

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 4, 2014

PILARCITOS CREEK BRIDGE REPLACEMENT (COASTAL TRAIL)

Project No. 14-046-01
Project Manager: Janet Diehl

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorize disbursement of up to \$200,000 to the City of Half Moon Bay to prepare designs, environmental analysis and permit applications for replacing the collapsed Pilarcitos Creek Bridge, a part of the California Coastal Trail at Half Moon Bay State Beach in northern San Mateo County.

LOCATION: Half Moon Bay, San Mateo County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Site Photographs](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

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 two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) to the City of Half Moon Bay (“the City”) to prepare designs, environmental analysis and permit applications for replacing the Pilarcitos Creek Bridge, a part of the Coastal Trail at Half Moon Bay State Beach in northern San Mateo County. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of Conservancy funds, the City shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, budget, and schedule for completion of the proposed project, and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed to carry out the work program.
2. To the extent appropriate, the City shall ensure that the final designs of the replacement bridge are consistent with the Conservancy’s “Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location” and with all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations and guidelines governing barrier-free access for persons with disabilities.

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3. The City shall incorporate into the replacement bridge design a signing plan acknowledging Conservancy participation and identifying the bridge as a segment of the California Coastal Trail.”

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 Conservancy’s 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 proposed project serves greater than local needs.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The proposed authorization will provide a \$200,000 grant to the City of Half Moon Bay to prepare designs, environmental analysis and permit applications for replacing the collapsed Pilarcitos Creek Bridge at Half Moon Bay State Beach (Exhibits 1 and 2). Closed to the public since it was declared seriously damaged and unsafe eight months ago, this bridge has played an integral role in a well-loved stretch of the California Coastal Trail for 20 years. It has served hundreds of state park visitors daily, as well as residents who use the Coastal Trail as a safe and beautiful route to school and work. Since its closure, users have had to choose between taking a detour along Highway 1, ignoring the danger and climbing over the barriers on both ends of the bridge, or using an upstream horse trail through the creek that may have harmful impacts on the sensitive riparian corridor.

Trail users have vigorously advocated for the bridge to be repaired and re-opened, but structural engineers have determined that there is no quick fix for this bridge. The deck of the 400-foot-long four-span prefabricated steel truss bridge is so seriously deteriorated that it must be removed and replaced – a process that will take more than a year. Thus there is an urgent need for the planning and permitting process to get underway as soon as possible. Conservancy assistance has been sought, both by residents and by City and State officials, so the City can engage engineers and environmental professionals before year’s end.

The City is taking the lead on the planning process because maintenance funds have not been available to the California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks), which owns the bridge and the four miles of coast on either side of it. State Parks expects to provide \$1 million toward construction of the bridge in 2015-16.

The City and State Parks have worked in this manner on many Coastal Trail projects, including construction of the Pilarcitos Creek Bridge 20 years ago. The two agencies have developed a Cooperative Agreement to facilitate the funding, design, permitting, and construction of a new pedestrian/bicycle bridge over the creek. The City will oversee the bridge construction, and will remit the completed bridge to State Parks for long-term maintenance as part of the Half Moon Bay State Beach.

The City has committed \$100,000 toward this effort, but planning and permitting is expected to

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cost \$300,000. Conservancy assistance is needed to fill the gap.

Conservancy funds will be used to prepare designs consisting of final plans and specifications, environmental analysis pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) and permit applications. It is expected that existing piers can be used to support a new bridge deck, which will minimize environmental disturbance and lower construction costs. The new bridge will be designed to be accessible, based on Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines.

Site Description: The Pilarcitos Creek Bridge connects the north and south stretches of the City of Half Moon Bay’s Coastal Trail, which runs uninterrupted for about six miles along the beach. The bridge cuts through a thick band of willows on either side of Pilarcitos Creek. The willows are met on the seaward side by small dunes that have been restored with native dune plants. Beyond the dunes lies the beach, which provides a variety of recreational uses.

The bridge lies within Half Moon Bay State Beach, which attracts about two million visitors a year. Campsites at this state park are in high demand because its beachfront tent and RV sites are within a 45-minute drive of both San Francisco and San Jose. A big draw of this park is the ability to bike or hike along the Coastal Trail. Using the trail, bicyclists can travel four miles upcoast to Pillar Point Harbor, a major commercial and recreational fishing center.

The highly scenic San Mateo coast is known for its small towns, artichoke and brussel sprout fields, high cliffs, and wide sandy beaches, with redwood forests not far inland. Half Moon Bay is one of the major destinations for visitors to the coast, with an annual pumpkin festival that draws more than 200,000 people.

