

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 27, 2010

**SAN FRANCISCO BAY TRAIL:
BAIR ISLAND PEDESTRIAN/BICYCLE BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION**

File No. 07-063-13
Project Manager: Lisa Ames

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization (1) to disburse up to \$800,000 to Ducks Unlimited to construct a pedestrian/bicycle bridge linking the San Francisco Bay Trail to Inner Bair Island and (2) for the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) to disburse up to \$200,000 of previously-authorized Conservancy funds to Ducks Unlimited for this project.

LOCATION: Inner Bair Island, Redwood City, San Mateo County (see Exhibits 1-2)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Site Map](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

Exhibit 4: Environmental Impact Statement/Report for Bair Island Restoration and Management Plan Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Bair Island Ecological Reserve Project (Certified January 22, 2008) (separate CD)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes (1) disbursement of up to \$800,000 (eight hundred thousand dollars) to Ducks Unlimited to construct a pedestrian and bicycle bridge linking the San Francisco Bay Trail to Inner Bair Island in Redwood City, San Mateo and (2) the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) to disburse an amount not to exceed \$200,000 (two hundred thousand dollars) of the total Conservancy funds authorized on September 20, 2007 to Ducks Unlimited for this project, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds, ABAG shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a grant agreement between ABAG and Ducks Unlimited.

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2. Prior to the disbursement of funds, ABAG and Ducks Unlimited shall each submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a final work program, schedule and budget.
3. ABAG and Ducks Unlimited shall each ensure installation of signs identifying the pedestrian/bicycle bridge and acknowledging the Conservancy and displaying its logo in a manner approved by the Executive Officer.
4. ABAG and Ducks Unlimited shall ensure compliance by Ducks Unlimited with all project actions, components and mitigation measures that are identified as needed to reduce or avoid significant environmental effects in the Environmental Impact Report certified by California Department of Fish and Game on January 22, 2008 pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and accompanying the project staff recommendation as Exhibit 4.
5. ABAG and Ducks Unlimited shall provide documentation to the Executive Officer that the required project actions and mitigation measures have been implemented by or on behalf of Ducks Unlimited.”

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 the purposes and objectives of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31165.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated by the Conservancy on June 4, 2009.
3. Ducks Unlimited is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.
4. The Conservancy has independently reviewed the Environmental Impact Statement/Report for the Bair Island Restoration and Management Plan certified by California Department of Fish and Game on January 22, 2008 pursuant to CEQA and finds no substantial evidence that the portion of the project to be funded by the Conservancy, as mitigated, will have a significant effect on the environment.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$800,000 to Ducks Unlimited and authorize ABAG to disburse to Ducks Unlimited up to \$200,000 of the total Conservancy funds authorized on September 20, 2007 (“SF Bay Trail Block Grant #4,” which grants up to \$3,000,000 to ABAG to develop and implement projects to extend the San Francisco Bay Trail) to construct a pedestrian and bicycle bridge linking the San Francisco Bay Trail to Inner Bair Island in Redwood City, San Mateo County (Exhibits 1-2).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is restoring to tidal wetlands approximately 1,400 acres on Bair Island, part of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. The

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restoration project will convert much of Inner Bair Island to salt marsh habitat and reconfigure the existing public access, which currently extends around most of the perimeter of Inner Bair Island. To accommodate the salt marsh habitat, public access on Inner Bair Island will be reduced from 3.3 miles of trail to 1.8 miles of trail. An existing segment of the Bay Trail that consists of a narrow path along Bair Island Road will be rerouted onto Inner Bair Island via a pedestrian/bicycle bridge where it will connect with another segment that is currently on Inner Bair Island. The restoration plan includes the following related public access components: a pedestrian/bicycle bridge from the existing parking lot to Inner Bair Island, which will be used in place of the current access at Whipple Road; improvement of 1.8-miles of trail (two separate out-and-back segments) that will accommodate the restoration work and lead to two observation platforms; parking lot improvements; a new public restroom; an informational kiosk; and kayak accommodations.

The current authorization is solely for construction of the 175-foot-long bicycle/pedestrian bridge, which will consist of construction of two steel and concrete pilings and placement of a pre-fabricated bridge. The bridge will be compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards, and will include a predator-resistant barrier to prevent cats, foxes and raccoons from disturbing nesting birds on the island. Bridge construction work will be conducted between Summer 2010 and Winter 2011 in accordance with any permitting restrictions.

