COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 8, 2005

ISLA VISTA BEACH ACCESSWAY IMPROVEMENTS
File No. 05-051
Project Manager: Mary Travis

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to $150,000 to the County of Santa Barbara to reconstruct three public beach accessways on Del Playa Drive in Isla Vista.

LOCATION: Del Playa Drive at Escondido Pass, Camino Pescadero, and Camino Del Sur, Isla Vista, Santa Barbara County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: Photos of beach stairways

Exhibit 3: Letter from Isla Vista Recreation and Park District

Exhibit 4: Letters of Support

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 disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred fifty thousand dollars ($150,000.00) to the County of Santa Barbara to reconstruct three public beach accessways on Del Playa Drive in Isla Vista, as shown on Exhibit 1 to the accompanying staff recommendation. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the County of Santa Barbara shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
   a. A work program, including final design plans and specifications, schedule, and budget for construction.
   b. The names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the work.
   c. Evidence that that all necessary permits and approvals have been obtained.
   d. A signing plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy funding.

2. The County of Santa Barbara or its successor in interest shall manage and maintain the accessways for a period of not less than twenty years. Transfer of ownership of the accessways to the Isla Vista Recreation and Park District may require the Isla Vista Recreation and Park District to enter into a 31116(c) agreement with the Conservancy."

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 in Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31409) regarding public access to the coast.
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 will serve more than local public needs."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff is recommending that the Conservancy provide up to $150,000 to the County of Santa Barbara to reconstruct three public beach accessways in the community of Isla Vista (Exhibit 1). Located on Del Playa Drive at Escondido Pass, Camino Del Sur, and Camino Pescadero, the three are among five public accessways in Isla Vista built to provide beachgoers safe access down a 40- to 50-foot-high bluff to a sandy beach and surf spots that attract area residents and visitors alike (Exhibit 2). The wooden stairways at the three accessways are badly deteriorated, having withstood forty years of heavy public use and exposure to the elements, and during winter storms they are frequently closed for repairs. Also, at the Camino Pescadero and Escondido Pass accessways, storm drain pipes running beneath the bluff pose a hazard: the pipes, which drain the Isla Vista streets and emerge from the bluff face underneath the stairways, are old and have begun to rust through, threatening the stability of the two stairways and the paths leading to them. Several years ago the pipe at the Camino Del Sur accessway burst during an El Niño storm, causing massive erosion of the bluff. That pipe was repaired and retrofitted with a plastic liner, but the County is concerned that the other two might also fail.

The proposed project would entail extensive retrofitting of the accessways that would make them more durable in the marine environment and greatly reduce recurring maintenance costs. Work would include replacing the stairways' deteriorated wood components and corroded metal hardware and outfitting them with stainless steel handrails. The Camino Pescadero stairway also would receive a new stainless steel flight as well as repairs to the concrete steps and footing at the stairway's base. Additionally, the County would make repairs to the deteriorated storm drain pipes at the Camino Pescadero and Escondido Pass accessways, installing plastic liners in about 450 feet of pipe at the two sites to prevent failure, as well as attaching ninety-degree elbows at the pipe outlets to prevent storm water from hitting the stairs during high flows.

The cost to rehabilitate the three accessways, including both design and construction, is estimated at $366,099. The County has sufficient funds of its own to pay for preparation of plans and specifications, environmental review documents, permits, and construction bid documents, as well as a portion of the construction at the three stairways. The County also has received a grant from the Shoreline Preservation Fund, a fund established and administered by students of

the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) and funded by student registration fees to support local efforts to enhance, protect, and restore local coastal resources. The proposed Conservancy grant of $150,000 would enable the County to carry out the project within the coming year and, hopefully, complete construction before next summer.

