

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
April 24, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA WATER TRAIL IMPLEMENTATION

File No. 07-017
Project Manager: Ann Buell

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to make the following disbursements for environmental analysis and project planning to implement the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Plan in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area: 1) up to \$20,000 to Grasseti Environmental Consulting to augment an existing professional services contract for environmental review of the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Plan, and 2) up to \$20,000 to the Association of Bay Area Governments to conduct preliminary planning for future water trail signage.

LOCATION: San Francisco Bay Area, including Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, San Mateo, San Francisco, Marin, Sonoma, Napa, and Solano Counties (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Water Trail Act](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160 - 31165 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the following disbursements for environmental analysis and project planning to implement the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Plan in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area: 1) up to \$20,000 to Grasseti Environmental Consulting to augment an existing professional services contract for environmental review of the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Plan, and 2) up to \$20,000 to the Association of Bay Area Governments to conduct preliminary planning for future water trail signage.”

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 authorization is consistent with Public Resources Code Sections 31160 *et seq.*, regarding the Conservancy's mandate to address the resource and recreation goals of the San Francisco Bay Area.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007."
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

This authorization of \$40,000 would enable the Conservancy to complete the programmatic environmental review of the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Plan ("Water Trail Plan" or "Plan") in 2008 and prepare for short-term and long-term implementation of the Plan by funding sign reconnaissance and associated mapping. Specifically, this authorization would allow for disbursement of up to \$20,000 of these funds to Grassetto Environmental Consulting to augment an existing professional services contract with the Conservancy for completion of the environmental review of the Water Trail Plan under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); and disbursement of up to \$20,000 of these funds to the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) in a grant to conduct preliminary planning for future water trail signage at Water Trail sites that coincide with the San Francisco Bay Trail.

Background

The San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail (Water Trail) is envisioned to be a network of access sites (or "trail heads") that will enable people in human-powered boats and beachable sail craft to safely enjoy single and multiple-day trips around San Francisco Bay. The Water Trail has been designed to increase boater safety, avoid impacts to wildlife and habitat, and enhance public access to and recreation on the Bay, both through education, outreach, and stewardship efforts and careful selection of trail heads. The Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) completed a draft Plan in 2007 to help guide the development of the Water Trail, with 112 "backbone" sites selected as potential trail heads. The Plan was submitted to the legislature for review in January of this year, as required by the Water Trail Act (AB1296, 2005, Exhibit 2).

The Water Trail Act identified the Conservancy as the lead agency for the funding and development of projects implementing the Plan. As such, the Conservancy is the lead for development of a programmatic Environmental Impact Report (EIR) consistent with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); development of an education, outreach, and stewardship plan; a sign program for trail heads; organization and leadership of public meetings; development of communication materials to assist in information exchange with project participants and stakeholders on a continuous basis (website, brochure, news briefs, guidebook); initial analysis of individual sites for their suitability as trail heads and eligibility for funding; and other tasks. Conservancy staff is working closely with other agencies, organizations, and stakeholders to accomplish these and other tasks.

Environmental Compliance (\$20,000)

Pursuant to the authority delegated to the Executive Officer for technical services contracting up to \$200,000, the Conservancy entered into a professional services agreement with Grassetto Environmental Consulting in September 2007 for \$200,000 to develop the programmatic EIR for the Water Trail Plan. An additional \$20,000 is needed to complete the EIR, for which

Conservancy authorization is needed. The Initial Study for the Plan was completed in November 2007 and revealed more issue areas requiring research than had been originally anticipated. Also, the variability among potential trail heads and the complexity of the aquatic and shoreline environment of San Francisco Bay has necessitated extensive use of a Geographic Information System (GIS) by the consulting team. Staff requests authorization for an additional \$20,000 to augment the contract with Grassetti Environmental Consulting to allow for a broader analysis of environmental issues and to provide some contingency funds in case other unexpected, complex issues arise. The EIR is expected to be complete and will be presented to the Conservancy for its review and possible certification by the fall of 2008.

Signs at Water Trail Sites (\$20,000)

Conservancy staff is also preparing for the official launching of the Water Trail project after certification of the EIR. This preparation includes the development of a sign program for individual sites. Approximately 80 of the potential 112 trail heads are closely associated with the San Francisco Bay Trail (Bay Trail). Bay Trail staff are currently working under a Conservancy grant to ABAG to plan for improved signage at all Bay Trail sites. An additional grant of \$20,000 to ABAG would accomplish two tasks for the Water Trail. First, Bay Trail staff would collect data describing recommended locations for directional and identification signs for the future Water Trail while already in the field collecting similar data for the Bay Trail (see “Project Financing,” below). These data, including precise GPS-based spatial coordinates, would be entered into a spreadsheet and digital photos would be taken of all sites.

