

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 5, 2008

EDGEWOOD PARK INTERPRETIVE CENTER EXHIBITS

File No. 07-088-01
Project Manager: Michelle Jespersion

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$250,000 to the San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Foundation for design, fabrication, and installation of environmental education exhibits at a new Interpretive Center at the Edgewood County Park and Natural Preserve in San Mateo County.

LOCATION: Near the intersection of Highway 280 and Edgewood Road in San Mateo County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Exhibit Schematics](#)

Exhibit 3: [Letters of Support](#)

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 disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) to the San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Foundation for design, fabrication, and installation of environmental education exhibits for a new Interpretive Center at the Edgewood County Park and Natural Preserve in San Mateo County. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Foundation shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy, a detailed work program, budget, schedule and sign plan, and the names and qualifications of any subcontractors that it intends to employ. ”

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 Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last

updated by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007.

2. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
3. The San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Foundation is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff requests authorization to disburse up to \$250,000 to the San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Foundation for the design, fabrication, and installation of environmental education exhibits at a new Interpretive Center at the Edgewood County Park and Natural Preserve (Edgewood).

The new Interpretive Center will be located at Edgewood’s main entrance. The purpose of the Interpretive Center is to have a place to introduce visitors to the elements of nature, human ideas, and recreational opportunities that are found outside in Edgewood. The proposed authorization would provide part of the funding for the exhibits and displays that will convey information about Edgewood’s unique features, geologic and biological significance, and the stewardship needed to maintain Edgewood’s resources. Details about the proposed exhibits are discussed further below; schematics of the proposed exhibits are also included in Exhibit 2.

Staff from San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Foundation conducted background research on comparable institutions that offer environmental education programs and school district surveys to determine educator needs and interests as they pertain to Edgewood and what should be displayed at the Interpretive Center. As a result, the exhibits are designed with the needs of teachers in mind. In addition to text displayed on the panels throughout the center, the exhibits will encourage multi-sensory experiences appropriate for a wide range of visitors.

Upon entering the Interpretive Center, visitors will be greeted by a large and colorful three-piece photomural of Edgewood’s spectacular landscapes highlighting the serpentine grasslands, oak woodlands, and regional wetlands. A three-dimensional topographic watershed model features the park, its trails, and its 13 watercourses in the context of three surrounding bodies of water: Upper and Lower Crystal Springs Reservoirs, Cordilleras Creek, and the San Francisco Bay Estuary. Landscape photomurals of the Bay, Bair Island, and beyond extend the view. A compass rose helps visitors with orientation.

In a separate area of the Interpretive Center, a larger-than-life grassland soil profile offers an unusual venue to study the serpentine soil complex and explore the foundation of Edgewood’s unique biota. Set against a painted mural, the exhibit tells the above-ground story in terms of the below-ground structure revealing the geologic composition (iron-magnesium silicates) that created Edgewood’s unique soils. A reader railing separates the visitor from the diorama and serves as the mount for two interpretive panels: one on the ecology of serpentine soil complexes and another on the location of serpentine soils at Edgewood with an explanation of what rare flora occur at the site. Serpentine specimens are mounted on the railing, accessible to touch.

The Interpretive Center exhibits will also showcase: (1) a realistic riparian environment that focuses on the significance of water to Edgewood, water loving plants and specific water sites

(i.e. a freshwater marsh, vernal pool, seep, springs, and water falls), (2) the species in the park that are specialized to specific habitats in the park, (3) invasive species, and (4) the presence of humans in the area, from the time of the Ohlone Indians to the most recent present. There will also be a small, changeable exhibit area for seasonal or special exhibits.

The 1,200 square foot building will include exhibit displays that can be moved to allow the Nature Center to double as a space for meetings and trainings for docents and volunteers. The building will utilize green building concepts including recycled building materials and will incorporate active and passive solar energy and rainwater collection into the design.

Edgewood's location and unique natural and cultural resources provide a great opportunity for environmental education. The location is within two to twenty miles of most schools in San Mateo County. In addition, the Friends of Edgewood Preserve (FOE), a community-based nonprofit organization, has an active school outreach program that provides a hands-on experiential outdoor education program for students and teachers. FOE currently serves about 300 to 500 students per year; however, there are no support facilities for the program. FOE will use the Interpretive Center for educational activities during bad weather and also as a meaningful way to provide programming to children with disabilities. FOE has already begun to build their youth educational program by increasing outreach to schools, especially those in underserved communities, and recruiting additional volunteers and docents to handle more students in the program. In addition to the youth education program, FOE offers organized docent-led activities at the Edgewood every weekend from March to June. The Interpretive Center will also provide a shared office space for San Mateo County Park Rangers and FOE docents and volunteers.

Site Description:

The Edgewood County Park and Natural Preserve is located on the western edge of Redwood City, near the junction of Edgewood Road and Highway 280 (see Exhibit 1) and is managed by the San Mateo County Department of Parks and Recreation (County Parks). The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District provided original funding to acquire the property and currently maintains an easement over most of Edgewood that precludes development. The easement does not extend over the entrance area to the park where the Interpretive Center will be built.

Edgewood is one of the largest publicly-owned serpentine grassland areas on the peninsula and is known for incredible wildflower displays. The 100-acre Preserve, an area that is approximately 1 square mile, is also known for its remarkable species richness due to its varied topography and serpentine soils. To date, 480 different plant species have been identified in the Edgewood, of which 10 are rare or endangered plant species such as the San Mateo Thornmint. In addition, the serpentine grasslands at Edgewood support the last remaining population of the endangered Bay checkerspot butterfly on the San Francisco Peninsula; the butterfly only exists in three locations throughout the Bay Area. The remaining habitat for the Bay checkerspot butterfly at Edgewood is compromised by the invasion of non-native grasses detrimental to the survival of the butterfly.