Currently the three accessways are managed by the Transportation Division of the County Public Works Department (the County Parks Department manages Isla Vista's two other accessways), whose primary responsibility is maintenance of the County's road system. In order to ensure consistent maintenance of the beach stairways, the County intends to transfer ownership of the three accessways to the Isla Vista Recreation and Park District (Park District) once the reconstruction is complete. The Park District, a locally-based public agency that manages about 72 acres of parks in Isla Vista, has committed to operating and maintaining the accessways and to developing and implementing a comprehensive landscape and facility plan for them (Exhibit 3). The County will provide the Park District with a small endowment to help pay for long-term maintenance of the accessways.

Site Description: Isla Vista is an unincorporated community surrounded on three sides by UCSB; to the south is the Pacific Ocean. It is one of the most densely populated communities in California, comprising mainly university students and low-income families, and recreational open space is in great demand. The town's five beach accessways are located on Del Playa Drive between Camino Majorca and El Embarcadero (Exhibit 1). Surfing is a popular activity here; many surfers claim that Isla Vista has the most consistent surf between Gaviota and Carpinteria. Visitors also come to bird watch, fish, kayak, and stroll along the beach. Above the beach, along Del Playa Drive, are a number of small oceanfront parks and open space areas. The newest of these will be the two-acre Walter H. Capps Park, located on the block between the Escondido Pass and Camino Del Sur stairways and created in part with Conservancy funding assistance. These blufftop open spaces afford views of the shoreline and across the Santa Barbara Channel to the Channel Islands.

Project History: Isla Vista's accessways were constructed in the 1960s to serve local and regional needs for beach access. Because they were built at street ends, where the County held road easements, their management fell to the County Public Works Department. Over time the accessways have been battered by winter storms and high tides, and the materials used in the original design have deteriorated. Two of the accessways were transferred to the County Parks Department, which has rebuilt one stairway and is in the process of refurbishing the other. Although the Public Works Department has made repairs to the three accessways under its jurisdiction, the County finally decided that rather than continuously make repairs to a poor design it would develop and implement a better design. The County and the Isla Vista Recreation and Park District also agreed that the Park District was better situated than the County to operate and maintain the accessways. Over the past four years the County and the Park District have worked to develop a design, identify funding for the project, and work out the terms of the transfer.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	$150,000
County of Santa Barbara	136,099
Shoreline Preservation Fund (UCSB)	80,000
Total	**$366,099**

The expected source of Conservancy funds for this project is the FY 04-05 appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhoods and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 40) for acquisition, development, rehabilitation, restoration, and protection of land and water resources in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation. As discussed below, the project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Consistent with Proposition 40, the proposed project includes matching funds from other sources.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31409), regarding public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 31400 states the Legislature's intent that the Conservancy play a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the coast. Through the proposed authorization the Conservancy would assist in keeping Isla Vista's beach accessways safe and open for public use.

Section 31400.1 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies to develop, operate, or manage lands for public access purposes that serve more than local public needs. Consistent with that section, the proposed grant would assist the County of Santa Barbara with the reconstruction of three beach accessways that are used by local residents, UCSB students, and visitors from all over.

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 available for coastal public accessway and urban waterfront projects, the fiscal resources of the grantee, the importance 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 41 percent of the amount needed to complete the project.

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 would increase coastal recreational opportunities for residents and visitors by correcting potentially dangerous conditions at three popular beach accessways and reducing the number of days that they are closed for repairs. It would also protect the County's existing investments in the accessways by redesigning them to be sturdier and implementing measures to prevent erosion of the blufftop.

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 from the public:** This project has the support of the students of UCSB, as demonstrated by their grant to the County from the Shoreline Protection Fund. The project also has the support of Assembly Member Pedro Nava and the Isla Vista Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation. Letters of support are attached as Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project site is located within the coastal zone of Santa Barbara County.
5. **Need:** The three dilapidated accessways must be rebuilt so that visitors can continue to reach the beach safely. The County has secured over half of the funding needed for this project, and will also provide an endowment to the Park District to help with long-term maintenance. Still, a funding gap remains. Conservancy funding is needed to enable the project to go forward
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** In addition to serving the entire community of Isla Vista, this project would benefit people from throughout the region and the tens of thousands of students and visitors who come to UCSB and Isla Vista from all over the state and the country.

