

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
July 16, 2014

**EXPLORE THE COAST WEB APP**

Project No. 14-026-01  
Project Manager: Trish Chapman/Sam Jenniches

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$275,339 for information technology services to develop an “Explore the Coast” mobile-optimized website (web app) for the State of California.

**LOCATION:** Coastwide

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Sample Web App Concepts](#)

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**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 \$275,339 (two hundred seventy-five thousand three hundred thirty nine dollars) for information technology services to develop an “Explore the Coast” mobile-optimized website (web app) for the State of California. Prior to the disbursement of any funds, the Executive Officer of the Conservancy shall approve the work program, budget, schedule, and contractor for that 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 Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state’s coastline.
  2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The proposed authorization would allow the Conservancy to disburse up to \$275,339 for information technology services to develop an “Explore the Coast” mobile-optimized website (web app) for the whole coast. This web app would provide searchable descriptive and geospatial information to help the public access the coast and enhance their experience of the coast.

California boasts one of the most diverse and spectacular coastlines in the world. Visitors and residents alike are drawn to its sandy beaches, tide pools, dramatic coastal cliffs, densely forested coastal mountains, and large bays. The variety and breath-taking beauty of its coast is a critical component of California’s economy and quality of life for its citizens. To make the coast more accessible, encourage non-motorized transportation, and foster appreciation and stewardship of the scenic and natural resources of the coast, the California Coastal Trail (CCT) is being developed to create a continuous, interconnected public trail system spanning over a thousand miles from Oregon to Mexico. Despite the fact that over 60% of the CCT already exists, many Californians and visitors are not familiar with the great opportunities, sometimes even in their own back yards, to enjoy the beach, go for a hike, or experience a tide pool.

To address this, the State Coastal Conservancy, California Coastal Commission (Commission), and the California Coastal Trail Association (CCTA, formerly Coastwalk) have teamed up to develop a mobile-optimized website (web app) to help visitors explore the California Coast. Mobile technology provides an opportunity to greatly improve the accessibility of information related to the California coast and CCT, and to help users select the best coastal experience for their interests and needs. In addition, web-based and mobile technology offers the opportunity to add interactive elements to a user’s experience of the coast. Educational experiences and interpretive information can be provided to users through a variety of multimedia platforms (audio, visual, interactive, etc.) on their phones or tablets.

The goal of this initiative is to develop a geospatially-enabled web app that will allow the public to find and enjoy segments of the CCT, beaches and other coastal recreation points. The app will include site specific maps, trail descriptions, and lists of amenities that users will be able to search based on their interests and needs. Users will be also able to search for coastal locations based on their current location or on a location that they enter, for instance if they are planning a trip somewhere. The web app will also be designed to provide site specific interpretive information on topics such as natural resources and cultural and natural history. Information could be presented through a wide variety of media including text, photos, podcasts, and videos. In this way, for instance, information along a nature trail could be served up to a visitor’s phone providing audio explanations of the natural resources along the trail, as well as pictures to help visitors identify specific plants or geologic formations. Alternatively, information could be packaged as a visual scavenger hunt to help engage younger visitors. The web app will be designed to be easy and attractive for the public to use. It will make it simple for people to find their way to a new place on the California coast, and help them enjoy it when they are there.

The proposed authorization would enable the Conservancy to contract for information technology services for three key activities: 1) develop a content management system for storing, searching, and retrieving data within the system; 2) develop a user interface for content managers to add, edit, and delete data; and 3) develop a user interface for the public web app. The services would also include training and technology transfer to the Conservancy, Commission and CCTA steering committee.

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In order for the web app to truly serve the public and enhance visitors' coastal experiences, the web app will need to be populated with high quality content. Content will be developed over the next several years. Initially, the app will be populated with data from the Commission's Coastal Access Guides and trail map data compiled by the Conservancy. In the near-term, brief descriptive content of access points and trail segments will be added in by staff from the three organizations. Staff will also integrate information from existing resources such as the wheel chair access guides to the coast and Coastwalk's guides for CCT hikers. The CCTA will work with local partners to develop more detailed and comprehensive descriptive and geospatial data over the next few years. The recent round of Conservancy Explore the Coast grants included several grants that will provide interpretive content for the web app, such as videos and podcasts, that can be used to demonstrate to other organizations the system's potential. Conservancy staff anticipate that CCTA local partners, local historical and/or nature societies, and a variety of college programs will also be sources for interpretive content for the system.

As stated above, the Coastal Conservancy, Commission, and the CCTA are working collaboratively to develop the Explore the Coast web app. These are the lead government and nonprofit organizations focused on developing and promoting access to and along the coast. By working together, the three organizations aim to avoid duplicative effort, maximize cost-effectiveness, and produce a high quality product. .

**Site Description:** The Explore the Coast web app will apply to the entire coast of California. In order to initially access data within the app, a user must have an internet connection. Because large expanses of the coast, particularly in rural areas, do not have cellular coverage and therefore a mobile connection to the internet, the web app will prompt users to download information in advance for areas without sufficient mobile coverage for direct use on the coast. There will be no specific geographic constraints on content in the app. Local partners may choose to enter data for other trail systems within their County; however, the Conservancy's focus will be on the coast.

**Project History:** Working both together and separately, the Conservancy, Commission and CCTA have undertaken numerous projects to promote access to California's coast and the CCT. Some of the key resources that have been developed include the Coastal Access Guides developed by the Commission and the UC Press, Wheelchair Rider's Guides to the San Francisco Bay Area, and Los Angeles and Orange County funded by the Conservancy, and the CaliforniaCoastalTrail.info website managed by the CCTA. These resources provide a variety of valuable information about access California's coast, but only some of the information is available on the web and none of it is designed for mobile use.

Over the past few years, numerous local partners have discussed with Conservancy staff the possibility of developing mobile applications for the parks and trails, and the Conservancy received several proposals for these types of projects in the 2013 Explore the Coast grant round. Conservancy staff recognized the interest and need for mobile technology and also the reality that it would be far more cost-effective and easier for the public's use to develop one coastwide application rather than a series of local apps.

In 2012, Conservancy staff began discussions with the Commission and CCTA on collaborating to build a high quality coastal access app. In addition, Conservancy staff began to meet with technology experts to determine the best technology approach. In 2013, the three organizations began to work together in earnest to develop a mobile web app.

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**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	\$275,339
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$275,339</b>

The anticipated source of funds for the project is an appropriation to the Conservancy 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 use of the bond funds for protection of beaches, bays and coastal waters and watersheds, including projects and expenditures to promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state (Section 75060). The proposed project will promote access to and enjoyment of the State’s coastal resources. The California Coastal Trail is a significant state resource that provides both transportation and recreational benefits, and is a significant component of the coastal tourist economy. The proposed web app is an investment in digital infrastructures that will help bring more people to the coast. By doing this, the web app will help the Conservancy, as well as other State and local agencies, to realize a greater return on investment for past projects to expand the CCT or provide increased coastal access.

Section 75060(b) of the Public Resources Code specifically allocates funding to the Conservancy for expenditure pursuant to the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Consistency of the project with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation is discussed below in “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation.”

While neither the Commission nor CCTA are able to provide financial assistance to the project, both are providing significant staff time.

**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 the Legislature’s intent that the Conservancy play a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the coast. The intent of the proposed project is to promote use and enjoyment of coastal access points and the CCT.

Public Resources Code Section 31400.3 authorizes the Conservancy to provide assistance to public agencies and nonprofit organizations “in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division.” The proposed Explore the Coast web app would help public agencies and nonprofit agencies that own and manage coastal lands and/or coastal trails to provide valuable information to aid in accessing and enjoying the coast. For instance, the web app will provide a description of and directions to the coastal access points that have been opened as a result of the Conservancy’s OTD program. At Point San Luis where the Conservancy invested \$625,000 in improvements to the light station, the Lighthouse Keepers are preparing a series of videos that provide historical

information about the light station that will be incorporated in the web app. These are just a few examples of how the web app will help to increase the value of prior Conservancy investments.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective 1a** of the Conservancy's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will implement a web-based technology project to promote awareness and use of the California Coastal 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 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 is supported by the Coastal Commission, the CCTA, and local organizations from throughout the coast that are dedicating staff time to participate on the project's advisory committee. These organizations include the San Diego Association of Governments, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservation & Recreation Authority, City of Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo Council of Governments, Pacifica Land Trust, County of Marin, Sonoma County Regional Parks, and the Mendocino Land Trust.
4. **Location:** The proposed project does not have a physical location; however, it would address areas located within the coastal zone of the State of California.
5. **Need:** The proposed project is a collaborative effort of the Conservancy, Commission and CCTA. Without Conservancy funding, the project will not go forward.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed project would develop a tool that will benefit the entire California coast.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed project does not have a physical location and as such is not vulnerable to sea level rise.

**Additional Criteria**

8. **Urgency:** The proposed project is timed so that the kickoff of content development will coincide with the first annual conference of the CCTA. This is a critical opportunity to

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introduce the tool to local partners and recruit their assistance in developing high quality content.

9. **Innovation:** The proposed project will make innovative use of developing technologies and could be a model for public access programs across the nation. The Conservancy intends to provide the technical framework developed through this project to other agencies upon request.
10. **Readiness:** The project is ready to begin immediately and will be finished in six to nine months.
11. **Cooperation:** The project is a cooperative effort of the Conservancy, Commission, and CCTA.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed authorization does not have the potential to result in any physical changes to the environment and therefore is not a “project” subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as provided in 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15378.