

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
March 29, 2012

BAY AREA RIDGE TRAIL: EL CORTE DE MADERA TRAIL AND STAGING AREA

Project No. 12-003-01
Project Manager: Deborah Hirst

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$282,000 to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District to construct staging area and trail improvements to the San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail at El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve in San Mateo County.

LOCATION: Woodside, San Mateo County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Project Site Maps](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Photographs of Proposed Staging Area and Vista Point](#)
- Exhibit 4: [El Corte de Madera Creek Parking/Staging Area and Trails Project Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring Program and Addendum](#)
- Exhibit 5: [Project Letters](#)

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 eighty-two thousand dollars (\$282,000) to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MPROSD) to construct staging area and trail improvements to the San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail at El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve in San Mateo County, subject to the following conditions:

- A. Prior to the disbursement of Conservancy funds for construction, MPROSD shall:
 - 1. Submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

- a. Evidence that the MPROSD has obtained all necessary permits and approvals.
 - b. A signing plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy participation and identifying the trail segments as part of the San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail system, as applicable.
 - c. A final work plan (including the names of any contractors to be used in the completion of the project), and a project schedule and budget.
2. Evidence that it has entered into an agreement or agreements with the Conservancy and the landowner sufficient to protect the public interest in the project and to provide public access to the project site.
- B. The MPROSD shall implement the Mitigation Monitoring Program, adopted by it on February 10, 2010, and as further modified in its Addendum dated March 14, 2012 and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 4. ”

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 project is consistent with the authority of the Conservancy under Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31165 regarding projects of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
3. That the proposed project, as mitigated, will not have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15064. ”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff is recommending that the Conservancy authorize a grant of up to two hundred eighty-two thousand dollars (\$282,000) to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MPROSD) to construct a staging area with amenities, a segment of the San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail and an accessible trail connection in El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve in San Mateo County (Exhibit 1). The project will provide the only dedicated parking for El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space (Preserve) and amenities will include a 69-space parking lot with four spaces for equestrian trailers and three spaces for people with disabilities, restrooms, trailhead signage and a boot and bike tire cleaning station. A 0.3-mile trail segment will connect the new staging area with the Bay Area Ridge Trail corridor via a safe crossing of Highway 35 to the Ridge Trail/Skyline Trail segment on the California Water Service Company’s Bear Gulch Watershed property (Exhibit 2). A second new 0.3-mile spur trail will provide Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant access from the staging area to a vista of the ocean on the eastern ridge of the Preserve. The improvements will connect the Bay Area Ridge Trail with the Preserve’s 36-mile interior trail network.

Though this Preserve is the most popular of MPROSD's Skyline Highway preserves, the Preserve has no formal parking area. The public parks on either side of the twisting, two-lane highway and at a Caltrans vista point parking lot on the far side of Highway 35 north of the Preserve at Skeggs Point. Both the informal crossing of the highway and the poor line-of-sight along most of this stretch of Highway 35 make parking and entry to the Preserve a safety concern. In addition, no access trails or parking for people with disabilities currently exists at the Preserve. The proposed project will resolve safety issues, provide a regional staging area and establish a safe connection for the Bay Area Ridge Trail and the Preserve. The proposed project will allow public use of the staging area, amenities, parking lot and connector trails by the winter of 2012/2013 as the first phase in a four phase project that is anticipated to construct a 2-mile segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail by 2015 (Exhibit 2). The Bay Area Ridge Trail improvements will connect the existing Skyline Trail/Ridge Trail corridor coming south from Huddart Park over California Water Company property to the Preserve via the new 0.3-mile trail that includes improved Highway 35 crossing location and then link over the 0.3-mile vista point spur trail to the staging area, parking lot and amenities (Phase 1). It will then continue south through the Preserve toward La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve along approximately 1.7 miles of new multi-use trail (Phases 2-4). A previous section of Bay Area Ridge Trail east of Highway 35 will be rededicated as local connector trail after Phase 4 is completed to keep connectivity to Wunderlich County Park while avoiding use of an informal highway crossing on a sharp bend where there is poor line-of-sight. A grant from the Conservancy in 2004 helped fund the MPROSD's design of this four-phase Bay Area Ridge Trail project.

The MPROSD's mission is to purchase, permanently protect, and restore lands forming a regional open space greenbelt, preserve unspoiled wilderness, wildlife habitat, watershed, viewshed, and fragile ecosystems, and provide opportunities for low-intensity recreation and environmental education. The MPROSD currently manages 26 open space preserves and participates in cooperative regional trail efforts including the Bay Trail, Ridge Trail, and Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail. The district has permanently preserved over 60,000 acres of mountainous, foothill, and bayland open space in its 550-square mile district area, which includes portions of Santa Clara, San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties.