Additional Criteria

12. **Readiness:** The design work for the project is underway, and, if the Conservancy approves the proposed grant, the County expects to be able to go to bid by the end of January 2006 and complete construction before the end of May.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** In October 2000 the Conservancy provided a grant of $48,500 to the Isla Vista Recreation and Park District to construct access facilities including a blufftop erosion control demonstration project at Pelican Park, located on Del Playa Drive adjacent to the El Embarcadero beach accessway. In June 2005 the Conservancy provided $300,000 to the County of Santa Barbara to acquire three blufftop parcels on Del Playa between the Escondido Pass and Camino Del Sur stairways that ultimately will form a two-acre park overlooking the ocean. This project would continue the Conservancy's commitment to providing much-needed coastal access and open space in the densely populated community of Isla Vista.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The certified Local Coastal Program (LCP) of Santa Barbara County recognizes the significance of providing and protecting coastal access and recreation. In addition to advocating the provision of additional public access to and along the coast, the LCP also encourages responsible management of coastal recreational areas. Noting "the physical and visual degradation of some coastal areas used for recreational pursuits," the LCP states, "These areas need improvements . . . to restore their full recreational value." Consistent with the LCP, the County proposes to restore three heavily used beach accessways to ensure continued public access at these sites.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15302, which provides a categorical exemption for the replacement or reconstruction of existing structures or facilities provided the new structure will be located on the same site and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structure replaced. The proposed reconstructed beach accessways would be located on the same site and would have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the existing structures. Upon Conservancy approval of the proposed project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.

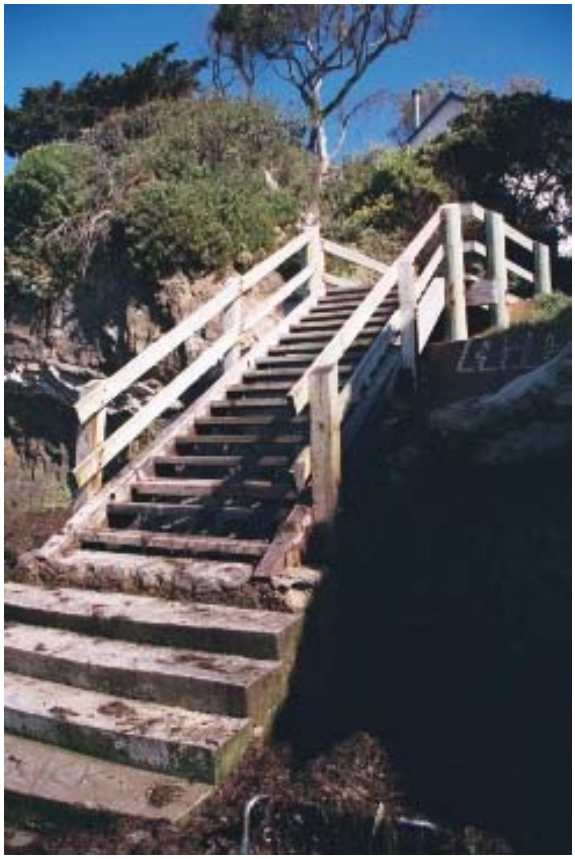
Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Public beach access stairways at Escondido Pass, Camino Pescadero, and Camino Del Sur

Exhibit 2: Photos of beach stairways

Escondido Pass stairway



Bottom portion of Escondido Pass stairway

Exhibit 2: Photos of beach stairways

Camino Pescadero stairway

Lower portion of Camino Pescadero stairway

Exhibit 2: Photos of beach stairways

Bottom portion of Camino Pescadero stairway

Camino Pescadero support members

Exhibit 2: Photos of beach stairways

Camino Del Sur stairway

Bottom portion of Camino Del Sur stairway, retrofitted storm drain outlet