

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 29, 2016

**KASHIA COASTAL RESERVE AND STEWARTS POINT RANCH
COASTAL TRAIL PLAN**

Project No. 16-026-01
Project Manager: Lisa Ames

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$160,000 to Sonoma County Regional Parks Department to prepare an access plan, trail designs, permit applications and environmental documents for two trail segments along the coastal bluffs of the Kashia Coastal Reserve and the Stewarts Point Ranch in Sonoma County.

LOCATION: 29001 and 32025 Highway 1, Stewarts Point, Sonoma County Coast

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [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 \$160,000 (one hundred sixty thousand dollars) to Sonoma County Regional Parks Department (“SCRPD”) to prepare a public access plan and trail designs, permit applications and environmental documents for development of two segments of the California Coastal Trail on the Kashia Coastal Reserve and Stewarts Point Ranch on the Sonoma Coast, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the SCRPD shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
 - a. A work program, including budget and schedule, and the names and qualifications of any contractors it intends to retain for the project.
 - b. Evidence that Sonoma County has acquired a trail easement over the Stewarts Point Ranch.

2. To the extent appropriate, the SCRPD shall ensure that the final designs of the project are consistent with the Conservancy's 'Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development'.

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 *et seq.* of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access to and along the coast.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The project serves greater than local needs.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to \$160,000 to Sonoma County Regional Parks Department (SCRPD) to prepare a public access plan and trail designs, permit applications and environmental documents to develop two trail segments along the coastal bluffs of the Kashia Coastal Reserve and the Stewarts Point Ranch in Sonoma County. The proposed project will complete the planning process for up to two miles of new California Coastal Trail and associated staging areas in a six-mile stretch of the Sonoma Coast that is currently inaccessible to public use.

Situated only 2.5 miles apart, the Kashia Coastal Reserve and the Stewarts Point Ranch share similar coastal terrace geology, open grassland habitats, culturally significant resources and agricultural use of the land for grazing. Stunning views from Highway 1 over this rugged coastline attract trespass across the landscape. To resolve this problem that occurs on both properties, the proposed project will provide for safe, responsible access while protecting the natural and cultural resources and preserving agricultural use.

Components of the public access will likely include a six-foot wide natural ground trail, (ADA compliant where feasible), a new bridge and bridge replacements, two new parking areas, one restroom, gates and fencing, information and trails signs.

The Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of Stewarts Point Rancheria (Kashia) acquired the Kashia Coastal Reserve in 2015 in part with Conservancy funding, anticipating the construction of a portion of the coastal trail. With Conservancy and the Sonoma County Agricultural and Open Space District assistance, SCRPD accepted a public access easement over the 52-acre portion of the Reserve west of Highway 1 to facilitate development of this segment of the California Coastal Trail.

Funding for planning the Stewarts Point Ranch segment is contingent upon acquisition of a public access trail easement over the 105-acre coastal terrace. Acquisition of the easement will be considered for Conservancy funding at this September 29, 2016 meeting. If acquired, this trail easement will be held by SCRPD who has committed to operate and maintain both coastal trail segments once constructed. It is cost-effective for SCRPD to combine planning, design and

environmental document preparation for both properties due to their common management, as well as their geographical, natural and cultural resource, and land use similarities.

SCRPD successfully operates a network of parks and public access trails throughout the County of Sonoma, and the county hosts over 2 million visitors each year who come to recreate along its spectacular coast. SCRPD has completed a number of coastal planning and implementation projects with public input and Conservancy support, and it currently manages Gualala Point Regional Park, Black Point Sea Ranch Access Trail, Stillwater Cove Regional Park, Doran Regional Park and the Coastal Prairie Trail, a segment of the California Coastal Trail (CCT) north of Bodega Bay. In addition, SCRPD has a history of successfully working with coastal tribes to accommodate cross-cultural and historic complexities associated with public access on tribal lands.

Site Description: The 688-acre Kashia Coastal Reserve straddles Highway 1, immediately north of Salt Point State Park in Sonoma County. Fifty-two acres are on the coastal side of the Highway and 636 acres are on the inland side of the highway. The 873-acre Stewarts Point Ranch, located approximately 2.5 miles north of the Kashia Coastal Reserve and nestled in the small hamlet of Stewarts Point, extends from the Pacific Coast approximately two miles inland to the South Fork of the Gualala River. Similar to the Kashia Coastal Reserve, the 105-acre coastal side of Stewarts Point Ranch contains nearly a mile of linear ocean front. (See Exhibit 1)

Both properties include uplifted coastal terrace land west of Highway 1 that gently slopes to steep bluffs adjacent to the Pacific Ocean. (See Exhibit 2 for photos of the properties.) The terrace is currently used for sheep grazing and is mostly comprised of annual and perennial coastal grassland with seasonal and ephemeral drainages and wetlands. The special status plant species that may occur on the sites include harlequin lotus (*Hosackia gracilis*), coastal bluff morning glory (*Calystegia purpurata* spp. *saxicola*), fringed corn lily (*Veratrum fimbriatum*), coast lily (*Lilium maritimum*) and swamp harebell (*Campanula californica*); special status animal species that may occur include grasshopper sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*), Bryant's savannah sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*), American badger (*Taxidea taxus*), and osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*).

