

# COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

May 29, 2014

## WAVECREST COASTAL TRAIL CONSTRUCTION

Project No. 11-041-02

Project Manager: Janet Diehl

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$246,000 (two hundred forty-six thousand dollars) to the Coastside Land Trust to construct a wheelchair-accessible segment of the California Coastal Trail at the Wavecrest Property in Half Moon Bay (San Mateo County).

**LOCATION:** Half Moon Bay, San Mateo County (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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### EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [CEQA Documents: Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration](#)

Exhibit 3: [Site Photographs](#)

Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)

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### RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400-31410 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$246,000 (two hundred forty-six thousand dollars) to the Coastside Land Trust (“CLT”) for the purpose of constructing a segment of the California Coastal Trail at the Wavecrest Property in Half Moon Bay (San Mateo County). This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of Conservancy funds, CLT shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
  - a. Evidence that CLT has obtained all necessary permits and approvals.
  - b. A final work program, project budget and schedule, including the names of any contractors to be used in the completion of the project.

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2. CLT shall implement, or cause to be implemented, the mitigation measures contained in the City of Half Moon Bay's May 2014 Mitigated Negative Declaration for the project prepared under the California Environmental Quality Act, attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 2.
3. Upon completion of the project, CLT shall provide to the Conservancy a written report indicating the implementation of all applicable mitigation measures required in the Mitigated Negative Declaration.
4. CLT shall install and maintain sign(s) on the project site, the design, number and placement of which have been approved by the Executive Officer, acknowledging Conservancy funding and identifying the project as a segment of the California Coastal Trail.
5. To the extent appropriate, CLT shall ensure that the final designs of the project are consistent with the Conservancy's 'Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development' and with all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations and guidelines governing barrier-free access for persons with disabilities.
6. Prior to commencing the project, CLT shall enter into and record an agreement pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 31116(c) sufficient to protect the public interest."

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

"Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the 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 9 of Division 21 (Sections 31400-31410) of the Public Resources Code, regarding the establishment of a system of public accessways to and along the California Coast.
3. The Coastside Land Trust is a nonprofit organization that qualifies under section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.
4. The Conservancy has independently reviewed the City's Mitigated Negative Declaration adopted on May 13, 2014 under the California Environmental Quality Act by the City of Half Moon Bay's Planning Commission, and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 2."

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The proposed project will provide a \$246,000 grant to the Coastside Land Trust to build a section of the California Coastal Trail along the dramatic bluffs of the Wavecrest property in Half Moon Bay. Featuring spur trails to scenic overlooks, the new wheelchair-accessible trail will connect to four miles of Coastal Trail to the north.

The Wavecrest property has been used informally for years by hikers, bicyclists and others. The site is criss-crossed with informal trails that have led to erosion, loss of native vegetation, and, in some places, safety concerns. The proposed project will address these issues by developing a

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primary bluff top trail with three narrower spur trails branching from the main trail, leading to overlooks.

The new 2,000-foot section of trail will be built on the 50-acre Wavecrest property that was purchased by CLT in 2012, with support from the Coastal Conservancy and the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST). After acquiring the property, CLT spent almost two years planning and obtaining permits to build this section of the Coastal Trail. CLT also produced a conceptual design for a future phase of the project – taking the trail farther south, to join the existing Coastal Trail at Redondo Beach.

The project will provide formal public access from the Seymour Bridge at southern end of Half Moon Bay's Blufftop Coastal Park through the Wavecrest property, directing users to a safe route that directs foot and bicycle traffic away from wetlands and other sensitive areas. While a dirt trail has existed for many years on this property, it needs to be re-routed away from the eroding bluffs and improved to safely accommodate all users during the wet season as well as the dry. Because the Wavecrest cliffs are steep and sandy, the trail will run along the bluff top, but will not provide access to the beach on this property.

The trail will accommodate pedestrians, people walking leashed dogs, wheelchair-riders, bicyclists and equestrians. Compacted rock will be used to ensure durability and provide a firm surface for the eight-foot-wide trail, while a two-foot-wide soft shoulder will allow for equestrian use. Where the trail runs near wetlands, 58 feet of elevated wooden boardwalk will be built. Other trail features include a split-rail fence in hazardous or sensitive habitat areas, directional and warning signs, and interpretive panels.

Erosion caused by multiple informal footpaths will be reduced by constructing one trail and "retiring" the excess, informal paths. The project includes the restoration of 2,500 feet of informal trail. These areas will be ripped and reseeded with a native coastal seed mix. Removal of non-native plants in these areas will be conducted by mowing, hand-weeding, and raking, with minimal usage of herbicide application or burning.

In order to minimize impacts to sensitive species, trail construction must take place between August 15 and October 15. The proposed Conservancy grant would enable CLT to construct the trail this fall, within this window. Without Conservancy support at this time, CLT would not be able to build the trail.

CLT will build the trail in partnership with the San Mateo County Department of Parks and Recreation, which has pledged to provide labor and trail construction equipment. The value of the County's contribution is expected to total \$104,400. POST also has pledged up to \$40,000 to support construction of the trail. CLT will manage and maintain the trail and the re-vegetated areas when they are completed.

Based in Half Moon Bay, CLT has an active volunteer stewardship program that maintains trails and removes invasive species on the land trusts' properties. CLT has been working for several years to acquire vacant lots just south of its Wavecrest property, and currently owns about 84 parcels in the immediate area, with an additional 17 parcels in negotiation. Construction of this trail will be a logical next step for CLT, and will streamline land management on this section of the coast. The partnership between CLT, the City of Half Moon Bay and San Mateo County represents a strategic collaboration that is essential in these times when budget shortfalls limit the ability of public agencies to own and manage such properties.

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**Site Description:** Directly on the beach about a mile southwest of downtown Half Moon Bay, the Wavecrest property lies about 20 miles south of San Francisco. The 50-acre parcel upon which the proposed trail will be built is a portion of a greater undeveloped area that includes an adjacent baseball field and parking lot owned by the City of Half Moon Bay. Immediately north of Wavecrest is the county-owned, city-operated Poplar Beach/Bluff Top Coastal Park. Featuring a parking lot with a short trail to the beach, this park also includes a quarter-mile section of developed Coastal Trail that connects to the north to a paved four-mile section of the Coastal Trail running through the adjacent Half Moon Bay State Beach.

Just east of the Poplar Beach Park lies the old Ocean Shore Railroad right-of-way. Extending almost a mile north from Wavecrest's northern boundary, this right-of-way is protected from development by a conservation easement held by the CLT. There is potential to develop this right-of-way as a multi-use trail.

East of the greater Wavecrest property, across Highway One, lies another property that is protected from development, the 862-acre Johnston Ranch. This ranch is owned by the POST, and contains potential future trail connections to nearby Burleigh H. Murray Ranch State Park. It surrounds a 20-acre in-holding (owned by the City of Half Moon Bay) that contains the historic Johnston House, operated as a museum by the Johnston House Foundation, Inc.

Directly to the south of CLT's 50-acre Wavecrest property are many small undeveloped properties. These lots were laid out in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and marketed with the promise that the Ocean Shore Railroad would be built to connect San Francisco to Santa Cruz along the coastline. Although it was never completed, the railway led to the subdivision of many properties along its corridor. CLT has been working with the County and POST for several years to acquire vacant lots in this area, and has produced a conceptual design for the Coastal Trail here on public and CLT lands.

Residential developments are situated to the north and south of the greater Wavecrest property. On the southern end are the clustered homes and golfing greens of Ocean Colony and the Half Moon Bay Golf Links. At Redondo Beach, the developed Coastal Trail resumes past the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and along the golf course, doubling as the golf cart path. Private property to the south of the golf course presents a short gap in the Coastal Trail. The trail then resumes at Cowell Ranch State Beach, where the four-mile Cowell-Purisima section of the Coastal Trail was recently built by POST, with Conservancy support.

Aside from its recreational value, Wavecrest provides habitat that is vital to the health of local coastal plant and animal species. Mature trees on the property provide ideal perching and roosting habitat for raptors, while the grasslands, wetlands and coastal scrub provide dense cover and support healthy populations of prey animals such as voles and other small rodents. It is one of the most important sites for wintering short-eared owls in the state. Wetlands on the property may provide suitable habitat for threatened and endangered species, including the California red-legged frog and the San Francisco garter snake. The site's usefulness as wildlife habitat is enhanced by its proximity to other open spaces and protected lands.

**Project History:** The proposed Coastal Trail construction project was made possible with the acquisition of the greater Wavecrest property by POST six years ago. This purchase finally laid to rest decades of intense development pressure that had swept over Wavecrest's open meadows and coastal bluffs. Proposals ranging from golf courses, hotels and hundreds of homes had been proposed by various owners, but had elicited strong community protest.

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In 2007, the owners of the Wavecrest property determined that selling the land for conservation was their best option. They approached POST about purchasing the property, and in 2008, POST bought 206 acres of Wavecrest for a total of \$13.5 million.

Four years later, with a \$2.5 million grant from the Coastal Conservancy, CLT acquired 50 acres from POST and began to plan the section of Coastal Trail that is the subject of this recommendation. Over the past two years, CLT and its consultants have conducted initial planning meetings, reviewed existing conditions and trail alignments, applied for necessary permits, prepared environmental documents for CEQA compliance, and completed trail construction design documents.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

Coastal Conservancy	\$246,000.00
County of San Mateo	104,400.00
Peninsula Open Space Trust	<u>40,000.00</u>
<b>Total Project Costs</b>	<b>\$390,400.00</b>

The anticipated source of funds for this project is an appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, Public Resources Code (PRC) section 75001 *et seq.* (“Proposition 84”). Proposition 84 authorizes a portion of funds specifically for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program that must be used consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the PRC (see PRC section 75060(c)). Consistency of the project with the Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 is discussed below in “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation.”

As discussed above, the County of San Mateo will facilitate in construction of the trail, providing construction services valued at \$104,400. The Peninsula Open Space Trust will provide up to \$40,000 toward construction of the trail. The Coastside Land Trust will provide maintenance and management services for the property once acquired. CLT estimates the value of these services to be \$42,000/year, which can be considered a match.

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

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31410), regarding public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 31400 states that the Conservancy shall have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state’s coastline. Consistent with this section, CLT will construct a section of the Coastal Trail that will help to fill a gap in the trail in this area.

Section 31400.1 allows the Conservancy to award grants to a nonprofit organization for development of lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. Surveys conducted by the San Mateo County Department of Parks and Recreation have shown that more than 1.5 million people visit the beaches and trails of the mid-coast area annually, coming from

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throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and the state. The proposed grant is consistent with this section because it would enable a large number of visitors to the area to access this property.

Section 31400.2 allows the Conservancy to provide up to the total cost of the initial development of public accessways by a nonprofit organization. Consistent with this section, Conservancy staff has considered a number of factors in determining the amount of funding for the proposed project. The proposed level of funding was evaluated relative to the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal public accessway projects, and the very limited fiscal resources of the applicant. The proposed grant is consistent with this section because a match to Conservancy funds would be provided by San Mateo County, and the amount of proposed Conservancy funding is appropriate relative to the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal public accessway projects.

Section 31400.3 states that the Conservancy may assist nonprofit organizations in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The proposed project will further these goals by constructing a link of the California Coastal Trail.

Consistent with Section 31401, which provides for the Conservancy's development of standards for developing public access to coastal resources, the proposed grant is conditioned upon the grantee incorporating the Conservancy's access standards in the final design and the implementation of the trail.

The project also is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31165 regarding San Francisco Bay. Consistent with Section 31162(a), the Conservancy will award a grant to build a bicycle and pedestrian (multi-use) pathway and complete a segment of the Coastal Trail to improve public access to and around the coast, and open spaces without adversely impacting agricultural operations, environmentally sensitive areas, or wildlife. Consistent with Section 31162(c), the proposed project assists in the implementation of the policies and programs of the California Coastal Act. Consistent with Section 31162(d), constructing this segment of the Coastal Trail in Half Moon Bay will enhance public access to the San Mateo County coast, a natural area that is accessible to the urban populations of the Bay Area.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STANDARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCESSWAY LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT:**

The proposed segment of the Coastal Trail to be built on the Wavecrest property has been designed in accordance with the Conservancy's "Standards and Recommendations" in the following respects:

- **Standard No. 1: Protect the Public and Coastal Resources.** Trails developed on the property will minimize the alteration of natural landforms, be subordinate to the setting's character, and protect sensitive habitats.
- **Standard No. 2: Correct Hazards.** The Coastal Trail on Wavecrest will be aligned well inland (60 feet) from the bluff edge, which will serve to correct the current hazard posed by erosion.
- **Standard No. 8: Trails.** The trail will connect to a trail on adjacent public park land, and will include amenities such as scenic overlooks and interpretive signs.

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- **Standard No. 13: Barrier-Free Access.** The Coastal Trail on Wavecrest will be accessible to wheelchair-users.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2013 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective D** of the Conservancy's 2013 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in the construction of one third of a mile of Coastal Trail on the Wavecrest property.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A**, the proposed project will expand opportunities for barrier-free access to and along the coast and coastal trails.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective B**, the proposed project will result in the restoration and enhancement of one-third of an acre of degraded coastal resource property.

Consistent with **Goal 12, Objective L**, the proposed project helps implement a segment of trail that will provide barrier-free access to a natural area.

### **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 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 project has broad public support. See "Project Letters," attached to this recommendation as Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of the City of Half Moon Bay.
5. **Need:** Without funding from the Conservancy, CLT would not be able to construct this trail. The opportunity to provide local, long-term management and to formalize this section of the Coastal Trail would be lost.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Construction of this trail will provide recreational opportunities to people throughout the state who visit the adjacent city and state parks.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed trail has been designed to minimize vulnerability associated with sea level rise by setting the trail back 60 feet from the coastal bluffs. A range of sea level rise scenarios for the years 2050 and 2100 has been considered in order to assess project vulnerability and, to the extent feasible, reduce expected risks and increase resiliency

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to sea level rise. The inland portion of the property owned by CLT provides ample room for future realignment as needed to protect against potential flooding, erosion, or other vulnerabilities as a result of sea level rise.

### **Additional Criteria**

8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** This project will offer opportunities to fill a gap in the Coastal Trail while reducing risk of bluff top erosion.
9. **Leverage:** Conservancy funds will be partially matched with a local funding source. See the “Project Financing” section above.
10. **Readiness:** If the Conservancy approves the proposed grant, CLT will begin construction in September.
11. **Cooperation:** This project is the result of cooperation among the private sector, local agencies and the Conservancy. CLT has acquired the property, with support from the Conservancy, and has enlisted private support to cover its management expenses. San Mateo County will provide support for the trail construction.
12. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** The trail surface (compacted rock) will be firm and inert. Increased frequency and intensity of storm events and/or droughts should not affect the viability of the trail.
13. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** By improving pedestrian access and supporting facilities improvements, the project would support Transportation Control Measure D-2 of the Bay Area 2010 Clean Air Plan, the current control strategy to reduce ozone, particulate matter, air toxics and greenhouse gas emissions for the Bay Area, including the project area. During the construction phase, the project is expected to generate short-term dust, vehicle, and equipment emissions. However, the scale of the project is small, at 2,040 linear feet. Further, the no motor idling requirement will reduce fuel usage. Because CLT is located in Half Moon Bay near the property, its staff will not have to travel far to manage and maintain the trail.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the City of Half Moon Bay’s Local Coastal Program (LCP), specifically with Policy 9.3.6, which addresses the Wavecrest area and identifies provision of public access to the coast as a goal of the LCP. An “Access Improvements” Map included in the LCP depicts that the Coastal Trail “should be extended” across the Wavecrest property.

The proposed project also is consistent with the San Mateo County 2001 Trails Plan, which identifies the California Coastal Trail as a Regional Trail route to connect numerous state and county parks and beaches along the coast.

### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the City of Half Moon Bay, as lead agency and with CLT as the project sponsor, undertook environmental assessment of the

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proposed Wavecrest Coastal Trail project through an Initial Study. On March 19, 2014, the City completed the Initial Study and draft Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND), attached to this recommendation as Exhibit 2. The public comment period began on March 20, 2014 and concluded on April 18, 2014. One comment, from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, was received. The City replied to the comment letter and modified its Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) accordingly (Exhibit 2, Attachments 4, 5 and 6). The MND, the comment letter and the modified MMRP were discussed at the City Planning Commission public hearing on May 13, 2014.

Based on information provided by staff and evidence presented at that hearing, the City approved the project and adopted the MND by resolution of its Planning Commission on May 13, 2014. At the time of the writing of this recommendation, staff expects that the City will file a Notice of Determination with the County Clerk, County of San Mateo on May 20, 2014, and will pay a filing fee for the MND to the State Department of Fish and Wildlife that same day.

The MND for the proposed project analyzed the following resource areas:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture and Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation/Traffic
- Utilities and Service Systems

The MND indicated that there were “no potential impacts” for four of the resource areas listed above: agriculture and forestry resources, land use and planning, mineral resources, and population and housing.

The proposed project was found to have “less than significant impacts” for the following seven resource areas: aesthetics, geology and soils, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, public services, recreation, and utilities and service systems.

The proposed project was found to have impacts that will be “less than significant with mitigation incorporated” in the following six resource areas:

- Air Quality
- Biological Resources

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- Cultural Resources
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Noise
- Transportation/Traffic

To reduce as much as possible any potential impacts in these six resource areas from the implementation of the proposed project, the City and CLT have integrated mitigating practices and procedures into the project itself. These practices and procedures are identified in the MND, and fall within the following seven categories:

- 1) Preconstruction surveys, relocation, and avoidance
- 2) Construction staging, vehicle maintenance, dust control measures
- 3) Project construction schedule
- 4) Worker education on biological and archeological procedures
- 5) Temporary wildlife exclusion fencing
- 6) Presence of biological monitor
- 7) Compliance with Construction Best Management Practices recommended by San Mateo County, which comply with the countywide National Pollutant Discharge System permit preventing the construction phase from violating water quality standards.

In addition, CLT will use Best Management Practices (BMPs) to prevent direct and indirect impacts to sensitive species and habitats. Finally, CLT and the City will obtain a biologist's report confirming that the identified actions were taken.

Based on review of the MND, Conservancy staff concludes that the proposed project, as mitigated, will not have a significant effect on the environment. Staff recommends that the Conservancy, as a responsible agency under CEQA, make the finding that the Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the MND. Staff will file a Notice of Determination upon the Conservancy's approval of the project.