Site Description: Bair Island is located on the west side of south San Francisco Bay within the Redwood City limits, bordered to the north by San Francisco Bay, to the northwest by Steinberger Slough, and to the southwest by Redwood Creek. It consists of approximately 3,000 acres and is divided by slough channels into three smaller areas—Outer, Middle, and Inner Bair Islands, which were diked in the late 1800s for grazing, oyster shell processing, and salt production. Bair Island is part of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, which is managed by the USFWS. Bair Island’s wetlands benefit the endangered California clapper rail, salt marsh harvest mouse and California least tern and the threatened California black rail.

Project History: The proposed project is a San Francisco Bay Trail project, and is consistent with and proposed for funding under the Conservancy’s San Francisco Bay Trail Block Grant #4 authorization of September 20, 2007. In addition, the Conservancy has a history of supporting the protection and restoration of Bair Island, both through the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture, a public/private collaboration of public agencies, environmental organizations, business representatives, and agricultural interests working to protect and restore wetlands in San Francisco Bay, and directly (\$100,000 authorization in 1998 to prepare a Bair Island Enhancement Plan).

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$1,000,000
City of Redwood City (secured)	300,000
Ducks Unlimited (in-kind match, secured)	15,000
Total Project Cost	1,315,000

The Conservancy’s contribution will consist of a portion of a \$3,000,000 Conservancy grant (SF Bay Trail Block Grant #4), which was authorized on September 20, 2007. SF Bay Trail Block Grant #4 is currently funded through the “Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood

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Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006” (Proposition 84). The Conservancy’s \$800,000 contribution is also anticipated to come from Proposition 84. These funds are available for all the purposes of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program and are thus appropriate for the funding of the proposed pedestrian/bicycle bridge.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160 *et seq.* regarding San Francisco Bay Area projects.

The proposed project is consistent with Section 31162(a) because it will improve public access to and around the bay by helping to complete a regional trail system (the San Francisco Bay Trail). The proposed project will not have a significant adverse effect on agricultural operations, environmentally sensitive areas or wildlife. In addition, as described in greater detail in the CEQA section of this report, the proposed project is consistent with locally adopted general plans. Consistent with Section 31163(c), the proposed project is supported by an adopted regional plan (see the “Consistency with the San Francisco Bay Plan” section), serves a regional constituency, can be implemented in a timely way, and includes matching contributions from other sources of funding or assistance.

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

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective E**, the proposed project consists of constructing an approximately 175-foot segment (approximately 0.03-mile) of the San Francisco Bay Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective L**, the proposed project will be ADA-compliant.

**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 June 4, 2009 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:** See letters of support in Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located on the Bay Trail alignment, along the Bay shoreline.
5. **Need:** The proposed project will not be constructed absent Conservancy participation.

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6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Bay Trail is a regional trail network that will be approximately 500 miles in length when completed. This authorization will help further the completion of the trail, of which some 230 miles have been completed to-date.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed pedestrian bridge will cross an upstream channel and link two upland areas: a parking lot and a walkway along the waterfront on Inner Bair Island. The larger wetland restoration project will deepen the tidal channels throughout the marsh and increase sediment transport, thereby increasing marshplain sedimentation in the upland areas where the pedestrian bridge is planned. In addition, because of flooding concerns of the surrounding commercial and municipal users, the marsh restoration project includes construction of a levee and additional fill on Inner Bair Island to raise the elevation above the high tide mark. Based on hydrological modeling that accounts for sea level rise, a worst case scenario resulting from the restoration project would lead to a long-term increase in peak water levels during a 100 year flood event of .02 - .06 feet (less than an inch), in the upstream channels. These peak water levels are not expected to affect the proposed bridge.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY PLAN:

The proposed project is consistent with the applicable policies contained in Part IV, Development of the Bay and Shoreline: Findings and Policies, of the San Francisco Bay Plan adopted by the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) in January 2006.

Public Access Policy No. 8 states:

Access to and along the waterfront should be provided by walkways, trails or other appropriate means and connect to the nearest public thoroughfare where convenient parking or public transportation may be available. Diverse and interesting public access experiences should be provided which would encourage users to remain in the designated access areas to avoid or minimize potential adverse effects on wildlife and their habitat.

Consistent with Public Access Policy No. 8, the proposed project will provide a bridge from a parking lot to a walkway along the waterfront (Inner Bair Island). The walkway will provide a diverse and interesting public access experience (access to and along Inner Bair Island, and to platforms that will enable views of tidal wetland habitat) that will encourage users to remain in designated public access areas (clearly-marked out-and-back trails to designated viewing platforms).

