COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
October 2, 2014

TWIN LAKES BEACHFRONT IMPROVEMENTS

Project No. 14-033-01
Project Manager: Tom Gandesbery/Trish Chapman

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to $250,000 to the County of Santa Cruz to implement access improvements at Twin Lakes Beach, Santa Cruz County.

LOCATION: Twin Lakes State Beach, Santa Cruz (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location Map

Exhibit 2: Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring Program

Exhibit 3: Photos of Existing Conditions

Exhibit 4: Sketches of Proposed Project

Exhibit 5: Project Letters

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

"The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred and fifty thousand dollars ($250,000) to the County of Santa Cruz to construct improvements to the California Coastal Trail and other access features at Twin Lakes Beach, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds, grantee shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
    a. Evidence that the County has obtained all necessary permits and approvals, including entering into any agreements necessary to implement the project on land not owned by the County, and all other funds necessary to complete the public access improvements.

   b. A final work program, budget, schedule, and names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed for these tasks.
   c. A signing plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy participation.

2. The County shall ensure that the final design of the project is 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 access for persons with disabilities.
3. The County shall install California Coastal Trail emblems, provided by the Conservancy, in the project area at locations identified by the County in consultation with the Conservancy."

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 Chapter 9, Sections 31400-31410 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding coastal access.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring Program adopted by the County on October 24, 2012, under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 2 , and finds, based on the Conservancy's independent judgment and analysis, that the project avoids or reduces the possible significant environmental effects to a level of insignificance, and that there is no substantial evidence that the project may have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382.
4. The proposed project serves greater than local needs."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize a $250,000 grant to the County of Santa Cruz to implement improvements at Twin Lakes State Beach. Visitors to Twin Lakes Beach exceed one-half million a year yet the state beach does not offer separate parking or access facilities. Visitors park along East Cliff Drive, other streets and in the Santa Cruz Harbor. There are no pedestrian or bicycle facilities or organized parking along this segment of East Cliff Drive. Pedestrians and bicyclists share the travel lanes with vehicles. Parked cars straddle the road shoulder and sandy beach. See Exhibit 3 for examples of current conflicts.

In addition, the project area is subject to erosion during winter storm events when sand can be removed from the beach exposing the existing road edge and bedrock. This can leave a bluff face between the beach and the road which visitors scramble down. Storms and erosion also threaten the roadway, sewer system, and other underground utilities.

The Twin Lakes Beachfront Improvement project will improve the public access conditions at the beach while also providing increased protection for existing infrastructure. The proposed project shifts East Cliff Drive inland to the north between 5th Avenue and 7th Avenue, and portions of the road will be reconstructed at slightly higher elevations. The project design provides for continuous pedestrian access (separated from bicycles and vehicles), and bicycle lanes through the area, while also organizing parking and improving vehicle circulation. The bicycle lanes and pedestrian paths are part of both the statewide California Coastal Trail (CCT) and the regional Monterey Bay Sanctuary Trail.

Improvements proposed for Coastal Conservancy grant funding include a continuous 6 to 10 foot wide pedestrian pathway along the beach side of East Cliff Drive from the 5th Avenue to 7th Avenue, and an informal path between 6th and Assembly Avenues (inland side) (Exhibit 4). The west end of the beachfront pathway will connect to the existing sidewalk at the harbor concession parking lot and Marine Sanctuary interpretive signs. The plan also provides for continuous 5-foot wide bike lanes on each side of East Cliff Drive through the area. Many areas along the pathway will include seat-walls, native landscape plantings and boulders. Bike racks will be strategically located. Trail markers and interpretive signage will be installed.

Although not included in the Coastal Conservancy grant request, the Twin Lakes project includes additional improvements to address more of the problematic conditions. Vehicle circulation, in particular for trucks and buses, is improved by increasing the diameter of the traffic circle at 5th Avenue harbor parking lot entrance, by modifying the road layout changing the 7th Avenue curve radius to the west along the beach, and by realigning the road to the north of its existing location (away from beach parking). The design also provides a passenger loading area at the 5th Avenue circle, providing a safe location to pull out of the flow of traffic during peak use times when beach goers must park in other locations. Public art will be installed in the traffic circle. Low impact development storm water measures to improve water quality are also incorporated into the project design. The public improvements will be protected, and year round coastal access enhanced, with the construction of a bluff protection structure. The bluff protection structure is finished with sculpted and stained concrete to mimic the natural contours of the existing Purisima Formation bedrock. The bluff protection structure is designed to allow for public access to the beach regardless of sand levels which can fluctuate with winter storm events.

The County of Santa Cruz has spent several years developing the proposed project in order to find an appropriate balance between public access improvements, community character, infrastructure protection, and other factors of concern. The County is providing over 90% of the project funding. Construction of the project will be overseen by the County's public works department.

Site Description: Twin Lakes State Beach is located just down the coast from Santa Cruz Harbor in the unincorporated Live Oak neighborhood of Santa Cruz. This area is busy year-round with beach goers, fisherman, harbor and coastal visitors. Twin Lakes State Beach is popular with local residents and visitors alike, and is a favorite spot for family and group gatherings throughout the year. The beach is heavily used with over one-half million visitors a year.

The Santa Cruz Port District owns the Harbor Beach which begins roughly opposite 6th Avenue. The beach to the east of 6th Avenue is owned by the State of California and operated by California State Parks as Twin Lakes State Beach. Beach goers enjoy views of the bay and boats

coming and going from the harbor. Wave and water conditions are generally safe for swimming and the harbor restaurants and neighborhoods are an easy walk. The only state facility is a shower house/restroom building which is in need of repair and improvement. Beach goers also use the restrooms located in the harbor. State Parks runs the lifeguard program, beach patrol, and also collects refuse from containers located near and on the beach. The County Sanitation District also operates the sanitary sewer pump station located near the shower house.

East Cliff Drive is designated as an arterial street in the County's General Plan, and has a 60-to-110-foot right-of-way in the project area. The existing two lane road from 5th to 7th Avenues has no bicycle lanes and has a narrow shoulder or none at all. Parking is informal and unorganized with no sidewalks or walkways. The lack of improvements creates safety and circulation problems along East Cliff Drive. Pedestrians and bicyclists in the area have a difficult time negotiating between the traffic and the parked vehicles. Current conditions in the traffic circle at the end of 5th Avenue make it difficult for large vehicles to negotiate.

In certain locations the bluffs, roadway, and public improvements are subject to high surf and storm conditions. Winter storm events will often pull sand off of the beach, revealing existing rip rap and the Purisima bed rock. This condition has been mitigated in recent years by the harbor dredging operation which pumps sand just off shore and onto the beach. Where East Cliff Drive curves north to 7th Avenue, the embankment slopes steeply down to the beach and in some areas is protected by existing rip rap. Visitors scramble down the slope from the road shoulder to the beach below. There are a number of large eucalyptus trees between 7th and 9th along the beachfront. At one time, a beach trolley ran along the road and was elevated above the beach connecting beaches, neighborhoods and the City of Santa Cruz. During the winter, the old pilings from the elevated track are often exposed.

Project History: The lack of pedestrian, bicycle, parking and coastal access improvements coupled with heavy beach and harbor use resulted in strong community interest in improving the Twin Lakes beach and harbor area. Area wide planning efforts begun in 2000, resulted in the construction of initial coastal access improvements along the harbor frontage of Lake and 5th Avenues, plans for improvements to East Cliff Drive between 9th and 12th Avenues adjacent to Schwan Lagoon, and conceptual design proposals for the beachfront areas of East Cliff Drive (5th to 9th Avenues). The final planning effort for the beachfront area of East Cliff Drive began with community meetings in the fall of 2007 and extended into October 2010. Through the community workshop process, goals and objectives for improvements to the area were developed, a series of conceptual alternatives prepared to address coastal access needs and ultimately a consensus reached on a conceptual design for future improvements. The resulting plan represents a reasonable balance between improving safety, providing beach access, and protecting existing and new improvements.

County staff initially contacted Conservancy staff in 2013 regarding a potential grant under to the Conservancy's public access program. Discussions led to staff's current recommendation.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	$250,000
County of Santa Cruz	$4,908,232

Santa Cruz Regional Transportation Commission	$200,000
To Be Determined	$99,054
Project Total	**$5,457,286**

The anticipated source for the Conservancy 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 section 75001 *et seq*. (Proposition 84). Proposition 84 authorizes the Conservancy's use of these funds for the purposes of promoting access to and enjoyment of coastal resources through projects undertaken pursuant to the Conservancy's enabling legislation (Division 21 of the Public Resources Code). Section 75060(e) of the Public Resources Code specifically allocates Conservancy funding for Monterey Bay and its watersheds. Consistency of the project with the Conservancy's statutory mission is discussed below in "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation." The proposed project will improve the CCT and access facilities at Twin Lakes Beach, which is located on Monterey Bay.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, 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. Through the proposed action, the Conservancy will play a primary role by funding improvements to the CCT and associated beach access facilities.

Section 31400.1 allows the Conservancy to award grants to a public agency for development of accessways to and along the coast that serve more than local public needs. Consistent with this section, the proposed access improvements will improve the CCT, a statewide trail system, and support access to Twin Lakes State Beach that attracts visitors from throughout the region.

Section 31400.2 requires the Conservancy to consider a number of factors in determining the amount of funding for an access project. Consistent with this section, the proposed level of funding was evaluated relative to the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal access projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant, and the Conservancy's project selection criteria (see Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines).

Section 31400.3 enables the Conservancy to assist public agencies in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The proposed project will further these goals by improving and enhancing public access in a heavily-visited coastal region.

Consistent with Section 31408, the proposed public access improvements, including improvements to the CCT, have been coordinated with the California Coastal Commission and California Department of State Parks.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective B** of the Conservancy's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, County will sign approximately 0.2 miles of the project area with the CCT emblem.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective F** of the Conservancy's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will improve existing access facilities and will include features to improve access for people with physical disabilities.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will provide barrier free access to the beach even when sand levels have eroded leaving a bluff in front of the beach.

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 proposed project enjoys broad support from the local community. Supporters include Congressman Sam Farr, State Senator Bill Monning, the Santa Cruz Port District, the Santa Cruz County Parks and Recreation Commission, the State Parks Department, Santa Cruz County Conference & Visitors Council, Save Our Shores, and O'Neill Sea Odyssey. See Exhibit 5 for project letters.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of the County of Santa Cruz.
5. **Need:** The County has secured more than 90% of the project funding, but additional funding is needed to complete the project.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Twin Lakes State Beach is a very popular beach that draws visitors from all over the region. In addition, the bike and pedestrian improvements will be part of the regional Monterey Bay Sanctuary trail and statewide CCT.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed project is located at the back of an existing beach and is subject to erosion during winter storm events when sand can be removed from the beach exposing the existing road edge and bedrock. The proposed design increases the resiliency of the public improvements to changing conditions over time and protects these improvements, including sewer and other underground utilities, and allows for coastal access

regardless of the level of beach sand. In addition the project area benefits from annual harbor dredging operations which deposits approximately 200,000 cubic yards of sand off-shore and on the beach. Coastal engineering studies conducted for the project indicated that plans featuring improvements and protective structures with crest elevations equal or marginally higher than the existing East Cliff Drive elevations would provide sufficient wave overtopping protection at least for the next 50 years when accounting for sea level rise, and that existing adjacent properties and structures would not be negatively impacted by the proposed improvements. The project is being designed and constructed for a minimum 50 year lifespan.

Additional Criteria

8. **Urgency:** The primary source of County funds is in the form of one time redevelopment tax exempt bond funds. Because of the nature of tax exempt bond funds, if this project is not able to proceed at this time, those funds may need to be re-programmed for another public improvement project, and would no longer be available for the beach improvement project.
9. **Resolution of more than one issue**: The proposed project will address public access issues, transportation and safety conflicts, and provide infrastructure protection.
10. **Leverage**: See the "Project Financing" section above.
11. **Readiness**: The County is ready to construct the project in 2015 if sufficient funds have been secured.
12. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The project will improve bicycle and pedestrian access to the beach area, thus encouraging reduced use of car transportation and associated greenhouse gas emissions.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is consistent the County of Santa Cruz General Plan and Local Coastal Program (LCP) adopted in 1994. The following LCP Coastal Recreation policies specifically apply to the proposed project:

Policy 7.7.5 Provide for safe bicycle travel along the coastal corridor by developing a coordinated, continuous bicycle route parallel to the shoreline…

Program a Improve existing parking areas through the use of… bike racks, and safety improvements; provide safe stairways for beach access as part of the program to upgrade vehicular parking.

Program b Increase parking opportunities to serve visitors to the Live Oak coastline in locations where such facilities are feasible and compatible with the neighborhood and natural setting.

The project is also consistent with the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network Master Plan (2013) and the Santa Cruz County Bikeway Plan (2011). The project design is also consistent with adaptive strategies in Chapter 7 of the Santa Cruz County Climate Action Plan (2013) including consideration of future sea level rise and frequency and severity of winter storm events.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

The project is consistent with the Conservancy's Standards and Recommendations for Access way Location and Development as follows:

Standard No. 2, Correct Hazards: The proposed improvements will reduce hazardous conflicts among pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles on East Cliff Drive.

Standard No. 10, Coastal Bikeways: The project will include a paved bike lane, with signs, and will provide bike racks at the beach.

Standard No. 12, Support Facilities: The proposed project will significantly increase and improve the support facilities available at Twin Lakes Beach including sitting areas, a passenger loading area, bike racks, and an accessible pathway.

Standard No. 13, Barrier-Free Access: The proposed project includes elements to provide barrier-free access to the beach.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The County of Santa Cruz (County) is the lead agency for the Twin Lakes Beachfront Improvements (also known as the East Cliff Drive Pedestrian Improvements Phase III) for purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The County prepared an Initial Study (IS) and Draft Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the proposed project (Exhibit 3) on April 12, 2012. The public comment period for the Draft MND lasted from April 13 to May 16, 2012. Based on community input, the County revised the Draft MND to provide additional information. The revised IS and Draft MND was issued on September 12, 2012 with the public review period lasting until October 12, 2012.

The Initial Study determined that the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment in the following areas: Geology and Soils, Biological Resources, Transportation and Traffic, and Noise. Public comments were generally focused on traffic safety, tree removal, due process issues, and geology impacts. The County proposed several mitigation measures to reduce these impacts to less than significant, and prepared an MND and Mitigation Monitoring Program (MMP). The County adopted the Final MND and the MMP on October 24, 2012.

The potential significant environmental impacts of the proposed project and the corresponding mitigations are identified and discussed in greater detail in the MND attached as Exhibit 2. These impacts are summarized below.

Geology and Soils

<u>Impact</u>

Geotechnical assessments of the project determined that there was a potential risk from liquefaction, shaking, settlement and scour of beach deposits resulting in failure of the shoreline protection structure.

<u>Mitigation</u>

County design criteria require that all structures be built to withstand liquefaction and lateral spreading. Additional geotechnical work will be done during the final design phase to ensure that the final design meets these criteria.

Biological Resources

Impact

A biological assessment of the proposed project showed that construction activities could have potential impacts to nesting birds.

Mitigation

To mitigate for potential impacts to nesting birds, the project will require preconstruction surveys to identify any nesting bird locations and then implement buffer zones to protect active nests within the work area.

Transportation

Impact

Partial road closures will be necessary during project construction. Any full closure of the road would interfere with emergency access to and from the harbor.

Mitigation

To avoid impacts to emergency access, one lane of traffic will be required to remain open at all times.

Noise

Impact

Project construction involves saw cutting of pavement, which is a temporary noise impact that will disturb pedestrians and surrounding residential uses.

Mitigation

To mitigate for these impacts, saw cutting activities will be restricted to occur after 8:30 a.m. and the contractor will be required to post a noise notification sign alerting the public of the duration of the noise disturbance portion of the work.

Conclusion

Staff has independently reviewed the MND and MMP and concurs that there is no substantial evidence based upon the whole record that the project as mitigated will have a significant adverse effect on the environment.

Upon Conservancy approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination for this project.