Second, a mapping specialist at ABAG would prepare a map and photo set for each of the visited sites, incorporating the GPS identification points. These two data sets would be very useful to Conservancy staff and the owners and managers of specific sites when trail heads are designated and signs need to be installed. The underlying maps, made with aerial photos, would be useful in other management applications as well. ABAG is a local government body serving the nine-county Bay Area and oversees the Bay Trail program. It has created excellent maps for the Bay Trail in the past and has all of the infrastructure and expertise needed to do the same for the Water Trail.

Site Description: The San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail will be a network of landing and launching sites located along the shoreline of the nine Bay Area Counties (Marin, Sonoma, Napa, Solano, Contra Costa, Alameda, Santa Clara, San Mateo, San Francisco) and entirely within BCDC’s jurisdiction. The proposed trail heads vary in terms of level of existing development and management, with some in established parks and marinas, and others consisting of a sandy or rocky shoreline and nothing more at this time. The sites are clustered primarily around the Central Bay, but there are sites in all nine counties (Exhibit 1).

Project History: The California legislature established the Water Trail in September, 2005 with the passage of the Water Trail Act (Exhibit 2). This legislation culminated years of advocacy efforts by Bay Access, Inc., a nonprofit organization comprised of kayakers, windsurfers, and other non-motorized small boat recreationists who recognized the potential benefits of this regional trail in the Bay Area. Bay Access, Inc. approached both Conservancy and BCDC staff in search of support and funding for the Trail several years before the legislation was passed. Conservancy staff supported the concept because the proposed Trail would increase public access to the Bay while also educating boaters about the need to avoid impacts to wildlife and wetland habitats. Furthermore, boaters in non-motorized watercraft have the potential to become strong stewards of the Bay.

As mentioned under “Project Summary,” above, the Conservancy was identified in the legislation as the lead for implementation and funding for the Trail. Conservancy staff worked collaboratively with BCDC and others on the development of a Water Trail Plan and together with BCDC staff presented an overview of the Water Trail to the Conservancy board at the July 16, 2007 board meeting as part of the Executive Officer’s Report. The Conservancy expressed support for the draft Water Trail Plan and continued staff leadership in the project.

The Conservancy provided funding for facilitation of the planning process through an interagency agreement with the Center for Collaborative Policy at California State University, Sacramento in late 2005 and early 2006 (totaling \$20,548). The Conservancy also provided \$50,000 in funding in June 2006 to Bay Access, Inc. to start building a website and a communication and stewardship plan for the project. In the fall of 2007, when BCDC completed the final draft of the Water Trail Plan, the Conservancy entered into a contract with Grassetti Environmental Consulting to produce a programmatic EIR for the Plan (\$200,000). Grassetti Environmental Consulting was chosen through a competitive process in which Conservancy staff in collaboration with BCDC and ABAG staff selected the most qualified consulting team.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$40,000
Total Project Cost	\$40,000

The expected source of Conservancy funds is the fiscal year 2005-2006 appropriation for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program from the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Act of 2000 (Proposition 12). This funding source may be used for the development of public use facilities in the San Francisco Bay Area and for projects that are consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21, which specifically mandates the Conservancy to “be the lead agency in the funding and development of projects implementing the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Plan prepared pursuant to Section 66694 of the Government Code.” (Public Resources Code Section 31163(d)(1)).

As noted under “Project Summary,” above, the work to be performed under a grant to ABAG for signage reconnaissance work along the Bay Trail would build upon a separate grant from the Conservancy to ABAG for Bay Trail signage (\$90,000). That separate grant stems from the September 2007 Conservancy authorization for \$3,000,000 to ABAG, which included \$12,000,000 in matching funds. Although difficult to quantify, a portion of those matching funds can be considered a match for the current request for \$20,000. The other funds that would be expended under this requested authorization would be a contract augmentation for which matching funds would not be expected.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Section 31160-31165, to address resource and recreation goals in the San Francisco Bay Area. In particular, the Conservancy may award grants to improve public access to, within, and around the bay and without having a significant adverse impact on environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife, including wetlands and other wildlife habitats, through completion and operation of bay, coast, water, and ridge trail systems (Section 31162(a)); to assist in the implementation of the adopted plans of local governments and special districts (Section 31162(c)); and promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational

purposes (Section 31162(d)). The initial development of the Water Trail under the proposed project will serve to further each of these objectives in a manner that promotes access and recreation while protecting natural resources.

This project is appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in Section 31163(c) in that (1) it is supported by adopted local or regional plans, such as the San Francisco Bay Plan, as amended (see “Consistency with San Francisco Bay Plan”); (2) it includes multi-jurisdictional participation from federal and state agencies, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Boating and Waterways; regional commissions, districts and councils, such as the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, East Bay Regional Park District, and Association of Bay Area Governments; and serves a regional constituency around all of San Francisco Bay and beyond; and (3) can be implemented in a timely way because the respective grantee and contractor have the staff and availability to complete the work.

Conservancy authorization to fund this proposed project would also be consistent with Sections 31163(d)(1), 31163 (d)(2), and 31163(d)(3), which direct the Conservancy to be the lead agency in the funding and development of projects implementing the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Plan, including the awarding of grants that are generally consistent with and advance the preparation or implementation of the plan, and which help coordinate a collaborative partnership with others in the preparation of the plan.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective A** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project will help to provide recreational facilities such as staging areas, docks and piers, campgrounds, and parking lots, as appropriate, as part of the implementation of the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on September 20, 2007, 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 the support of Assemblymember Loni Hancock, the National Park Service, BCDC, California Department of Boating and Waterways, San Francisco Bay Trail Project (ABAG), Port of San Francisco, East Bay Regional Park District, Save the Bay, non-motorized boating groups and businesses (Bay Area Sea Kayakers, Western Sea Kayakers, San Francisco Board Sailing Association, City Kayak) and others.

4. **Location:** The nine San Francisco Bay Area counties, within the jurisdiction of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, and within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program (see “Site Description”).
5. **Need:** The Conservancy is the designated lead agency in the funding and development of the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Plan. This project would not occur without Conservancy participation.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail is a regional project serving the nine-county Bay Area.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** It is important to finish the programmatic environmental review of the Water Trail Plan in a timely manner so that the project may be implemented. Likewise, planning for signs and further evaluation of specific sites needs to happen now so the implementation of the Water Trail project may proceed smoothly and efficiently when the programmatic environmental review is complete.
8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** This authorization would provide funds for environmental review and public access elements of the Water Trail project.
9. **Leverage:** The grant to ABAG for signage reconnaissance work represents a great cost savings in that Bay Trail staff will be going to all 80-plus sites already as part of a separate grant.
10. **Readiness:** All of the funding recipients are ready to begin work as soon as their respective grants and contracts are in place.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
12. **Cooperation:** Conservancy staff and ABAG’s Bay Trail staff are coordinating with one another to accomplish objectives for the Water Trail and Bay Trail simultaneously while maximizing the productive use of staff time and funding.

CONSISTENCY WITH SAN FRANCISCO BAY PLAN:

This project is consistent with the *San Francisco Bay Plan (Bay Plan)* adopted by BCDC in 1969, as amended. The most pertinent sections are found in “Part IV, Development of the Bay and Shoreline: Findings and Policies Concerning Recreation On and Around the Bay” and “Part IV, Development of the Bay and Shoreline: Findings and Policies Conserving Public Access to the Bay.”

Findings and Policies Concerning Recreation On and Around the Bay

Policy 1 states that diverse and accessible water-oriented recreational facilities should be provided and be well distributed around the Bay to accommodate a broad range of water-oriented recreational activities and that waterfront parks should be provided wherever possible. This policy generally supports the development and implementation of the Water Trail.

Policy 3 emphasizes that recreational facilities, including non-motorized small boat access, should be encouraged and allowed by the Commission [BCDC], provided they are located, improved and managed consistent with standards specified in Subsections 3 a. through h.

Subsection 3. a. **General** (7) focuses on signs: “Access to marinas, launch ramps, beaches, fishing piers, and other recreational facilities should be clearly posted with signs...” Subsection 3.e. **Non-Motorized Small Boats** provides in detail the basic policies that are consistent with the Water Trail Plan, including placement of access points to avoid significant adverse effects on wildlife and their habitats, commercial navigation, and security zones; and provision for overnight accommodations where possible. This subsection further emphasizes the need for parking, site improvements, educational programs, facilities for storage and training, and design standards for non-motorized small boat launching access. The environmental review for the Water Trail Plan is examining the potential impacts that may be associated with the aforementioned activities.

Policy 4 a. **In Waterfront Parks** focuses on ways to assure optimum use of the Bay for recreation, stating that (1) “Where possible, parks should provide some camping facilities accessible only by boat...” and (4) “Public launching facilities for a variety of boats and other water-oriented recreational craft, such as kayaks, canoes and sailboards, should be provided in waterfront parks where feasible.” Implementation of these policies is being examined as part of the environmental review of the Water Trail Plan, since provision of such facilities may change the nature of public use of a waterfront park.

Findings and Policies Conserving Public Access to the Bay

In a similar vein to the policies in the Recreation chapter, cited above, Public Access Policy 4 states that “public access should be sited, designed and managed to prevent significant adverse effects on wildlife” and Policy 6 adds that public access improvements “should be identified with appropriate signs.” The environmental review of the Water Trail Plan and the proposed sign reconnaissance work proposed by ABAG are wholly consistent with these policies as well, since, respectively, this work examines potential impacts and identifies Water Trail public access sites.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA: Under California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 15262, feasibility and planning activities are statutorily exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review. Similarly, 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15306 categorically exempts basic data collection, research, and resource-evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon the Conservancy’s approval of the project.