

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
January 29, 2015

STATE OF THE ESTUARY CONFERENCE

File No. 08-132-04
Project Manager: Amy Hutzal

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$50,000 to the Association of Bay Area Governments for the purpose of organizing and presenting the State of the Estuary Conference in September of 2015.

LOCATION: The conference will be held in Oakland, California, and is focused on the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [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 \$50,000 (fifty thousand dollars) to the Association of Bay Area Governments for the purpose of organizing and presenting the State of the Estuary Conference in September of 2015. No Conservancy funds shall be disbursed until the Executive Officer of the Conservancy has approved in writing a work plan, including a budget and schedule, the names and qualifications of any contractors proposed to be used to carry out this project, and a plan for acknowledging the Conservancy’s contribution.”

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 Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the resource and recreational goals in the San Francisco Bay Area.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Conservancy staff recommends authorization of a grant of \$50,000 to the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) for the purpose of organizing and presenting the San Francisco Estuary Partnership's State of the Estuary Conference in September of 2015. ABAG administers the San Francisco Estuary Partnership, a federal-state-local program, one of 28 National Estuary Programs throughout the United States that were established under the Clean Water Act. For more than 20 years, the San Francisco Estuary Partnership has worked to protect and restore the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary. Together with many other nongovernmental organizations and public agencies, the San Francisco Estuary Partnership developed, to protect and restore the Estuary, a plan of action called the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), which was last updated in 2007.

The Conference, which has been held every two years since 1993, provides the opportunity for scientists, managers, interest groups and the public to link the CCMP implementation to other ecosystem management programs and activities, address challenges, provide education, and solicit feedback on Bay-Delta Estuary restoration and protection. The Conference provides a forum to hear about new research and monitoring data, political and scientific impacts on environmental policy, and priority ecosystem management issues, with 50-60 speakers presenting, and approximately 800 individuals attending the Conference. The two-day conference includes both plenary sessions and concurrent sessions. The conference also includes a poster session, with approximately 200 posters on display, providing an opportunity for many students, scientists, and resource managers to showcase projects and results. Media outreach and awards for innovative restoration and education projects are also included in the Conference.

The Conference is held every two years and the Conservancy authorized \$100,000 grants for both the 2009 and 2011 Conference, and \$50,000 for the 2013 Conference. This made the Conservancy the largest single contributor to these three Conferences. Prior to this, Conservancy staff attended and presented at previous Conferences, participated in the organizing committee, and provided relatively small amounts of sponsorship funding. The Conservancy played a much more significant role in the development of the 2009, 2011, and 2013 Conference themes, proceedings, sessions, and overall organization. Conservancy staff participated on the Conference organizing committee, the Conservancy's support was credited on Conference materials, and Conservancy staff presented and moderated sessions on topics of concern to the Conservancy, such as wetlands restoration, subtidal habitat planning, invasive species, citizen stewardship, public access, and land conservation. While Conservancy funding has decreased, our participation and crediting will be very similar for the 2015 Conference, with staff participation in the planning and delivery of the Conference and crediting on Conference materials.

The other funding sources for the Conference will be co-sponsorships (ABAG anticipates generating over \$160,000 in additional sponsorships by public agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and businesses) and registration fees, which are expected to generate approximately \$90,000. ABAG's goal is to keep the registration fees low and provide scholarships so that more participants can attend. The Conference budget includes: facility rental, the production, printing, and mailing of materials, including the conference program and the summary, conference organization, travel for speakers, website production, and catering.

Registration fees will be applied towards catering costs, which the Conservancy funds cannot cover.