Project History: Conservancy involvement with the Pilarcitos Creek Bridge dates back 25 years. Working with a nonprofit group called Coastsiders for Safe Bikeways, the Conservancy granted the City \$300,000 in 1991 to build three miles of Coastal Trail. Although this trail crossed over Pilarcitos Creek, the City used its own funds to build the bridge, and used Conservancy funds to build the trail on either side of it. The City conveyed the portion of the trail that was built in Half Moon Bay State Beach (including the Pilarcitos Creek Bridge) to State Parks in 1993. State Parks has managed the trail and maintained the bridge since then. In recent years, Parks staff noted the deterioration of the bridge, but did not have funds to repair it.

In April 2014, the bridge structure was determined by State Parks engineers to be so seriously damaged that it could not be repaired. It was closed pending replacement. Residents of Half Moon Bay expressed their dismay to the City and to State Parks. At a City Council meeting in August, State Parks officials stated that bridge replacement could take at least two years – assuming that funding becomes available for the project.

Following the State Parks presentation, Council members and residents spoke of the urgency of restoring the bridge, and urged officials to speed up the timeline. After hearing from members of the public, Council members expressed a strong desire to use all reasonable means at the City’s disposal to move the bridge replacement project forward as soon as possible. City engineers analyzed potential measures that could be taken, including the feasibility of a quick, temporary fix. They concurred that the bridge was indeed too far gone for a quick fix.

The best option was to get started as soon as possible on plans and permits for a permanent fix. Conservancy assistance with planning was requested, and at a subsequent meeting in August, the City committed up to \$100,000 and the necessary staff time in order to expedite the project. State Parks staff recently identified \$1,000,000 of cost-savings from other projects, and is

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working toward allocating this amount to the replacement of the Pilarcitos Creek Bridge.

PROJECT FINANCING

Planning Phase:

Coastal Conservancy	\$200,000
City of Half Moon Bay	<u>\$100,000</u>
Total Costs, Planning Phase	\$300,000

Construction Phase (Anticipated):

CA Department of Parks and Recreation	\$1,000,000
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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 use of bond funds for projects that promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state and are consistent with the Conservancy’s San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program at Public Resources Code section 31160-31165. (Public Resources Code section 75060(b)). Funding the proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program as discussed below in “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation.” The proposed project will support access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources within the City of Half Moon Bay by facilitating the re-opening of a segment of California Coastal Trail, which will restore the connection of this trail to other park land nearby. Matching funds are available for the proposed project from the City of Half Moon Bay.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to 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. Consistent with this section, the Conservancy will play a primary role by funding the restoration of an important link in the California Coastal Trail.

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 support restoration of a segment of the Coastal Trail that attracts a million visitors throughout the state annually, due to its location in Half Moon Bay State Beach.

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 and the fiscal resources of the applicant. The proposed grant is consistent

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with this section because a match to Conservancy funds would be provided by the City of Half Moon Bay, and the amount of proposed Conservancy funding is appropriate relative to the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for public accessway projects.

Section 31400.2 also stipulates that the level of funding for an access project should be determined by an application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority. Consistent with this requirement, and as discussed in greater detail in the section below, the project has been evaluated and found to be consistent with the Conservancy's project selection criteria and guidelines.

Section 31400.3 enables the Conservancy to provide such assistance as is required to aid public agencies in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. Funding the proposed project will help the City of Half Moon Bay restore and re-open an important public accessway in a heavily visited coastal region as part of a regional, comprehensive public access plan.

The proposed project also is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31165 regarding San Francisco Bay. The proposed project will support replacement of a bridge located in San Mateo County, one of the nine counties within the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. Consistent with Section 31162(a), the proposed funding authorization will enable the preparation of final plans and permit applications to build a portion of a bicycle and pedestrian (multi-use) pathway and complete a section of the Coastal Trail to improve public access to and around the coast. The proposed project is to design a replacement bridge in the footprint of the existing bridge so as to avoid 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, which calls for maximum public access and recreational opportunities along the coast (see Public Resources Code Section 30210). Consistent with Section 31162(d), preparing plans and permit applications for the construction of 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 within a short drive of the urban populations of the Bay Area.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

The City's goal is to design the Pilarcitos Creek Bridge replacement to be consistent with the Conservancy's Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development ("Access Standards"). In particular, the City intends to address the Access Standards as follows:

Standard No. 1, Protect Public and Coastal Resources: The City's goal is to design the replacement bridge to minimize alteration of natural landforms by utilizing the existing piers that were constructed in the creek bed 20 years ago, thus avoiding the need to cut a new path through the willow grove. Preparation of final designs for the project will evaluate opportunities to replace the bridge deck with minimum disruption to the creek bed.

Standard No. 5, Environmentally Sensitive Areas: The City's goal is to utilize the footprint of the existing damaged bridge, which was designed to minimize impact to Pilarcitos Creek, an environmentally sensitive area. The Pilarcitos Bridge is unusually long for a pedestrian bridge because it was built with the goal of ensuring that the elevated creek crossing would minimize impacts to the creek and to the wetland and willow riparian woodland habitat on either side of it.

