

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
December 3, 2015

**BAY AREA RIDGE TRAIL MULTI-YEAR PLANNING**

Project No.: 04-085-03  
Project Manager: Matt Gerhart

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$765,000 to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council for planning of future Bay Area Ridge Trail projects.

**LOCATION:** Various locations along the Bay Area Ridge Trail alignment within the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area (see Exhibits 1 and 2)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

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**EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)  
Exhibit 2: [Project Maps and Photos](#)  
Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31111 and 31160-31165 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council of an amount not to exceed seven hundred sixty five thousand dollars (\$765,000) to conduct planning and feasibility studies, data collection and resource evaluation activities to support future development, construction, and real property acquisition of new Bay Area Ridge Trail segments. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, schedule and budget, and the names and qualifications of any subcontractors that it intends to employ for this planning work.”

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 the purposes and objectives of Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the recreational goals of the San

Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, including public access to, within and around the bay and ridgetops.

2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c) 3 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$765,000 to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (BARTC) to conduct planning and feasibility studies, data collection and resource evaluation activities to support future development and construction of, and acquisition of interests in real property for new Bay Area Ridge Trail segments.

The BARTC is working towards the goal of creating a 550-mile multi-use (serving hikers, mountain bicyclists and equestrians), continuous trail that rings San Francisco Bay high on the ridgeline. To date, over 360 miles of the Ridge Trail are open and dedicated for public use. The Ridge Trail serves all nine Bay Area counties and helps to create an interconnected system of open space and trails to provide recreation and scenic views to the public. The BARTC is assisting the Conservancy in meeting its statutory and strategic goals of improving access around the San Francisco Bay Area ridgetops – during the 3-year horizon of the proposed grant, the BARTC will be seeking to meet the major milestone of 400 miles of dedicated Ridge Trail.

Since its inception in 1987, the primary purpose of the BARTC, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has been to plan, promote, acquire, build and maintain the Ridge Trail. The BARTC’s governing structure was designed to ensure an ongoing public-private partnership with public agencies and trail enthusiasts. The BARTC has a membership base of approximately 3,300 people and over 1,000 volunteer workers who regularly participate in its work. These aspects of the BARTC make them uniquely qualified to carry out activities necessary to develop or make accessible new segments of the Ridge Trail.

This authorization would advance the future completion of Ridge Trail segments by continuing identification and refinement of the trail route, negotiating and developing preliminary agreements for the acquisition of property from willing sellers (including fee title and trail easements), designing and engineering trail segments, addressing needed Ridge Trail signage, and preparing and reviewing environmental review documents, maps and permit applications. Specifically, the proposed project seeks to open over 30 new miles of the primary alignment of the Ridge Trail (the main continuous trail encircling the Bay Area), as well as 10 miles of regionally-significant connector trails, and to secure, plan and/or design up to 15 miles of new primary trail.

A focus of this proposed project would be extension and connection of longer stretches of continuous Ridge Trail, including for example, the extension of an existing 40-mile stretch in the East Bay and a 60-mile stretch between Marin and Daly City to 50 and 95 miles, respectively. The authorization would also allow for the Ridge Trail Council to perform a thorough gaps analysis and prioritization of trail gaps, as well as update the regional guidebook: *Bay Area Ridge Trail: The Official Guide for Hikers, Mountain Bikers, and Equestrians*, first published in

2008. Finally, the proposed project would include a needs analysis and a plan for new overnight accommodations along the trail route, extending the ability for various trail group users (hiking, equestrian, biking) to undertake multi-day journeys (see Exhibit 2, Project Maps).

**Site Description:** The proposed project will support development of a regional trail along the Bay Area Ridge Trail alignment, which includes ridgetops throughout the nine-county San Francisco Bay area (see Exhibits 1 and 2).

**Project History:** The vision for the Bay Area Ridge Trail is a 550-mile multi-use, continuous trail that rings San Francisco Bay high on the ridgeline. Under the leadership of the Conservancy and the BARTC, and supported by a diverse group of project participants, the Ridge Trail creates an interconnected system of open space and trails that provides recreational opportunities and scenic views to the public. Begun over 25 years ago, the BARTC has dedicated and opened over 360 miles of public trail in all nine Bay Area counties.

This authorization will further the Conservancy's statutory and strategic goals of improving access around San Francisco Bay, and is consistent with previous Conservancy authorizations to the BARTC to negotiate and acquire trail easements, prepare trail construction plans and designs, and construct and open trail segments to the public. Specifically, in August 1998, following the first appropriation of funds for the San Francisco Bay Area Program, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$300,000 to the BARTC to prepare trail construction plans and negotiate trail easements to make eight specific Ridge Trail segments open to the public. In December 2000, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$3,427,800 to the BARTC, \$1,527,800 of which was used for planning and other work to support projects, and \$1,900,000 of which was authorized for construction and acquisition grants for individual projects. As a result of this 2000 grant, BARTC planned approximately 100 miles of trail along 60 segments, constructed 66 miles of trail as part of 14 projects, and secured 16.8 miles of the trail alignment.