Project History: The State of the Estuary Conference began in 1993; 2015 will be the 12th biennial Conference. The Conference began as a way to inform the public, scientists and decision-makers on the status of issues and actions described in the CCMP and has grown to become one of the key regional events for estuarine information. In December of 2008, the Conservancy authorized a \$100,000 grant for the 2009 Conference. In March of 2011, the Conservancy authorized a \$100,000 grant for the 2011 Conference. In February 2013, the Conservancy authorized a \$50,000 grant for the 2013 Conference. The 2009, 2011, and 2013 Conferences were attended by over 700 individuals, representing federal, state, regional, and local public agencies, nongovernmental organizations, businesses, corporations, and other interested parties. Conservancy staff participated in the organizing committee for the 2009, 2011, and 2013 Conferences, attended the conference, moderated sessions, and gave presentations on Conservancy projects. The Conference provides a forum for discussion of management issues and policies affecting the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary, and scientific findings that help inform ecosystem management.

The Conservancy, with many other public agencies and nongovernmental organizations, is leading the effort to protect and restore tidal wetlands in the San Francisco Bay, managing the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, Hamilton and Bel Marin Keys Restoration Project, and the Napa-Sonoma Marsh Restoration Project, and funding many other restoration planning and implementation projects, such as Sears Point, Bahia, and Bair Island. In addition, the Conservancy is leading the Invasive *Spartina* Project, and is funding several efforts to better understand processes in the Estuary, including a climate change update to the San Francisco Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Report (1999). The Conservancy also works closely with ABAG to plan and implement both the San Francisco Bay Trail and the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail, and has provided several grants to ABAG to further these public access efforts on and around San Francisco Bay. The Conference is an opportunity to present these projects, to learn about other projects, policies, and studies that can improve the Conservancy's efforts, and to identify opportunities for Conservancy involvement.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$50,000
San Francisco Estuary Partnership	44,000
Other State Agencies	10,000
Federal Agencies	52,000
Local/Regional Agencies	15,000
Nongovernmental Organization	5,000
Water Agencies and Ports	29,000
Consultants and Businesses	5,000
Registration Fees	<u>90,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$300,000

The expected source of funds for this project is the FY 2013 appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Beach and Coastal Enhancement Account of the California Environmental

License Plate Fund (Vehicle Code Section 5067) which may be used for purposes consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.

In addition to the cash contributions noted above, there is estimated to be an additional \$25,000 worth of in-kind contributions towards the Conference. This includes representatives from agencies and organizations participating in the Conference planning or serving as session chairs and moderators, individuals giving presentations, and volunteers working at the event.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31165, to address resource and recreational goals in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Conference will be located in Oakland and focuses on the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary. The Conservancy is authorized, under Sections 31160 and 31162 of the Public Resources Code, respectively, to address resource and recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay Area, and to undertake projects and award grants to address resource and recreational goals in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.

Consistent with Section 31163(a), the Conference provides the Conservancy an opportunity to cooperate with public agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and other interested parties to identify and adopt resource goals for the San Francisco Bay Area. Under Section 31163(b), the Conservancy is directed to participate in and support interagency actions and public/private partnerships in the San Francisco Bay Area for the purpose of implementing Section 31163(a) and providing for broad-based local involvement in, and support for, the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.

Consistent with Section 31162(a), the Conservancy may award grants to help improve public access to and within San Francisco Bay.

Under Section 31162(b), the Conservancy may act to protect, restore, and enhance natural habitats and connecting corridors, watersheds, scenic areas, and other open-space resources of regional significance. The focus of the Conference is on sharing information in order to better protect, restore, and enhance the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary, an ecosystem of national significance, and improve public access to area resources.

Consistent with Section 31162(d), the Conservancy may promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreation and educational purposes. The Conference provides an opportunity to share information about ways to better connect the people of the Bay Area to San Francisco Bay through trails, volunteer programs, public outreach efforts, and educational and interpretive programs.

Finally, the State of the Estuary Conference satisfies many of the criteria for determining project priority under 31163(c), as follows: (1) The conference is supported by adopted regional plans, namely the San Francisco Estuary Partnership's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), which is a collaboratively produced, consensus-based agreement about what should be done to protect and restore the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary. The CCMP was produced and adopted in 1993 and updated in 2007 CCMP, based on input from a broad community of stakeholders, including more than 100 representatives from federal and state

agencies, local governments, environmental groups, business and industry, academia, and the public. (2) The project serves a regional constituency, in that the Conference focuses on the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary. (3) The Conference will be held soon, in September 2015. (5) The Conservancy's funds are being matched by sponsors and registration fees.