Site Description: El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve is one of the District's most popular preserves, well known for its dramatic scenery, rugged terrain, and extensive trail network. Approximately 36 miles of multi-use trail are available for exploration at this 2,817-acre preserve. The Preserve is located in the headwaters of San Gregorio Creek. This watershed provides critical habitat for Steelhead Trout and Coho Salmon, both federally-listed as threatened species. The Preserve has cool redwood canyons, mixed evergreen forest and chaparral along the drier, warmer ridges. Visitors to the Preserve can enjoy views of the ocean and the forest.

The proposed staging area will be located on a flat, previously disturbed one-acre site that is 100 feet from Skyline Boulevard and roughly 25 feet higher than the highway in elevation (Exhibit 3). Under previous owners, the area had been cleared for a loggers' camp and is now overgrown with non-natives including French Broom and Purple Thistle. The two 0.3-mile trail segments in the proposed project would connect with a vista of the Pacific Ocean through mixed evergreen forest, the staging area and the new trail crossing of Highway 35 at a site with lines of sight that exceed Caltrans' requirements.

Project History: The Conservancy is a major partner in helping to implement the Bay Area Ridge Trail. Since 2001, the Conservancy has approved more than \$3.5 million in grants for planning and project implementation, helping complete more than 60 miles of new trail. The Conservancy provided funds to MPROSD to prepare designs for the proposed trail and staging area construction project with a grant in 2004. The proposed project is the first of four phases designed to complete two new miles of dedicated Bay Area Ridge Trail. Phase 1 will provide a staging area with a 69-space parking lot, restrooms and other amenities, a safe Highway 35 crossing, and two 0.3-mile trail segments that will be completed by December 2012. Phases 2-4 will continue to add trail segments and decommission sections of steep and eroding trail in the Preserve. The new alignment and improvements to the Bay Area Ridge Trail corridor will be opened incrementally as they are completed, and at the completion of Phase 4 in 2015 the new two-mile segment will be dedicated as the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

The vision for the Bay Area Ridge Trail is a 550-mile trail that rings San Francisco Bay high on the ridgeline and serves hikers, mountain bicyclists and equestrians. Under the leadership of the Conservancy and the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, and supported by a diverse group of project participants, the Bay Area Ridge Trail creates an interconnected system of open space and trails that provides recreational opportunities and scenic views to the public.

PROJECT FINANCING

Conservancy	\$282,000
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District	<u>\$365,500</u>
Total Project Costs	\$647,500

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for this grant is the fiscal year 2010/11 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 (Pub. Res. Code §§ 75060(c), 31162(a)). 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.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

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 bay, coast, ridgetops, and urban open spaces, consistent with the rights of private property owners, and without having a significant adverse impact on agricultural operations and environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife. Consistent with Section 31162(a), the proposed project will further the development of the Bay Area Ridge Trail within San Mateo, one of the nine Bay Area counties.

Consistent with Section 31163(a), the Conservancy cooperates with nonprofit and other organizations in identifying and adopting long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay Area. Completion of the Bay Area 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, Draft 2006).

The proposed project satisfies all of the criteria for determining project priorities under Section 31163(c) in that:

- 1) The project is consistent with approved plans including: *The San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program Regional Needs Briefing Book* (Bay Area Open Space Council, July 1999); *400 Miles and Beyond: A Strategic Plan for Completing the Bay Area Ridge Trail* (BARTC, Draft 2006); the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council trail plans; the San Mateo County Trails Plan (2001); MPROSD's Trails Plan in the Use and Management Plan for the Preserve and El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve Watershed Protection Program (2004);
- 2) The project serves a regional constituency by creating additional trail length for the Bay Area Ridge Trail;
- 3) The project can be implemented in a timely way as the MPROSD is prepared to begin work upon project approval;
- 4) The construction of the Bay Area Ridge Trail through lands managed by the MPROSD provides an opportunity for benefits that could be lost if recreational uses of the property was developed without Conservancy funding; and
- 5) The project includes significant matching funds from the MPROSD.

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 0.3-miles of Bay Area Ridge Trail and a staging area to serve the Bay Area Ridge Trail as well as the adjacent El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve.

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective L** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will construct the only easy access trail in El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve and will increase access for people with disabilities. Three spaces in the new parking lot and the restrooms to be constructed on site will also be Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, updated November 10, 2011, 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 Eshoo, State Assembly Members Gordon and Hill, the County of San Mateo, and the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, a nonprofit organization dedicated to completing the Ridge Trail. Project letters are attached as Exhibit 5.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located within San Mateo County, within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
5. **Need:** Without the proposed Conservancy funding, MPROSD would not have sufficient funds to complete this project.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Bay Area Ridge Trail is truly a regional attraction. The 400-mile trail network offers spectacular views of the Bay Area and links many parklands and open space preserves. In addition, the Bay Area Ridge Trail will be tied to the San Francisco Bay Trail and the California Coastal Trail systems, creating an extensive trail network. Completion of the Bay Area Ridge Trail is one of the goals identified in the Bay Area Open Space Council's “Regional Needs Briefing Book”.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed project is located on a ridge more than 1,000 feet above sea level and therefore the project is not vulnerable to sea level rise scenarios anticipated for 2050 or 2100.

Additional Criteria

8. **Urgency:** There is a pressing need to construct dedicated parking for El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve and a Highway 35 crossing with better line-of-sight. The public is currently parking along the winding, narrow highway and crossing at an unsafe location.
9. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The project will include construction of a safe crossing from the Bay Area Ridge Trail to El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve; an easily accessible trail to a vista point for people with limited mobility; and the only dedicated parking area for the Preserve for people with disabilities, equestrians and the general public.
10. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
11. **Readiness:** If approved, it is anticipated that work will begin immediately upon obtaining required permits and construction will be completed by December 2012.
12. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** “See “Project History” above.”
13. **Return to Conservancy:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
14. **Cooperation:** The Conservancy has been working cooperatively with the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council to identify projects that help implement the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

15. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The projected emissions for construction and operation of the proposed parking lot fell well below the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's *California Environmental Quality Act Air Quality Guidelines* (May 2011) threshold of significance. The majority of the Preserve's emissions are due to visitors and vehicle miles travelled to enjoy passive recreation in the existing open space area. The proposed project is not expected to increase the level of park utilization and therefore, increase emissions.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MPROSD), as lead agency, approved the project and adopted the Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) including a Mitigation Monitoring Program (MMP) on February 10, 2010. On February 16, 2010, MPROSD filed its Notice of Determination with the County Clerk of San Mateo County. No challenges to the project were made. On March 14, 2012 the MND and MMP were modified to reflect permit conditions required by San Mateo County Planning Commission and an addendum was made to the Mitigated Negative Declaration for technical modifications to the proposed driveway entrance, the length of one trail, and the replacement tree size and location. The MPROSD found in its March 14, 2012 addendums that its February 10, 2010 findings that the project, as mitigated, does not have the potential for a significant environmental effect remained unaffected by the new information obtained from the permitting process and incorporated in the addendums.

The adopted MND identified potentially significant impacts in the areas of aesthetics, cultural resources, biological resources and hazards; mitigation measures were incorporated into the project to assure that these potential impacts were eliminated or reduced to less than significant levels, as summarized below:

Mitigation incorporated into project for aesthetics:

AESTH-1. Tree replacement requirement: Replace trees that need to be removed with twenty-five (25) 1-gallon size redwood trees. The new trees will be incorporated into the landscaping plan for the parking lot and will be located mainly within District lands. This replacement meets the tree replacement requirements of Caltrans and San Mateo County.

Mitigation incorporated into project for cultural resources:

CULT-1. Implementation of the following measure will reduce potential impacts to cultural and historical resources in the proposed driveway area, including buried and unknown archeological, paleontological, and human remains, to a less-than-significant level:

- Due to the observation of one isolated lithic artifact and two potential lithic artifacts within the vicinity of the proposed driveway, all initial ground disturbance activities during construction of the driveway shall be monitored by a qualified archaeological professional. If cultural and/or historical resources are encountered during construction, the measures outlined in CULT-2 shall be followed.

CULT-2. Implementation of the following measures will reduce potential impacts to cultural and historical resources in the proposed driveway area, including buried and unknown archeological, paleontological, and human remains, to a less-than-significant level:

- If cultural and/or historical resources are encountered during construction, every reasonable effort shall be made to avoid the resources. Work shall stop within 50 feet of the find until a qualified cultural and/or historical resources expert can assess the significance of the find.
- A reasonable effort will be made by the MPROSD to avoid or minimize harm to the discovery until significance is determined and an appropriate treatment can be identified and implemented. Methods to protect finds include fencing and covering remains with protective material such as culturally sterile soil or plywood.
- If vandalism is a threat, 24-hour security shall be provided.
- Construction operations outside of the find location can continue during the significance evaluation period and while mitigation for cultural and/or historical resources is being carried out, preferably with a qualified cultural and/or historical resources expert monitoring any subsurface excavations.
- If a resource cannot be avoided, a qualified cultural and/or historical resources expert will develop an appropriate Action Plan for treatment to minimize or mitigate the adverse effects. The MPROSD will not proceed with construction activities within 100 feet of the find until the Action Plan has been reviewed and approved.
- The treatment effort required to mitigate the inadvertent exposure of significant cultural and/or historical resources will be guided by a research design appropriate to the discovery and potential research data inherent in the resource in association with suitable field techniques and analytical strategies. The recovery effort will be detailed in a professional report in accordance with current professional standards. Any non-grave associated artifacts will be curated with an appropriate repository.
- Project construction documents shall include a requirement that project personnel shall not collect cultural and/or historical resources encountered during construction. This measure is consistent with federal guideline 36 CFR 800.13(a) for invoking unanticipated discoveries.

CULT-3. If human remains are uncovered during project construction, the MPROSD will immediately halt work, contact the San Mateo County Coroner to evaluate the remains, and follow the procedures and protocols set forth in §15064.5(e) of the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Sections 15000-15387). The District will immediately notify the California Department of Transportation Cultural Resources Studies Officer, District 4 at (510)286-5618. No further disturbance of the site, the area within 50 feet of the site, or any nearby area reasonably suspected to overlie adjacent remains shall occur until the County Coroner has made a determination of origin and disposition, which shall be made within two working days from the time the Coroner is notified of the discovery, pursuant to State Health and Safety Code Section 7050.5 and Public Resources Code Section 5097.98. If the remains are determined to be Native American, the Coroner will notify the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) within 24 hours, which will determine and notify the Most Likely

Descendant (MLD). The MLD may recommend within 48 hours of their notification by the NAHC the means of treating or disposing of, with appropriate dignity, the human remains and grave goods. In the event of difficulty locating a MLD or failure of the MLD to make a timely recommendation, the human remains and grave goods shall be reburied with appropriate dignity on the property in a location not subject to further subsurface disturbance.

The mitigation under section V(b) calls for stopping work and evaluating significance if an artifact find is made, which will also reduce the potential for disturbance of human remains.

Mitigation incorporated into project for special status resources:

BIO-1. Focused plant surveys for each species listed in Table IV(1) shall be conducted prior to initial ground breaking to determine the species' presence or absence in areas that would be disturbed by construction and earth movement activities. If any special-status plant species are found, areas supporting the species shall be avoided, where feasible. Work shall not start if a special-status plant specimen and its required habitat conditions are found within the impact area while a plan detailing on-site mitigation is developed based on consultation with California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). Construction work may start once such plan has been approved by CDFG.

BIO-2. The three to four month construction period for each project component would occur between the months of April and October due to County restrictions on the timing of earthwork operations and thus would overlap the raptor breeding season (April through August). Therefore, pre-construction surveys shall be conducted by a qualified biologist after breeding season has begun and no more than 30 days prior to construction to determine if raptors are nesting in the project area. If nests of these species are found, no noise-generating construction activities shall occur within 1/4 mile of the nest. Activities will be postponed until all young are fledged.

BIO-3. The three to four month construction period for each project component would occur between the months of April and October due to County restrictions on the timing of earthwork operations and thus would overlap the migratory bird breeding season (April through August). If suitable avian nesting trees are proposed for removal during the breeding season, a qualified biologist should conduct pre-construction nesting bird surveys within 30 days of the onset of any construction activity. The pre-construction survey should search all trees and snags greater than 6 inches DBH and all shrubs taller than 8 feet proposed for removal. If bird nests are observed, an appropriate buffer zone will be established around all active nests to protect nesting adults and their young from construction disturbance. Removal of trees, snags, or woody shrubs with identified avian nests shall be postponed until all young are fledged.

BIO-4. A qualified biologist shall conduct San Francisco dusky-footed woodrat nest surveys prior to initial ground breaking to determine the presence or absence of nests in areas that would be disturbed by construction and earth movement activities. If feasible, disturbance of woodrat nests shall be avoided by routing the trail and by staging construction-related equipment and

materials away from known nest sites. If avoidance of San Francisco dusky-footed woodrat nests is not feasible, CDFG will be consulted regarding the possibility of relocating the nests outside of the work area.

Mitigation incorporated into project for hazards:

HAZ-1. All equipment to be used during construction must have an approved spark arrestor.

HAZ-2. Cut grass and reduce fuels around construction sites where vehicles are allowed to park.

HAZ-3. Minimize use of mechanical construction equipment during hot, dry, windy weather.

HAZ-4. Hired contractors will be required to:

- i) Provide water to suppress potential fires caused by the work performed.
- ii) Remind workers that smoking is prohibited at the work site and on any MPROSD land per contract conditions and MPROSD Ordinance.
- iii) Maintain working ABC fire extinguishers on all vehicles in the work area.
- iv) Contact both Mountain View Dispatch at (650) 968-4411 and the California Department of Forestry, Skylonda, at (650) 851-1860 for emergency response in the event of a fire (these numbers are to report emergencies only).

Conservancy staff has independently reviewed and concurs with the MPROSD's analysis of the proposed project and recommends that the Conservancy, as a responsible agency, find that the proposed project, as mitigated, will not have a significant effect on the environment. Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination.