

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
September 22, 2011

**BAY AREA RIDGE TRAIL: HOOD MOUNTAIN TO HIGHWAY 12**

File No. 11-039-001  
Project Manager: Betsy Wilson

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$152,000 to Sonoma County for construction of a 0.3 mile segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, including improvements to facilitate a safe and accessible crossing of Highway 12, in Sonoma County.

**LOCATION:** Near the intersection of Highway 12 and Pythian Road in the City of Santa Rosa and unincorporated Sonoma County (Exhibit 1).

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

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**EXHIBITS**

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

Exhibit 2: [Engineering Drawings](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Site Photos](#)

Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)

Exhibit 5: [Notice of Exemption filed by Regional Parks](#)

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**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 one hundred fifty two thousand dollars (\$152,000) to Sonoma County for construction of a 0.3 mile segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, including improvements to facilitate a safe and accessible crossing of Highway 12, in Sonoma County. This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to the disbursement of funds, Sonoma County shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a detailed work program, budget, schedule, a signage plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy participation, and the names and qualifications of any contractors 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 current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
  2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the improvement of public access to, within, and around the bay, coast, ridgetops and urban open spaces of the San Francisco Bay area.”
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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

This authorization would provide up to \$152,000 to Sonoma County for its Regional Parks Department (Regional Parks) to construct a 0.3 mile segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail (Ridge Trail), including improvements to facilitate a safe and accessible crossing of Highway 12, in Sonoma County. The project will complete a critical link in the Ridge Trail, connecting Hood Mountain Regional Park with the City of Santa Rosa and Annadel State Park.

Regional Parks proposes to construct a multiple-use pathway from the existing end of the Ridge Trail at Rancho Los Guilicos Road to State Highway 12 on the existing County-owned Los Guilicos complex (Exhibit 1). Currently pedestrians use the roadway between the highway and the facility. The proposed trail will be separated from motorized vehicle traffic, providing a safer route of travel (Exhibit 2). The pathway will be approximately 1,250 feet in length with a total width of 6-8 feet, and surfaced in compacted gravel. The gentle trail grades and compacted aggregate surface will make the trail accessible and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The proposed project also includes crosswalk improvements, including ramps, striping, and signage at the Rancho Los Guilicos Road and the Pythian Road/State Highway 12 intersection. New push-button signals will be installed for the Pythian Road/Highway 12 crosswalk and the traffic signal timing will be modified as necessary to accommodate the new use. Existing substandard asphalt ramps will be replaced with concrete ramps that are disabled accessible.

Although the proposed project is a short segment, it is necessary to provide a critical connection in the overall Ridge Trail. To the north, the trail will connect to an existing, dedicated segment of the Ridge Trail which connects to Hood Mountain Regional Park. To the south, the project connects to the subdivision of Oakmont in the City of Santa Rosa, which provides access to Annadel State Park beyond that. The proposed trail will connect the public to existing open space and an extensive existing trail network. In addition, the trail will support the use of alternative transportation as it connects to Sonoma County Transit bus stops, along a bus route linking the cities of Santa Rosa and Sonoma, and provides access to the numerous facilities at the County’s Los Guilicos complex.

The project uses existing County property, making the connection without impacting private properties. The trail location was planned to avoid impacting cultural, biological, and other resources; avoid fragmenting an open field; and avoid impacting existing utilities. The trail construction will use drainage lens style tread to allow water to migrate through the soil.

Regional Parks manages over 5,500 acres of land in Sonoma County within 40 different parks, including over 90 miles of trail. The organization has completed numerous projects, including Ridge Trail construction, with Conservancy support. Regional Parks will be responsible for

maintaining the trail and has a maintenance station in the County's Los Guilicos complex, a short distance from the proposed trail. The proposed project has been developed collaboratively with Regional Parks and the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (BARTC).

**Site Description:** The trail portion of the project is located on vacant land that is part of the County-owned Los Guilicos complex. The project site is former agricultural land dominated by introduced annual grass species. The proposed trail will be constructed on land that is already improved and/or disturbed.

The project also includes a crossing of Pythian Road, owned by Sonoma County, and a crossing of State Highway 12, owned by State of California Department of Transportation. Photographs of the Highway 12 crossing are included as Exhibit 3.

**Project History:** The vision for the Bay Area Ridge Trail is a 500-mile multi-use (serving hikers, mountain bicyclists and equestrians), continuous trail that rings San Francisco Bay high on the ridgeline. Under the leadership of the Conservancy and BARTC and supported by a diverse group of project participants, the Ridge Trail creates an interconnected system of open space and trails that provides recreational opportunities and scenic views to the public. Begun almost 20 years ago, over 325 miles of trail are now dedicated and/or open to the public in all nine Bay Area counties. This authorization will further the Conservancy's statutory and strategic goals of improving access around San Francisco Bay, and is consistent with previous Conservancy authorizations to negotiate and acquire trail easements, prepare trail construction plans and designs, and construct and open trail segments to the public.

There has been significant support for open space and trail development in Hood Mountain Regional Park, which is immediately adjacent to the proposed project. The Conservancy provided a grant to Regional Parks in 2005 to develop a 5-mile segment of Ridge Trail known as the Hood Mountain/Johnson Ranch Expansion Ridge Trail project. The Hood Mountain/Johnson Ranch Ridge Trail project was complemented by a State Parks grant which provided funding to develop additional non-Ridge Trail park and trail access in Hood Mountain Regional Park. The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District contributed \$4,025,000 to acquire the Johnson Ranch expansion property in 2003 and an additional \$1,160,000 to acquire the adjacent Lawson property in 2005. A current State Parks Recreational Trails Program grant for \$117,500 is funding improvements to a section of Ridge Trail within Hood Mountain Regional Park.