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In designing the new project, care will be taken to use construction materials that will not have a negative impact on the environment.

Standard No. 13, Barrier-Free Access: Consistent with this standard, plans for the bridge replacement will allow for barrier free access, as required by and consistent with all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations and guidelines governing barrier-free access for persons with disabilities.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective B** of the Conservancy's 2013 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in plans and permit applications necessary to for construction of a bridge that will open an area that is currently closed to public use, and restore public connection to six miles of the California Coastal Trail on the Half Moon Bay coast.

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective D**, the proposed project entails preparation of plans for the reconstruction of a dilapidated and unsafe facility -- the Pilarcitos Creek Bridge -- to increase and enhance coastal recreational opportunities along the Coastal Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 12 Objective A**, the proposed project entails preparing plans for a project that provides a recreational trail adjacent to the campground at Half Moon Bay State Beach.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

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. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** By developing plans to restore public access to the Coastal Trail, the proposed project serves to promote and implement several state plans, including:
 - *Coastal Act (1976)*, Public Resources Code Sections 30210 and 30214 on public access and recreation that call for "maximum access, which shall be conspicuously posted, and recreational opportunities shall be provided for all the people consistent with public safety needs and the need to protect public rights, rights of private property owners, and natural resource areas from overuse."
 - *Completing the California Coastal Trail Report (2003)*, "Objectives in Completing the California Coastal Trail," Objective #1, which calls for the state to "provide a continuous trail as close to the ocean as possible" (page 8).
 - *California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report (2013 Draft)* Chapter 4 – Goals for California's Future, which states that "investments in . . . safe,

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walkable communities are needed to provide viable alternatives to driving” in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (page 15).

4. **Support of the public:** The project has support from Senator Jerry Hill, Assemblymember Rich Gordon, local and state agencies, environmental groups, and individuals. See "Project Letters," attached to this recommendation as Exhibit 3.
5. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the coastal zone of the City of Half Moon Bay.
6. **Need:** Without funding from the Conservancy, the City of Half Moon Bay would not be able to prepare final plans, environmental analysis and permit applications for the bridge replacement. The opportunity would be lost to finalize plans in a timely manner so that the bridge can be replaced and this vital Coastal Trail section can be re-opened to the public.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Pilarcitos Creek Bridge serves the two million annual visitors to Half Moon Bay State Beach, as well as the residents of the City Half Moon Bay. Without it, there is no way to enjoy the full six-mile stretch of Coastal Trail that draws visitors from San Francisco, San Jose and beyond.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed bridge replacement will use the same footprint as the existing bridge, which was set on the inland side of the coastal dunes, far from the beach and not vulnerable when considering the 100-year projections for sea level rise. A range of scenarios will be considered in order to reduce expected risks from potential creek flooding, erosion, or other vulnerabilities as a result of sea level rise.

Additional Criteria

9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
11. **Cooperation:** The project has enlisted the cooperation of the City of Half Moon Bay, State Parks, environmental groups and community leaders.
12. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** Preparing final plans and permit documents for the Pilarcitos Creek bridge replacement will not result in increased emissions. Because the goal of the project is to restore a pedestrian and bike trail, 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 (which includes the project area).

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:

Transportation Policy 10-36, which addresses the provision of a north-south trail connection between Kelly Avenue and Venice Avenue to improve visitor and resident trail access; General Policy 2-8, which addresses recreational uses on ocean front lands that do not require extensive alteration of the natural environment; and General Policy 2-7, which addresses priority for

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coastal-dependent and related recreational activities and support facilities located 200 feet inland from the mean high tide line.

The proposed project is also consistent with the City's Local Coastal Program Implementation Plan as defined in the Half Moon Bay Municipal Code. Chapter 18.4 addresses Local Coastal Program Public Access, and states specific standards for Lateral Public Access, Trail Access and Active Recreational Use provisions. The proposed project is consistent with those standards.

The proposed project is a critical north-south linkage for the community of Half Moon Bay and an integral part of the overall California Coastal Trail System on the Midcoast. As such, the proposed project 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:

The proposed project is statutorily and categorically exempt from CEQA. California Code of Regulations ("CCR") title 14, Section 15262 sets forth a statutory exemption from the requirement to prepare an environmental impact report or negative declaration for preparation of feasibility and planning documents for future actions that have not yet been approved or funded; environmental factors must be considered. CCR title 14 Section 15306 exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that do not result in serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The proposed preparation of designs, environmental analysis and permit applications entails the preparation of feasibility and planning documents as well as data collection and resource evaluation activities; these activities will enable a future action, the construction of a replacement bridge, that has not yet been approved or funded. The proposed project will not have an impact on environmental resources, and environmental factors will be considered during implementation of the proposed project. Accordingly, the proposed project is exempt from CEQA.

Upon Conservancy approval of the project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the project.