A trail along the coastal terrace of the properties will provide expansive views of the ocean, Sonoma County's rocky coast and intertidal zones, and of the forested ridges inland. The area also provides prime whale-watching and wildlife-viewing opportunities.

Highway 1 is designated a scenic corridor in the Sonoma County General Plan as it represents the variety and beauty of the county's landscapes. In addition to the natural resources and scenic values found on the Kashia Coastal Reserve and Stewarts Point Ranch, both properties contain a very high concentration of culturally significant sites to the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of Stewarts Point Rancheria.

Project History: In 2015, the Conservancy awarded a \$500,000 grant to the Trust for Public Land to acquire the Richardson Ranch Property and transfer it to the Kashia for stewardship and management. The purpose of the acquisition was for the Kashia to protect the land from development in perpetuity and manage the property for habitat protection, sustainable forest

management, cultural resource preservation and for future public access along a coastal trail. This property is now known as the Kashia Coastal Reserve.

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (SCAPOS) contributed to the Kashia Coastal Reserve acquisition through the purchase of a conservation easement and a trail easement; SCAPOS subsequently transferred the trail easement which covers the portion of the property west of Highway 1 to SCRPD. Since the acquisition, SCRPD has led the effort to raise funds for trail planning and has agreed to operate and maintain the trail once constructed.

Since 2002, Stewarts Point Ranch has been identified as a priority acquisition for conservation ownership due to the high value of its natural resources, endangered species habitat, historical/cultural resources, coastal trail access, and scenic resources. In 2008, the property was sold to Pacific Forest Trust by the Richardson family who had owned the ranch for 140 years. In 2010, the property was sold to Save the Redwoods League (SRL) who had the intention of selling the ranch to a local non-profit. But after SRL purchased the property, the thinking among the partners (SRL, SCAPOS, foundation funders, and the potential state funders, Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) and the Conservancy) about the best conservation outcome evolved, and the partners agreed that because the ranch had a long history as a privately-held property situated among other private ranches, a better conservation outcome would be for the property to be protected with a conservation easement and the fee interest sold to a private buyer, with a trail easement on the coastal terrace for the future development of a segment of coastal trail. The partners agreed that an easement project would demonstrate to a future buyer and neighboring landowners how conservation could work on private ranches on the northern Sonoma coast. Additionally, acquisition of easement interests reduces the amount of public funding needed to preserve the property's conservation values.

Acquisition of conservation and trail easement interests in Stewarts Point Ranch will be recommended for funding at its September 29, 2016 Conservancy board meeting. If authorized, SCAPOS will use Conservancy funds to match funds authorized by WCB and SCAPOS in August 2016 to acquire a conservation easement and a trail easement over Stewarts Point Ranch; similar to the Kashia Coastal Reserve transaction, the trail easement will be held by SCRPD. Because the Kashia Coastal Reserve and Stewarts Point Ranch share common geography, habitats and cultural resources, as well as potentially the same trail easement holder, it represents a cost savings for the SCRPD to develop a Coastal Trail plan for both properties.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$160,000
Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District	\$160,000
Project Total	\$320,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project is the F/Y 2016-2017 appropriation of the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 ("Proposition 84"), codified at Public Resources Code

(“PRC”) section 75001 et seq. A portion of these funds are specifically reserved for projects within San Francisco Bay Area counties situated in watersheds which drain directly to the ocean. (PRC § 75060(c)). These funds may be used to promote public access to and enjoyment of coastal resources of the State. Conservancy projects funded utilizing Proposition 84 must be consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation. As discussed immediately below, this project is consistent with Chapter 9 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 (Sections 31400-31410) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code regarding public access to 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 the planning of two segments of the California Coastal Trail (CCT), a trail system of statewide significance.

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 project will support development of the California Coastal Trail that will attract visitors from throughout the region and beyond. The Sonoma Coast attracts millions of visitors per year.¹

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, below). SCRPD has only limited funds available to plan and construct the trail, and it will commit the funds necessary to operate and manage the proposed improvements once they are developed.

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 as part of a regional, comprehensive public access plan, and create two significant segments of the California Coastal Trail.

The proposed project helps meet the objectives of the Sonoma County Local Coastal Program. (See “Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies” below). Additionally, the project also implements Coastal Act policies (see “Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies,” below).