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

Consistent with **Goal 10, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2013 Strategic Plan, the proposed project assists the Conservancy in identifying and prioritizing long-term resource and recreational goals for the Bay Area Program, including projects that restore natural habitats and projects that increase public access and recreation.

**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 October 2, 2014, 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. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** The Conference furthers the state of knowledge necessary to address the recommendations and policies of the following state plans:
 - *California Water Action Plan* (Natural Resources Agency, California Department of Food and Agriculture, and California Environmental Protection Agency, 2014): The Conference focuses on nearly all of the challenges outlined in the plan on pages 1-3, including freshwater flows, water quality, restoration of native fish and wildlife habitat, flood management, and climate change. Speakers represent various management and scientific perspectives.
 - *California Wildlife Conservation Challenges: California's Wildlife Action Plan* (Prepared by U.C. Davis Wildlife Health Center for California Department of Fish and Game): The Conference addresses numerous topics from the Wildlife Action Plan, including water management conflicts and water needs for wildlife, introduced aquatic species in the Bay and Delta, climate change impacts on wildlife, water quality impacts on wildlife, and wildlife habitat restoration opportunities.
 - *Safeguarding California: Reducing Climate Risk* (Natural Resources Agency, July 2014): A major focus of the Conference is on the impacts of climate change on the Bay-Delta Estuary and its habitats, as well as on the potential for bay wetlands to enhance shoreline resilience and sequester carbon.

- *Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan* (San Francisco Estuary Project, 2007): This report, which is undergoing an update now, frames the entire organization of the Conference. Progress towards goals and objectives in the CCMP was the topic of discussion for the 2013 Conference's plenary session, and discussion of the update will be part of the 2015 Conference.
 - *Recovery Plan for Tidal Marsh Ecosystems of Northern and Central California* (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2013): Several panels, speakers, and posters presented during the Conference specifically focus on techniques for and results of tidal marsh restoration in San Francisco Bay.
 - *San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Plan* (State Coastal Conservancy, 2010): The Conference will include discussion of projects and programs, such as the Water Trail, that improve access to and within San Francisco Bay.
 - *The San Francisco Bay Trail Project Gap Analysis Study* (Association of Bay Area Governments, 2005): The Conference will include discussion of projects and programs, such as the Bay Trail, that improve access to and within San Francisco Bay.
4. **Support of the public:** The Conference is supported by many agencies and organizations, including the San Francisco Estuary Institute, San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, Save The Bay, and the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board. Letters of Support are attached as Exhibit 2.
 5. **Location:** The Conference is located in Oakland and is focused on the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary.
 6. **Need:** The Conference will not occur without Conservancy support, or will be significantly scaled back.
 7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Conference focuses on management and science affecting the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary, an ecosystem of national significance and the largest estuary on the West Coast of the Americas.
 8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The Conference will not be impacted by Sea Level Rise, but will include many presentations and posters related to the impacts of Sea Level Rise on conservation work in the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary.

Additional Criteria

9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
10. **Readiness:** The San Francisco Estuary Partnership, under the auspices of ABAG, is prepared to organize and put on the Conference in September of 2015. The San Francisco Estuary Partnership has successfully conducted eleven State of the Estuary Conferences to date.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See "Project History" above.
12. **Cooperation:** The San Francisco Estuary Partnership, which organizes the Conference under the auspices of ABAG, is a federal-state-local program that works to protect and restore the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary's wildlife, wetlands, and other natural resources. Many

entities take part in the San Francisco Estuary Partnership's activities, including organization of the State of the Estuary Conference.

- 13. Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The Conference is being held at the Oakland Marriott, which is easily accessible via BART and AC Transit. Participants will be encouraged to use alternative methods of transportation to automobiles. Conference outreach, registration, and hand-outs will be on-line and printed materials will be kept to a minimum.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

Under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15378, the State of the Estuary Conference is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as the Conference does not have the potential for a direct physical change or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment.