plan Amendment," the 2004 Addendum to the Final EIR, the relevant portions of the Mitigation and Monitoring plan and public comment, and 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 substantial evidence that the project, as mitigated, will have a significant adverse effect on the environment, as defined in 14 Cal. Code of Regulations, Section 15382."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This project will reconstruct the West Campus Bluff Trail, a one-half mile segment of the California Coastal Trail, running from the western edge of Isla Vista to Coal Oil Point Reserve in Santa Barbara County. The trail will be handicapped accessible and will avoid sensitive habitat areas on the bluff.

Used heavily by bicyclists, pedestrians, and joggers, the trail is located on the coastal bluffs of the west campus section of the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). It lies directly below a 37.2 acre area owned by UCSB which, because of the presence of coastal scrub, vernal pools and native grasses, has been designated as protected open space. The area is called the West Campus Nature Park (Exhibit 2: Photographs).

The West Campus Bluffs Trail was initially developed as an informal trail, although improvements were added by UCSB in 1990. Over the years, the trail has deteriorated due to drainage problems and its use by pedestrians and bicyclists after heavy rains. Eroded and rutted in many sections, the degraded conditions have caused visitors to seek alternative routes,

creating a network of social trails that have exacerbated erosion and impacted adjacent habitat areas (Exhibit 2: Photographs).

The proposed project will involve re-grading and stabilization of the existing pathway system, resulting in improved drainage and isolation from adjacent habitat areas. The trail will be surfaced with decomposed gravel treated with a binding polymer and will be handicapped accessible. It will be bordered by a two-foot wide shoulder on each side, and landscaped along the edges to discourage bicyclists from seeking alternate routes. These informal routes will be closed and revegetated with native plants, such as purple needlegrass and coast goldenbush, using a seed base extracted from the nearby Ellwood-Devereux Slough watershed.

In general, the trail will be about 10 to 12 feet wide. In some areas, it will be straightened or moved away from the bluff for safety. It will also be narrowed or widened along certain sections, in part to avoid sensitive habitat areas. Remnant concrete from an old hard-surfaced walkway will be removed to improve aesthetics and reduce runoff.

Reconstruction of the West Campus Bluffs Trail and designation of the adjacent open space area as the West Campus Nature Park were recommended in UCSB's Faculty and Family Student Housing, Open Space and Habitat Management Plan, prepared in 2004 as part of the University's Long Range Development Plan Amendment for the campus. Under an agreement with Associated Students, the UCSB planning department will oversee construction and provide for long-term maintenance and management of the project area. Two student-managed programs of Associated Students, the Shoreline Preservation Fund and BIKES, have raised \$60,000 in funds for planning and implementation of this project. Over the past two years, about \$24,000 of these funds were spent in design and habitat mapping; the remaining \$36,000 will be used toward constructing the project. Trail reconstruction is anticipated to be completed within 18 months.

Associated Students (AS) is the student government organization within the University of California, Santa Barbara. It is a department of the University of California, Santa Barbara (a state agency), as well as a 501(c)(3) organization whose objectives include serving UCSB students and the campus community by providing a framework that promotes educational and professional development, encourages community service, and empowers students and student leaders to create change. Its many programs include BIKES (Bicycle Improvement Keeps Everyone Safe), which collaborates with UCSB campus planning, helps prioritize bike path additions and renovations, and works on similar issues related to the on-campus bike system.

Another of Associated Students' standing organizations is the Shoreline Preservation Fund (SPF), a student initiative to enhance the UCSB campus coastline. SPF was established in 1999 after UCSB students voted overwhelmingly to tax themselves by contributing \$3 per quarter of registration fees to support stewardship of the local coast. Since that time SPF has awarded approximately \$150,000 in grants each year to local organizations to preserve, protect, and enhance terrestrial and marine habitats associated with the local shoreline through preservation, education, public access, research and restoration projects. By its successful creation and management of these and other programs, Associated Students has demonstrated the requisite experience and expertise to administer the proposed project along the West Campus Bluffs Trail.

Site Description: The West Campus Bluffs Trail is located on the coastal bluffs in the western section of the UCSB campus. The trail extends about one-half mile from the Cliff House at Coal Oil Point to the western edge of Isla Vista and is a component of the designated Coastal Trail in

Santa Barbara County. The trail lies below a 37.2 acre area of protected open space called the West Campus Nature Park. The trail connects Isla Vista, an unincorporated residential and commercial neighborhood, and one of the densest urban areas in southern Santa Barbara County, with popular surfing beaches, the UC Natural Reserve area at Coal Oil Point, and hiking trails in the vicinity of the Devereux Slough and Elwood Mesa ecosystems.

The topography of West Campus Bluffs consists of a low gradient elevated marine terrace at an elevation of about 30 feet above sea level. The project area lies adjacent to sloping sea cliffs with gradients of 30 to 100 percent. A shallow swale descends to the northwest through sand dunes to Devereux Slough and Sands Beach. A habitat survey performed in August 2006 identified native habitats on the site as southern coastal bluff scrub and coastal scrub, purple needlegrass grassland, and vernal pools. Non-native habitats consist of annual grasslands, ice plant, kikuyu grass, eucalyptus woodland, Monterey cypress and acacia.

In its current condition, the trail is eroded and rutted from bicycle tires and footprints. A portion of the nature park is crisscrossed with an informal network of trails that have evolved in part by people attempting to avoid the degraded sections of the West Campus Bluff Trail.

Project History: Before 1987, students and pedestrians hiking above the beach along the bluffs created an informal social trail. In 1990, the University added improvements to this trail as a condition for approval of its Faculty and Student Housing Plan. Signs and benches were added, the trail was surfaced with decomposed granite and bordered with redwood headers, and the path was named the West Campus Bluffs Trail. Since that time, heavy use by joggers, pedestrians and bicyclists (including students carrying surfboard on the bikes) has seriously impacted the trail. It is severely eroded and rutted from bicycle tires and footprints. Because of its condition and its proximity to sensitive habitat areas, the trail needs to be reconstructed and the area restored.

The UCSB planning staff and student organizations have long desired to reconstruct the West Campus Bluff Trail to make it handicapped accessible, less prone to flooding and erosion, and more protective of adjacent habitat areas. The project is recommended in the UCSB Faculty Student Housing, Open Space and Habitat Management Plan as part of the Long Range Development Plan Amendment of 2004.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$175,000
Shoreline Preservation Fund	36,000
Total Project Cost	\$211,000

The expected source of Conservancy funds for the proposed project is an appropriation from the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Fund (Proposition 40). This funding may be used for the development of land and water resources in accordance with provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The proposed project serves to assist in developing land-based public access to and along the coast. Among other things, Proposition 40 requires the Conservancy to give priority to grant projects with matching funds (Public Resources Code §5096.651); this project is supported by matching funds from the Associated Students and BIKES.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is consistent with Division 21, Chapter 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Sections 31400-31409 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access.

Section 31400 states that the Conservancy will “have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline.”

Section 31400.1 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations to develop, operate or manage lands for public access purposes to and along the coast.

Consistent with the requirement that accessways serve more than local public needs, the proposed project will reconstruct a segment of the Coastal Trail along the Santa Barbara coast, a statewide, national and international visitor destination, and provide an important linkage to the regionally-significant Coal Oil Point Reserve.

Under Section 31400.2, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of the initial development of public accessways, provided that the Conservancy evaluates the fiscal resources of the applicant, the current funds available for coastal accessways, the urgency of the project relative to other access projects, and consistency with other Conservancy funding criteria. Associated Students is a nonprofit organization that (among other things) promotes and helps fund planning and improvement of bike path projects on and adjacent to the UCSB campus. Without additional funding from the Conservancy, Associated Students will be unable to reconstruct this trail segment.

Consistent with Section 31400.3, the Conservancy is authorized to provide funds “required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division.” Restoration of the West Campus Bluffs Trail will expand public access opportunities along the south coast of Santa Barbara County.

Consistent with Section 31408, the Conservancy is authorized to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail, in consultation with the California Coastal Commission and the California Department of Parks and Recreation. The West Campus Bluffs Trail is designated by the California Coastal Commission as a segment of the California Coastal Trail in Santa Barbara County.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective B** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, this project would incorporate and install Coastal Trail signs in key areas along a 0.5-mile segment of the California Coastal Trail in Santa Barbara County.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective C** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, this project would improve a 0.5-mile segment of the California Coastal Trail in public ownership along the south coast of Santa Barbara County.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project would assist in protecting open space and views by avoiding impacts to sensitive natural areas

from the use of the Coastal Trail and by encouraging visitors to enjoy the expansive ocean views this site has to offer.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective D** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project would increase coastal recreational opportunities for residents and visitors by implementing measures to control erosion along a segment of the Coastal Trail.