¹ State parks in coastal Sonoma County receive over four and one -half million visitors per year, and coastal Sonoma County Regional Parks exceed one million visitors. Sonoma County, *Local Coastal Plan Update, Public Access Element, Preliminary Draft* (June 2015), available at <http://www.sonoma-county.org/prmd/docs/coastal/LCP-Element-10-Public-Access.pdf>.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective C**, the proposed project will result in the design of two new Coast Trail segments, totaling approximately 2 miles.

**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:** Preparation of a public access plan will facilitate the development of the Coastal Trail while protecting natural coastal resources on both the Kashia Coastal Reserve and the Stewarts Point Ranch. The proposed planning project will promote and implement the following state plans:
 - *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, Coastal Conservancy)*, which identifies the need to work with private landowners west of Highway 1 extending northward from Salt Point State Park for the development of a blufftop trail and recreational support facilities. (page 44 #3).
4. **Support of the public:** The project has broad support as demonstrated by the letters attached as Exhibit 3.
5. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of Sonoma County.
6. **Need:** Conservancy funds are needed to complete the planning phase of the project prior to construction. SCRPD has indicated that funding from other regional, state and federal sources is more readily available for construction projects, but there are currently no funds for planning the trail on these properties.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The project is of state-wide significance because it will help to extend by two miles the California Coastal Trail, which is a state-wide recreational resource.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** While both properties are not vulnerable to flooding from rising sea levels or storm surges because of the 70-foot elevations of the coastal bluffs, these forces are expected to cause erosion of the bluffs and a gradual receding of the shoreline. This poses

a risk to the proposed coastal trail segments along this section of the Sonoma Coast. However, this risk has been carefully considered and will be mitigated in the project design. The trail easements over both properties are generally 50 feet wide, thus allowing the trails to be re-routed further inland to escape a receding shoreline. Furthermore, the Kashia Coastal Reserve trail easement that traverses a narrow section of bluff can be relocated if coastal erosion renders a part or all of the existing alignment unusable.

Additional Criteria

9. **Urgency:** The SCAPOSD allocates Initial Public Access funds for planning and operation and maintenance of sites they help to protect for up to three years after acquisition. SCRPD needs to commence the planning process in order to take advantage of this funding opportunity, matching the Conservancy's proposed contribution. Immediate trail planning activity will also continue to build the SCRPD working relationship with the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians who recently acquired the Kashia Coastal Reserve.
10. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
11. **Innovation:** The project will serve as a model to demonstrate how resource conservation, private ranching interests and cultural resource preservation can be compatible with public access.
12. **Readiness:** SCRPD is ready to begin the planning project with the recent acquisition of the Kashia Coastal Reserve and the potential, upcoming acquisition of a trail easement on the Stewarts Point Ranch.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** "See "Project History" above."
14. **Cooperation:** SCRPD will work closely with the SCAPOSD, the Kashia, and the private rancher to develop the coastal trail plan.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The *Sonoma County Local Coastal Program (LCP)*, certified in 1981 and revised and incorporated into the *Sonoma County General Plan 2020* (2008), identifies the need for public action and assistance to resolve existing problems in special resource areas including coastal prairie and grassland, and coastal woodlands. The project advances policies of the Plan which and calls for protecting and enhancing public access to the coast (Policy § 30212 et seq).

By developing an access plan that will balance the needs of the sensitive natural resources, grazing interests and cultural resources, the proposed authorization advances goals of the *Sonoma County General Plan 2020* by protecting the largely open, scenic character of an important Scenic Landscape Unit; preserving the roadside landscape of scenic Highway One (Goal OSRC-3); preserving the unique rural and natural character of the area (Goal OSRC-6); protecting the County's natural habitats (Goal OSRC-7); and protecting significant archaeological and historical sites that represent the ethnic, cultural and economic groups that have lived and worked in Sonoma County, including Native American populations (Goal OSRC-19).

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is statutorily and categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”). California Public Resources Code § 21102 exempts from the requirement to prepare an environmental impact report or negative declaration projects which only involve the preparation of feasibility and planning documents for future actions that have not yet been approved or funded; environmental factors must be considered in the development of such studies and plans. 14 Cal. Code Regs. § 15306 establishes a categorical exemption from CEQA for basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that will not result in serious or major disturbance to environmental resources. The preparation of designs and environmental analysis entails data collection, resource evaluation activities, and preparation of feasibility and planning documents. These activities will inform a future action, the construction of trail segments that have 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 project. Accordingly, the project is exempt from CEQA.

Consistent with Section 15004(c), the grantee will coordinate existing planning, review and project approval process for public access on this property with the environmental review process concurrently. The public access plan and trail design will incorporate environmental considerations into project conceptualization, design and planning, consistent with Section 15004(b)(1) and will not have a significant adverse effect or limit the choice of alternatives or mitigation measures before CEQA compliance consistent with Section 15004(b)(2). Implementation of any public access improvements will be the subject of an environmental analysis approved by a public agency prior to funding and implementation of those improvements.

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