In 2008, BARTC provided a grant to Regional Parks for planning, environmental review, engineering, and the Caltrans encroachment permit needed to design the proposed Hood Mountain to Highway 12 trail construction project.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

|                                         |                   |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Coastal Conservancy                     | \$ 152,000        |
| Sonoma County Regional Parks Department | <u>37,500</u>     |
| <b>Total Project Cost</b>               | <b>\$ 189,500</b> |

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for this grant is the fiscal year 2009/10 appropriation to the Conservancy from the "Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006" (Proposition 84). Proposition

84 funds may be used for the purposes of promoting access to and enjoyment of the urban open space resources in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation. Consistent with the purposes of Proposition 84, the proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program (Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code), as described below.

Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 provides that the S.F. Bay Conservancy Program give priority to projects with matching funds. (Pub. Res. Code §31163(c)). In addition to \$37,500 from Regional Parks general fund and park mitigation fees, approximately \$5,000 in in-kind services will be provided for this project. In-kind services include volunteer time (overseen by Regional Parks staff) and the use of Regional Parks equipment (truck and backhoe). Volunteers will plant oaks, install oak cages, spread mulch, and install signs.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

Funding of the project is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31165, which addresses resource goals in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Pursuant to Section 31162(a) of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy may award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area that will help to improve public access to, within, and around the ridgetops, consistent with the rights of private property owners, local plans, and without having a significant adverse impact on agricultural operations and environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife. The proposed project is located in Sonoma County, one of the nine San Francisco Bay Area counties, would provide planning for a segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, is not located in or near any agricultural operations, and has been designed to avoid significant adverse impacts to environmentally sensitive areas and is consistent with local planning efforts around the Ridge Trail.

Consistent with Section 31163(a), the Conservancy cooperates with nonprofit land trusts and other organizations in identifying and adopting long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay Area. Completion of the Ridge Trail is identified in (1) *The San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program Regional Needs Briefing Book (Bay Area Open Space Council, July 1999)* and (2) *400 Miles and Beyond: A Strategic Plan for Completing the Bay Area Ridge Trail (BARTC, 2006)*.

The Hood Mountain to Highway 12 project satisfies all of the criteria for determining project priority under 31163(c), since the project: 1) is supported by adopted regional plans including; Bay Area Ridge Trail Council trails plan, the Sonoma County General Plan, and the Sonoma County Outdoor Recreation Plan (pending); 2) serves a regional constituency by creating additional trail length for the Bay Area Ridge Trail; 3) can be implemented in a timely manner; 4) provides access that may be lost if the project is not quickly implemented as existing permits will expire and the available funding is limited; and 5) will include matching funds from Regional Parks.

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

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective G** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will construct a 0.3 mile segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective L** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will include ADA-compliant elements, including crosswalk improvements (ramps, striping, and signage) and new push-button traffic signals.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S  
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted 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:** The proposed project is supported by Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey, State Senator Noreen Evans, State Assemblyman Mike Allen, and the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council. See project letters in Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located in Sonoma County, within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
5. **Need:** Without Conservancy funding, there would not be sufficient funding to construct the proposed trail segment. The Conservancy is ideally suited to provide funding in a timely manner to ensure continuation of the project.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Ridge Trail is a major regional attraction. When completed, it will offer spectacular views of the entire Bay Area, and will link with many other parklands and preserves. Completion of the Ridge Trail is one of the goals identified in the Bay Area Open Space Council's "*Regional Needs Briefing Book*." The proposed project will construct a critical connection of the Ridge Trail, connecting Hood Mountain Regional Park with the City of Santa Rosa and Annadel State Park.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project is located in an area that is not vulnerable to impacts due to anticipated rise in sea levels attributable to global climate change.

**Additional Criteria**

8. **Urgency:** This project is ready to proceed as soon as funding is secured. Environmental review has been completed and a Caltrans encroachment permit has been granted. If the project is delayed, site conditions could change and the design review and encroachment permit process would have to start over with Caltrans.
9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.

10. **Readiness:** This project is ready to proceed as soon as funding is secured and is estimated to be completed by the end of 2012.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
12. **Cooperation:** Completion of the Ridge Trail is one of the goals identified in the Bay Area Open Space Council’s *The San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program Regional Needs Briefing Book (July 1999)*. In addition, the proposed project is consistent with the BARTC’s adopted alignment and the report entitled *400 Miles and Beyond: A Strategic Plan for Completing the Bay Area Ridge Trail (2006)*.
13. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** The proposed project will utilize several design measures that will make the project better able to tolerate potential climate change impacts. The trail tread will be constructed on "drainage lenses" that allows water to migrate through the trail section. Locally raised native plant materials will be used. In addition, the local field office for Regional Parks will provide ongoing stewardship of the trail.
14. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The proposed project will provide a multi-use trail, thereby encouraging non-motorized transportation. The proposed trail provides a connection to a network of trails from a neighborhood of Santa Rosa. The project also provides a safe crossing of Highway 12 to bus stops, thereby reducing barriers for employees at the County’s Los Guilicos center to use public transportation. The project will connect to a future Class II bicycle trail along Highway 12, approved in the 2010 Sonoma County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in that it involves a minor change to the operations of an existing publicly-owned facility involving negligible expansion of use, (14 California Code of Regulations Section 15301c). Examples of this exemption include minor modifications to existing streets and pedestrian trails for public safety purposes. Staff will file a CEQA Notice of Exemption upon Conservancy approval of the project.