Wetland, grassland, oak woodland, and chaparral plant communities provide habitat for a variety of other species such as frogs, lizards, foxes, coyote, bobcat, raccoon, deer, and over 70 resident and migratory birds. Water flows through Edgewood and supports several ponds, seeps and springs, and a freshwater marsh. Cordilleras Creek runs through the park near the main entrance. Once inhabited by the Ohlone Indians, the site also has a rich cultural history that draws 125,000 visitors annually and provides unique educational opportunities to inform visitors of both the natural and cultural significance of this area.

Project History:

In February 2001, the Conservancy authorized \$17,000 to County Parks to assist with an educational program at Edgewood. The grant provided funding for educational exhibits, interpretive signage, and brochures to teach the public about the serpentine grasslands and the associated plants and endangered butterflies. This funding supported an educational program that enhanced County Parks' habitat restoration efforts; the proposed project will continue to support this initial Conservancy investment by providing a permanent home for educational exhibits on the serpentine grasslands and Bay checkerspot butterfly and by highlighting County Parks' efforts to restore and preserve these resources.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$250,000
San Mateo County Parks	\$52,000
San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Foundation	<u>\$40,000</u>
Total Exhibit Cost	\$342,000

Conservancy funding is expected to come from fiscal year 2002/03 appropriated funds to the Conservancy from the "California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002" (Proposition 40) for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program re-appropriated in fiscal year 2005/06. Proposition 40 funds may be used for the deployment, protection, and development of land resources in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. This project is appropriate to receive funds from Proposition 40 because it will enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to the urban population for educational purposes as described further below. Proposition 40 also gives priority to projects that include a commitment for a matching contribution; for this project, the grantee will provide \$92,000 in matching contributions.

The total project cost of the new Interpretive Center, including the exhibits, is \$1,999,410. The total project costs includes concept plans, designs, studies, permitting, construction, exhibits, interior furnishing, a native demonstration garden, parking and entrance improvements, and restoration work at Cordilleras Creek. To date, the San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Foundation has raised over \$1,100,000 in private donations for this project and is looking to close the funding gap through other grant applications and additional private giving.

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 that serve to achieve goals identified in Section 31162. The proposed project will assist in the implementation of the adopted plans of local governments and special districts (Section 31162(c)); specifically, the Master Plan for Edgewood County Park and Nature Preserve identified the need and ordered an

evaluation of the feasibility of opening an interpretive center to support environmental education and foster volunteer activities. As a result, the new Interpretive Center achieves one of the desired outcomes of the Master Plan. The project is also consistent with Section 31162(d) to promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes because the Interpretive Center will highlight the on-going habitat restoration efforts for the Bay checkerspot butterfly and recreational opportunities that can be enjoyed at Edgewood and is located in close proximity to large urban populations in San Mateo, Santa Clara, and San Francisco counties.

This project is appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in Section 31163(c) in that: (1) it is supported by an adopted local plan, as explained above; (2) it includes multi-jurisdictional participation from San Mateo County, the cities of Redwood City and San Carlos, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, and environmental organizations and serves a regional constituency from the south San Francisco Bay Area and beyond; (3) it can be implemented in a timely way because of support from San Mateo County Department of Parks and Recreation and the planning that has already been completed; and (4) it includes matching funds from other sources as described under "Project Financing" above.

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

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective 11 B** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project provides recreational facilities such as interpretive signs and interpretive or educational centers.

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective 11 L** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project includes wheelchair-accessible and other ADA-compliant elements in a Conservancy funded-project.

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:** The project is supported by Assembly Member Ira Ruskin and State Senator Joe Simitian, San Mateo County Parks, Friends of Edgewood Natural Preserve and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (see Exhibit 3, Letters of Support). The project also enjoys a great level of community support with over 50 entities representing individuals, foundations, non-profit organizations, and business contributing gifts for the development of the Interpretive Center.

4. **Location:** The project is located in San Mateo County, one of the nine Bay Area counties.
5. **Need:** Without Conservancy funding, the San Mateo Parks and Recreation Foundation will not be able to leverage funds already received through private fundraising for development of the Interpretive Center. In addition, without exhibits for the Interpretive Center, San Mateo County Department of Parks and Friends of Edgewood Natural Preserve will not be able to expand both the volunteer program and existing environmental education activities to reach more of the public and engage more students.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Edgewood is an amazingly rich and biologically diverse place within close proximity to the large urban populations of San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara counties. The diversity of plant species, the special status of the Bay checkerspot butterfly, and the serpentine soils habitat on which the butterfly depends makes this park one of regional significance for the Bay Area. The preserve receives 125,000 visitors and 300-500 students annually. The new Interpretive Center is likely to increase visitation through expanded outreach efforts and will bolster the environmental education opportunities of these students and the general public.

Additional Criteria

7. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
8. **Readiness:** The first phase of improvements to the construction area concluded in fall 2007, and the grantee is ready to begin preparing the bid packages and obtaining the necessary permits to be able to initiate construction of the Interpretive Center building by fall of 2008.
9. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** “See “Project History” above.”
10. **Return to Conservancy:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
11. **Cooperation:** The San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Foundation and the San Mateo County Department of Parks and Recreation are managing the planning and design of the Interpretive Center with input from numerous community groups and agencies including the cities of San Carlos and Redwood City, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, Friends of Edgewood Natural Preserve, California Native Plant Society, Coyote Point Museum, and the Sequoia Audubon Society.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project to provide funding for the design, fabrication and installation of exhibits and displays in the interpretive center are categorically exempt under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code Reg. § 15322 which exempts educational or training programs which involve physical changes in the interior of existing structures. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon Conservancy approval of the project.