In December 2004, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$1,200,000 to the BARTC to perform planning activities for future Ridge Trail projects. As a result of this 2004 grant, BARTC planned approximately 78 miles of trail along 70 segments; dedicated and opened 52 miles of trail along 13 segments; secured about 74 miles of the trail alignment; installed interpretive signs; and conducted database and mapping work. The Conservancy also awarded funds to Ridge Trail site managers for specific projects, authorizing \$2,287,140 to design and construct approximately 23 and 11 miles of Ridge Trail, respectively.

In May 2010, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$1,200,000 to the BARTC for additional planning. As a result of this 2010 grant, BARTC dedicated 39 new miles along 19 segments, and proceeded to plan a variety of segments totaling over 100 miles, preparing another 40 miles of primary Ridge Trail and 12 connector miles for construction. During the period of this 2010 grant, the Conservancy also awarded 16 grants to Ridge Trail site managers for specific projects totaling \$2,418,150, plus grants for three larger-scale projects that involved the Ridge Trail, to design and construct approximately 16 and 23 miles of Ridge Trail, respectively.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	\$765,000
Other Sources (public and private)	<u>448,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$1,213,000</b>

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is the “Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006” (Proposition 84). These funds are available for all the purposes of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program and are thus appropriate for the funding planning of the Bay Area Ridge Trail. The BARTC anticipates matching Conservancy funds at least at a 1:3 ratio.

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

Pursuant to Section 31111 of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy may fund and undertake plans and feasibility studies, and may award grants to nonprofit organizations for these purposes. The proposed project consists of funds awarded to the BARTC, a nonprofit grantee, to undertake plans and feasibility studies for implementation of the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

Pursuant to Section 31162(a), the Conservancy may award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area that will help to improve public access to, within, and around the ridgetops, consistent with the rights of private property owners, and without having a significant adverse impact on agricultural operations and environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife. Consistent with Section 31162(a), the proposed project will enable the BARTC to plan for development and implementation of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, a regional ridgetop trail system located entirely within the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. As required by Section 31162(a), the proposed project is consistent with the rights of private property owners because Ridge Trail segments are only built with the permission of property owners over which the trail is located. In addition, Ridge Trail projects will be designed to not have a significant impact on agricultural operations, environmentally sensitive areas, or wildlife. Any future trail development projects resulting from this proposed planning grant will require future environmental review.

Consistent with Section 31163(a), the Conservancy cooperates with nonprofit land trusts and other organizations such as the BARTC in identifying and adopting long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay Area. Completion of the Ridge Trail is identified in (1) *The San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program Regional Needs Briefing Book* (BARTC, July 1999) and (2) *400 Miles and Beyond: A Strategic Plan for Completing the Bay Area Ridge Trail* (BARTC).

Finally, the proposed project is appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in Section 31163(c) for the following reasons:

- (1) The proposed project is supported by adopted local and regional plans. The Ridge Trail is specifically recognized in the California Recreational Trail Plan, the San Francisco Bay Area’s regional Priority Conservation Area Plan, by the East Bay Regional Park District, by all nine Bay Area County General or Master Trail Plans, in all relevant regional park and open space district plans, and in many other local plans and policies.
- (2) The proposed project is multi-jurisdictional and serves a regional constituency by contributing toward the completion of a regional trail system that links ridgetops throughout the nine counties of the San Francisco Bay Area.

- (3) The proposed project can be implemented in a timely manner, because the proposed project supports BARTC's continuing efforts, which are ready to proceed due to previous Conservancy planning authorizations (See Project History, above).
- (4) The proposed project provides benefits that could be lost if the project is not quickly implemented, as there is current momentum built from the work supported by the previous Conservancy grants. A loss of opportunity exists to establish the Ridge Trail in gap areas lying over private properties due to competing development projects on those properties that could be inconsistent with the Ridge Trail.
- (5) The proposed project leverages matching funds from several sources, both public and private. (See Project Financing, above).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:**

**Standard No. 1, Protect Public and Coastal Resources:** Ridge Trail segments are routinely planned with protection of human safety, concerns of local residents, and natural resources in mind.

**Standard No. 2, Correct Hazards:** Ridge Trail accessways are planned with the avoidance and correction of hazards in mind.

**Standard No. 3, Access Easements: Construction and Location:** Ridge Trail access easements are negotiated with landowner input, projected trail use, and aesthetic concerns taken into consideration in order to determine appropriate trail corridor siting and widths.

**Standard No. 4, Privacy:** Ridge Trail segments are planned in consultation with neighbors to best take their concerns into consideration.

**Standard No. 5, Environmentally Sensitive Areas:** The Ridge Trail alignment seeks to avoid sensitive resources, and where it is sited in sensitive areas because of necessary routing or recreational concerns, due care is taken through appropriate environmental analysis, and, if necessary, implementation of mitigation measures to address any potential trail impact.

**Standard No. 8, Trails:** Ridge Trail planners seek trail corridor widths and trail amenities (furnishings) that suit the context of the trail, taking into account factors such as the urban or rural nature of the segments, topography, access limitations, adjacent development and intended service levels.

**Standard No. 9, Scenic Overlooks:** Overlooks are planned to be accessible to multiple user groups (hikers, equestrians, cyclists) and to allow for barrier-free access where feasible.

**Standard No. 10, Coastal Bikeways:** The Ridge Trail does not seek to construct formal coastal bikeways, except where co-aligned with such facilities (primarily in urban settings); however the proposed project goal is to provide continuous and safe bicycle access along the full length of the trail.

**Standard No. 11, Hostels:** The Ridge Trail does not include the development of new hostels, however there are opportunities to partner with existing hostels and the proposed project will explore options for a wide variety of near-trail low cost accommodations including camping, backpacking, yurts, huts and hostels (See Exhibit 2).

**Standard No. 12, Support Facilities:** As mentioned above in Standard No. 11, supporting facilities are planned and developed according to the local context and service levels of sections of Ridge Trail.

**Standard No. 13, Barrier-Free Access:** The Ridge Trail seeks to provide barrier-free access wherever feasible per federal and state guidelines.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2013 STRATEGIC PLAN  
GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S), AS REVISED JUNE 25, 2015:**

Consistent with **Goal 12, Objective F** of the Conservancy's 2013 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will plan for or support the development of approximately 55 miles of the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

**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 June 25, 2015, 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 Ridge Trail is specifically recognized in the California Recreational Trail Plan, as well as numerous regional and local plans including the San Francisco Bay Area's regional Priority Conservation Area program, all nine Bay Area County General or Master Trail Plans, all relevant regional park and open space district plans, and dozens of local plans and policies.
4. **Support of the public:** The California State Legislature passed a resolution in 1990 to "recognize the value of the Bay Area Ridge Trail to the people of the Bay Area, and encourage the creation of trails in the San Francisco Bay Area." The Ridge Trail enjoys widespread recognition and support among State, regional and local governments, stakeholders, advocacy groups and the public. The Ridge Trail Council has a base of 4,000 members and volunteers who participate in trail advocacy, building, stewardship, and public events. (See project letters in Exhibit 3).
5. **Location:** The Bay Area Ridge Trail is located exclusively in the nine counties that make up the San Francisco Bay Area (Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma), and is thus entirely within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
6. **Need:** The Conservancy has played a major role in supporting completion of the Bay Area Ridge Trail; without Conservancy participation, the majority of BARTC's work could not occur, and region-wide planning for completion of the Ridge Trail could become fragmented and/or halt altogether.

7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Bay Area Ridge Trail is regional trail running through all nine Bay Area counties. In addition, the spectacular scenic views, opportunities for extended trips and connectivity to other trail systems, parks and natural areas enhance the appeal of the Ridge Trail as a destination for visitors from outside the Bay Area.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The Bay Area Ridge Trail is by definition to be aligned high on the ridgetops encircling San Francisco Bay. The proposed project will therefore not be vulnerable to the sea level rise scenarios of 16 inches by year 2050 or 55 inches by year 2100 (or other likely sea level rise scenarios).

### **Additional Criteria**

9. **Urgency:** The BARTC currently is pursuing a large number of trail opportunities that, without funding, may experience significant delays or be foreclosed.
11. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
12. **Conflict resolution:** As a regional amenity that crosses a host of jurisdictions, the Ridge Trail provides an opportunity to transfer best practices, management guidelines, and apply lessons learned that reduce conflict over local trails.
13. **Innovation:** BARTC pursues its work across a very large and diffuse network of partners and volunteer groups with a high level of coordination and outreach. This results in an innovative ability to push many different segments of trail simultaneously, allowing each to proceed at a pace and scale that suits local needs but provides regional results.
14. **Readiness:** The BARTC has been successfully working towards completion of the Ridge Trail for over 20 years and is prepared to continue this work under a new authorization.
15. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
16. **Return to Conservancy:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
17. **Cooperation:** The wide range of partners and volunteer groups that work with the BARTC result in a remarkable level of support and coordination in developing trail opportunities. The BARTC regularly works with dozens of local agencies, non-profits, private corporations, local advocates, political leaders, landowners and citizen groups in making the trail a reality.
19. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The Ridge Trail endeavors to provide alternatives to motorized transportation and in general seeks to implement low-maintenance, sustainable trail design and materials that lowers the life cycle emissions of the trail.

### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed authorization is to fund the preliminary planning work necessary to advance Bay Area Ridge Trail projects, including identifying and refining the trail route, negotiating and developing preliminary agreements for the acquisition of property, planning and designing specific segments, and preparing environmental review documents, maps and permit applications.

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to California Code of Regulations Section 15262 (“Feasibility and Planning

Studies”) because the proposed project is for feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions which the Conservancy has not approved, adopted, or funded.

The proposed project is also categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to California Code of Regulations Section 15306 (“Information Collection”) in that it will include basic data collection and resource evaluation activities, including those necessary for planning, designing, and preparing environmental review documents for Ridge Trail projects, and may lead to a future action that the Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted or funded.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the proposed project upon approval.