Public Access Policy No. 10 states that federal, state, regional and local jurisdictions, special districts and the Bay Commission should cooperate to provide appropriately-sited, designed and managed public access, especially to link the entire series of shoreline parks, regional trail systems and existing public access areas to the extent feasible without additional Bay filling and without significant adverse effects on Bay natural resources. Closing gaps between existing public access areas is a high priority for funding. The proposed project is consistent with this policy because it will provide a small new Bay Trail segment (the bridge) that will enable shifting of an existing Bay Trail segment onto Inner Bair Island in a manner that is appropriately sited and designed to accommodate both public access and the adjacent wetland restoration.

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COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

In order to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) prepared a joint Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/R) to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the Bair Island Restoration and Management Plan (the Plan). The EIS/R (Exhibit 4) was certified by the CDFG on January 22, 2008 pursuant to CEQA. Among the five restoration alternatives evaluated in the EIS/R, the preferred alternative of Tidal Marsh Restoration and Intermediate Public Access includes the subject of this authorization: construction of a 175-foot-long pedestrian/bicycle bridge from the parking lot on Bair Island Road to the eastern edge of Inner Bair Island. The EIS/R calls for a number of mitigation measures to offset potential significant environmental effects of the marsh restoration project. In connection with approval of the Plan, the CDFG adopted a CEQA “Findings” document addressing each significant environmental effect and a “Statement of Overriding Considerations” for effects that are unavoidable or infeasible to mitigate. Also included in the adopted Findings document is a corresponding Mitigation Monitoring Program.

Because the Conservancy-funded bridge project is a small part of the overall restoration project, most of the mitigation measures for the larger project are not relevant to the Conservancy-funded project. The potential significant environmental effects of the pedestrian bridge concern biological resources and short-term air quality during construction. Design features of the proposed bridge, management practices and implementation of mitigation measures would result in less than significant environmental impacts of the Conservancy-funded project.

Biological Resources. The proposed bridge will enable a reconfiguration of a small segment of the Bay Trail that currently accesses Inner Bair Island via Whipple Avenue. The bridge will provide a new access point to the Bay Trail on Inner Bair Island from the parking lot on Bair Island Road. The Whipple Avenue access will be closed. The current Bay Trail on Inner Bair Island will be improved and reduced from a 3.3 mile loop to two non-continuous segments that total 1.8 miles of trail with observation platforms at the end of each trail segment. The long-term effect of the trail shift and new access point via the pedestrian bridge in conjunction with the marsh restoration project is that there will be an improved trail next to the restored salt marsh, which is expected to be habitat for the endangered Clapper Rail. As a result, there is the potential for nesting Clapper Rails to be disturbed by people and their dogs using the trail. However, the EIR/S ultimately concludes that the impacts of the bridge and resulting trail on the east end are not significant for two reasons. First, the primary concern with public trails near potential future Clapper Rail habitat is that dogs will disturb nesting birds and lead to nest abandonment. The restoration plan will allow dogs but only on leash and for a three month test period. If the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge finds that the leash requirements are not being followed, it will prohibit dogs altogether. Also, the reduction of the trail from 3.3 miles to 1.8 miles will reduce potential disturbances. Second, the restoration plan will create new Clapper Rail habitat in much of Inner Bair Island so the birds will have opportunities to nest in places that are not near the public trails. Section 3.1 of the EIS/R discusses the wildlife and vegetation impacts of each action alternative of the proposed Bair

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Island Restoration and Management Plan. Impacts from the construction of the pedestrian/bicycle bridge are discussed in the following subsection pertaining to Alternative A. Section 3.1.3.2, (Impacts to Special Status Wildlife Species, Future Disturbance to California Clapper Rails) states that “[p]ublic access in the vicinity of nesting California Clapper Rails has the potential to disrupt breeding. There are situations where rails are known to nest in close proximity to public trails (e.g., Palo Alto Baylands, Luameister Tract, Greenbrae boardwalk, and numerous trails within the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)). Rails nesting in areas with public use may become somewhat accustomed to people, but they are very vulnerable to dogs. The reproductive success of these birds is unknown. A substantial increase in public use of the area, especially associated with unleashed dogs, may result in some disturbance. Disturbance of rails and other nesting waterbirds can lead to abandonment of nest and chicks, resulting in increased reproductive success (Albertson 1995, Rodgers and Smith 1995, Carney and Sydeman 1999, USFWS 2001).”

The EIS/R notes that “moderate public access under Alternative A would not increase public access in new areas, and leash restrictions, if followed, may reduce the potential for such disturbance. Additionally, the extensive tidal restoration proposed for Inner Bair Island would provide extensive, more isolated nest locations than the current strip marsh surrounding Inner Bair Island. However, the new habitat created under Alternative A will provide nesting habitat for rails in close proximity to areas used by humans. This potential for disturbance from humans and dogs on rails will be offset somewhat by a decrease in the total length of the recreational trail from 3.3 miles to 1.8 miles. The pedestrian bridge access at the east end of Inner Bair Island will incorporate design features to discourage predator passage, thus limiting terrestrial access by predators. The potential for long-term disturbance therefore is less than significant.”

Air Quality, Short-Term. In Section 3.13, the EIS/R discusses potential short-term air quality impacts from construction of Alternative A and does not discuss air quality related only to installation of the proposed pedestrian/bicycle bridge, a small part of the overall project. Because Alternative A includes significant marsh restoration, the EIS/R anticipates that “construction activities, including construction vehicle traffic and wind blowing over exposed earth, would generate exhaust emissions and fugitive particulate matter (i.e. dust) emissions that would affect local and regional air quality. Construction activities are also a source of organic gas emissions. Solvents in adhesives, thinners, and some construction materials would evaporate into the atmosphere and would participate in the photochemical reaction that creates urban ozone.”

The EIS/R states that “due to the increase in wetland vegetation on the project site over time, net air quality should improve as a result of this project. There may be short term negative impacts during placement of dredge and fill material and construction, especially in terms of dust and odor production but this should be only during construction.”

Section 3.13.2 of the EIS/R outlines mitigation measures prepared by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District to offset the significant air quality impacts associated with dust generation during construction. These measures include:

- Sweep streets daily if visible soil material is carried onto adjacent public streets;
- Limit traffic speeds on unpaved streets to 15 mph;

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- Replant vegetation in disturbed areas;
- Water or cover all stockpiles of soil that can be blown by the wind;
- Sweep daily with water sweepers the paved access roads, parking areas and staging areas at construction site.

The EIS/R concludes that with implementation of the mitigation measures listed above, Alternative A “would not result in significant construction impacts.”

Air Quality, Long Term. Section 3.4.3 of the EIS/R states that “the Action Alternatives may result in slight increases in traffic to and from the Bair Island parking lot once the public improvements (i.e. restrooms, improved trails, and observation decks) have been completed.” Since the land uses would remain the same and existing parking is adequate to serve the site, Alternative A is “not anticipated to generate trips that would result in substantial long-term air quality impacts.”

Recreational Resources. In Section 3.14.3.2, the EIS/R discusses the consistency with existing or proposed public access plans and the impacts to recreational facilities.

Currently, the Bay Trail Plan has a designated spur trail along Inner Bair Island. The EIS/R concludes that Alternative A would “improve the designated Bay Trail on Inner Bair Island and the connector trail to the parking lot along Bair Island Road and is consistent with the existing Bay Trail Plan.”

The pedestrian/bicycle bridge is one component of the public access improvements of Alternative A. In addition to the predator resistant bridge, these improvements include a 1.8 mile levee trail upgraded to meet Americans With Disabilities Act standards, an expanded parking lot on Bair Island Road, sanitary facilities, orientation kiosks, interpretive signs and wildlife viewing platforms.

The proposed bridge will improve public access and enhance the public’s opportunity for wildlife observation and environmental education as well as the visitors’ appreciation of the natural resources at this site. The EIS/R concludes that “implementation of Alternative A would not result in physical deterioration or an adverse effect to recreational facilities.”

Conformance with Relevant Plans, Goals and Policies. Section 2.5 of the EIS/R finds the proposed project is in conformance with the stated goals of the City of Redwood City Strategic General Plan. The following is a summary of relevant polices and objectives of the General Plan that would apply to the project;

Open Space Objective 3 states to “provide a network of trails and pathways through redwood City in order to enhance the City’s recreational opportunities.”

Conservation policy 3 states “environmentally unique open spaces such as San Francisco Bay, its tributaries, sloughs and marshlands should be protected and enhanced for conservation and recreation purposes.”

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Hydrology and Water Quality, Land Use, Socioeconomic and Environmental Justice, Geology, Farmlands, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Coastal Zone and Coastal Barriers, Public Health and Safety, Cultural Resources, Visual/Aesthetics Resources. The proposed project consists of installation of a pedestrian/bicycle bridge. There are no anticipated short-term or long-term impacts associated with these issue areas.

Based on the foregoing, Conservancy staff concludes that the Conservancy's project poses no potential for significant environmental impacts. Accordingly, staff recommends that the Conservancy find that there is no substantial evidence that the Conservancy project, as mitigated, may have a significant effect on the environment. Staff will file a Notice of Determination upon the Conservancy's approval of the project.