**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 has been promoted and partially funded by the students of UCSB, acting through their student government organization (Associated Students) and its environmental funding program (Shoreline Preservation Fund). It also has the support of local officials and organizations including Assemblyman Pedro Nava, Third District County Supervisor Brooks Firestone, the Isla Vista Recreation and Park District, and Surfrider Foundation. (Exhibit 4: Letters of Support).
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located in the coastal zone of Santa Barbara County. It follows the edge of the coastal bluffs on the west campus of UCSB and is adjacent to sensitive habitat areas.
5. **Need:** Associated Students and the Shoreline Preservation Fund have raised approximately \$60,000 for planning and construction of this project. The University itself does not have capital funds available to reconstruct the trail, although it has and will continue to contribute extensive in-kind services. Conservancy funds are needed in order to assure the project will move forward.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The West Campus Bluffs Trail is a segment of the California Coastal Trail, enjoyed by students at UCSB, local residents, and visitors from other parts of the state and country. The project will reconstruct the trail and protect adjacent habitat areas. Restoration of the trail will benefit native plants and vernal pools by directing users away from those areas onto the trail.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** The West Campus Bluffs Trail has become highly degraded. If not reconstructed, it may cease to exist, eliminating a popular segment of the California Coastal Trail, and causing further deterioration to adjacent sensitive habitats as more people form social trails across the bluffs and nature park.

8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The project will provide public access and protect adjacent sensitive habitats.
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
10. **Readiness:** The Associated Students has completed designs for this project and is ready to move ahead with construction.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The project will reconstruct an important section of the California Coastal Trail, a high priority for the Conservancy. It will also result in the protection of native habitats, including rare vernal pools.
13. **Cooperation:** The project is the result of close cooperation between students, UCSB, and others.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE CONSERVANCY’S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

As a condition of approval, the project will be designed and constructed so as to be consistent with the Coastal Conservancy’s Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development. In particular,

Standard No. 1. Protect the Public and Coastal Resources: The project will be designed and located to minimize alteration of natural landforms, will be subordinate to the setting’s character, prevent unwarranted hazards to the land and public safety, and protect environmentally sensitive habitat.

Standard No. 2. Correct Hazards: The project will be designed and constructed to correct the rutting and soil erosion that has resulted from the intense use of social trails on site.

Standard No. 3. Access Construction and Location: The reconstructed trail will be 10 to 12 feet wide, set back from the bluff edge, wheelchair accessible, and will utilize pervious materials with a binding polymer.

Standard No. 8. Trails: The proposed project will connect the Isla Vista neighborhood to areas of protected open space, the Coal Oil Point Reserve (a unit of the UC Natural Reserve System), and popular surfing beaches. It will feature appropriate paving materials, an adequate trail drainage system, trash receptacles and benches, and Coastal Trail signage.

Standard No. 10. Coastal Bikeways: As reconstructed, the West Campus Bluffs Trail will provide many features of a Class I Bikeway.

Standard No. 13: Barrier-Free Access. The proposed project will be wheelchair accessible along its length.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The Santa Barbara County Local Coastal Program (LCP) contains several general policies that support the restoration of the West Campus Bluffs Trail. Policy 7-1, for example, states that the public’s right to access to and along the shoreline shall be protected. The proposed project will reconstruct a segment of the designated Coastal Trail that traverses coastal bluffs directly above the shoreline.

In addition, the proposed project is consistent with Policy 7-5 of the LCP, which states that all areas proposed for public access in or adjacent to natural resources shall consider environmental carrying capacity. One of the objectives of this project is to reconstruct the trail so as to preserve habitats such as vernal pools and native grasslands within the West Campus Nature Park. The project is also consistent with Policy 7-12, which encourages the County and University to provide public access to the beaches adjacent to the University, particularly the west campus area.

The project is also consistent with the UCSB Long Range Development Plan (LRDP), approved by the Coastal Commission in 1986, which identifies West Campus Bluffs Trail as the primary west campus accessway along the bluff seaward of the West Campus Faculty Housing facility.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

In 2004, a Draft Environment Impact Report (EIR) was prepared for the UCSB Faculty and Family Student Housing, Open Space and Habitat Management Plan, and Long Range Development Plan Amendment. Restoration of West Campus Bluffs Trail was included as a project within the Open Space and Habitat Management Plan portion of the EIR. In particular, the Open Space and Habitat Management Plan described the West Campus Nature Park in the West Campus Bluffs area as an enhancement opportunity, and described the West Campus Bluffs Trail restoration project as a component of that project.

The Final EIR concluded there would be beneficial impacts to biological resources from closing off informal trails and improving the existing formal trail and restoring the West Campus Nature Park. It found that although the West Campus Bluffs do not currently contain any native grassland habitat, the proposed project would result in portions of the area being restored and preserved as native grassland habitat. In addition, the 1.1-acre area of southern coastal bluff scrub on site was currently fragmented by informal trails that result in the degradation and loss of that habitat. By replacing informal trails with a formalized trail system, the proposed project would result in reduced impacts to coastal bluff scrub and native grasslands on the site (pages 4.4-68 through 4.4-72).

The EIR also found that although the West Campus Bluffs do not support any sensitive species, restoration and trail construction activities could have short-term impacts to nesting birds and sensitive plants as non-native vegetation is removed prior to restoration and/or mechanized equipment is utilized to prepare areas for restoration and trail formalization. To minimize potential impacts to sensitive species, the Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (Section 13 of the EIR) required the University to implement the following Mitigation Measures in the restoration of the West Campus Bluffs Trail, which would reduce the short-term, construction-related impacts to biological resources to less than significant levels. Those measures are summarized below:

MM 4.4-1(f) Nesting Birds: The removal of trees, shrubs or weedy vegetation should avoid the February 1 through August 31 bird nesting period to the extent possible. If it is not feasible to avoid the nesting period, then the mitigation measure requires certain bird surveys by a qualified biologist, as well as measures to avoid or postpone clearing or construction near any identifies nests of special status or other protected nesting birds.

MM 4.4-1(n) Monitoring of Special Status Wildlife: Construction and construction-related noise associated with renovation of the West Campus Bluffs Trails could impact special status wildlife species located within or adjacent to the area. To minimize such impacts, a monitoring program is to be developed by the University and approved by the state Department of Fish & Game and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure the continued viability of individual or populations of special status wildlife that currently occur within or near the project area. The plan is to focus on maintaining baseline conditions of current populations by creating management or enhancement goals, developing a monitoring timeframe, establishing viability criteria, identifying appropriate remedial actions to be taken if viability criteria are not met, and development of a funding mechanism to ensure long-term monitoring.

MM 4.4-2(b) Use Of Native Plants: Consistent with provisions of the University's LRDP policies, native plant species from genetic stock from the Ellwood-Devereux watershed are to be used in all open space areas (such as the West Campus Bluffs Trail).

MM 4.5-4(b): Well Monitoring: If during trail construction abandoned oil wells are discovered, a soil sampling strategy will be prepared and implemented to characterize potential contamination from the well's former oil activities. Sampling locations shall be identified based upon historical review of on-site uses, locations of ground disturbance from either residential development or trail or coastal access improvements, and consultation with the County of Santa Barbara Fire Department Fire Prevention Division (FPD). Once soils have been characterized, remediation, where necessary, shall be completed in conformance with County standards. County FPD shall review and approve closure reports for remediation plans upon completion of remediation activities and prior to ground disturbance.

MM 4-11(g) Educational Signage: Finally, to minimize impacts to existing or potential resources, the Final EIR requires as a mitigation measure that each trail access point shall have posted signage requesting that users respect the sensitive sources of the Open Space Plan area, including biological, cultural, wetlands, and geological resources. Such signage shall convey an educational tone in keeping with the mission of the University's role in the Open Space Plan.

The Final EIR determined that with the mitigation measures adopted in the EIR and its Mitigation and Monitoring Plan, there would be less than significant impacts from development of the West Campus Nature Park, including the trail restoration project. The University of California certified the EIR (Exhibit 3) in September, 2004 in connection with adoption of the Amendment of the Long Range Development Plan, Santa Barbara Campus. The EIR incorporates a monitoring program for all mitigation measures specified in the EIR. The University filed a Notice of Determination for the project on September 21, 2004 (Exhibit 4). [Due to modifications in other components of the LRDP unrelated to the West Campus Bluffs Trail project, the University recirculated the EIR and produced an Addendum to the Final EIR in March 2006.]

Coastal Conservancy staff has independently reviewed the EIR (including the mitigation and monitoring plan), the Addendum to the Final EIR and public comment and recommends that the Conservancy find that the project as designed avoids, reduces, or mitigates the possible significant environmental effects to a level of insignificance, and that there is no substantial evidence that the project, as mitigated, has the potential for any significant adverse environmental effects (as defined under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382). Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination.

