

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
January 18, 2018

PEDRO POINT HEADLANDS STEWARDSHIP

Project No. 17-036-01
Project Manager: Hilary Walecka

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$41,800 to the Pacifica Land Trust for community-based habitat restoration and trail enhancement at the Pedro Point Headlands in San Mateo County.

LOCATION: Pedro Point Headlands, San Mateo County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, Public Access

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Site Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160 *et seq.* and Sections 31400 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed forty one thousand eight hundred dollars (\$41,800) to the Pacifica Land Trust (“PLT”) for community-based habitat restoration and trail enhancement at the Pedro Point Headlands in Pacifica, San Mateo County, subject to the condition that, prior to the disbursement of funds, PLT shall submit for review and approval by the Executive Officer of the Conservancy all of the following:

1. A work program, including tasks, schedule and budget.
2. All contractors to be employed for the project.
3. Evidence that a landowner access agreement from the City of Pacifica has been secured.
4. A plan for acknowledging Conservancy funding of the project.”

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 4.5 (Sections 31160-31165) and Chapter 9 (Sections 31400-31410) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program and the establishment of a system of public accessways to and along the California Coast.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
 3. The Pacifica Land Trust 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 Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy approve a \$41,800 grant to the Pacifica Land Trust (PLT) for community-based habitat restoration and trail enhancement at Conservancy and City of Pacifica-owned property at Pedro Point Headlands in Pacifica. This work is vital to keeping trails open and restoring habitat on this spectacular 255-acre, publicly-owned property. The existing trails at Pedro Point Headlands provide expansive and jaw-dropping views of the adjacent ocean and coastline. Public visitation and interest in the property has increased since the opening of the popular Devil’s Slide Trail which neighbors Pedro Point Headlands, thus PLT’s work on the property and the opportunity it provides for community stewardship is essential.

PLT’s program at Pedro Point Headlands began several years ago in 2007 with support from the Conservancy’s Community-Based, Educational, Environmental, Restoration and Trail Projects Grant Round. Since then, PLT has enlisted hundreds of volunteers to work on the property. With these volunteers, PLT improved many segments of trail, restored native habitat to heal past misuse of the property, and stabilized several areas prone to landslides with native plants (Exhibit 2). In addition to Conservancy support, PLT has obtained grants from other sources to improve habitat and trails at the Pedro Point Headlands. At the end of 2017, PLT completed a \$1.1 million Off- Highway Vehicle (OHV) restoration grant from California State Parks and Recreation to curtail continuing erosion. In addition, in June 2018, PLT will finish a \$350,000 grant from San Mateo County to substantially improve trails and support volunteer habitat restoration. This proposed grant from the Conservancy will enable PLT to continue its efforts to improve public access and habitats on the site until the property can be conveyed to San Mateo County Parks pursuant to the Pedro Point Headlands Implementation Plan approved by the Conservancy on March 26, 2015.

PLT aims to accomplish the following tasks with the proposed Conservancy funding:

- Continue monthly volunteer work days for habitat and trail enhancement, and offer additional educational programs to the community.
- Repair existing trails to improve visitor safety and comfort, including addressing erosion on the major entry trail to the property from the Devils Slide parking lot.
- Revegetate landscape scars caused by previous off-road vehicle use, control invasive plants, and prevent further erosion.

PLT is well suited to carry out this work, as its members live in the area and are able to visit and inspect the property with ease. Some members of the land trust have been involved in the protection of the Pedro Point Headlands for more than 20 years, when they were a critical part of the Conservancy's effort to acquire the property. PLT has attracted many new members since then, thanks in part to the organizational talent and contagious enthusiasm of its part-time volunteer coordinator. For over a decade, PLT has been crucial in the restoration of the property, improvements to trails and public access, and maintenance of the site.

Site Description: The Pedro Point Headlands is a large promontory located at the southern edge of the City of Pacifica, 15 miles south of San Francisco. While a small portion of the Pedro Point Headlands is privately owned and developed with houses, the remainder is publicly-owned open space. The Conservancy owns approximately 98 acres and the City of Pacifica owns an adjacent 157 acres at Pedro Point Headlands, which it purchased with Conservancy funding. Protected public land extends directly to the south at coastal Devil's Slide County Park, opened to the public in 2014 (Exhibit 1).

The land rises almost vertically from the ocean to a height of 625 feet, where the bluff-tops provide a spectacular view of the coastline north to Point Reyes, south to Devil's Slide, and east to Montara Mountain and the Santa Cruz Mountains. The only level land on the 255 acres owned by the Conservancy and the City is found at the top of the ridgelines and the floor of the main valley.

Trails with remarkable views run along these level bluff-top areas and down through the valley, connecting to a six-foot-wide trail that runs parallel to Highway One. Future Coastal Trail alignment for the property will utilize this existing informal trail to connect the City of Pacifica from the north, to 1.2 miles of existing paved Coastal Trail at Devil's Slide County Park to the south. When completed, this section of Coastal Trail will connect 7 miles of existing Coastal Trail segments in Pacifica to the Coastal Trail at Devil's Slide.

The Pedro Point residential neighborhood climbs the slopes of San Pedro Mountain on the west side of Highway 1. One-of-a-kind homes have been built there on impossibly narrow and steep streets. Twisted cypress and Monterey pine cling to the hillsides. At the foot of the coastal side of the mountain, hidden from view to all but walkers, is a tiny village called Shelter Cove. North of the Headlands, San Pedro Terrace Road supports mixed commercial uses and the Linda Mar Boulevard shopping mall is a half mile to the north, across Highway One. Pacifica State Beach is a 0.75 mile crescent shaped beach popular regionally for families and surfers.

Aside from its recreational value, the Pedro Point Headlands provide habitat for coastal species. Its usefulness as wildlife habitat is enhanced by its proximity to other open spaces and protected lands. The Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals Project rates the Pedro Point Headlands as an "area essential to the Conservation Goals" of the San Cruz Mountains North landscape unit and the Association of Bay Area Governments designated Pedro Point Headlands as a Priority Conservation Area (PCA) in 2015 as part of Plan Bay Area. The lands owned by the Conservancy and the City host healthy communities of native vegetation, including a secluded area of reed-grass prairie, which has been identified by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife as a rare plant community type.

Project History: The effort to preserve the Pedro Point Headlands began in 1989, when the Conservancy, the Trust for Public Land and the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) provided

technical assistance to Pacifica residents in establishing a local land conservation organization, the Pacifica Land Trust (PLT). PLT immediately turned its attention to the Pedro Point Headlands property, which was threatened at the time with a subdivision plan for 217 units.

With the assistance of POST, PLT reached agreement with the owners of the Pedro Point property on a phased acquisition plan. In August 1992, the Conservancy granted the City of Pacifica funds for the acquisition of 157 acres at Pedro Point Headlands for the purpose of public access, and in 1995, the Conservancy provided funds to match a federal grant, and acquired 98 more acres at the Headlands for the same purpose – public access.

Since then, two obstacles have faced the development of a public park at Pedro Point Headlands: How will the public access the property, and who will manage it? Until 2014, access to the Conservancy’s and City’s land was gained only by parking along the Caltrans right-of-way on Highway One. Now with the opening of Devil’s Slide Coastal Trail, there is a parking lot adjacent to Pedro Point Headlands to the south. In addition, once the Coastal Trail is built through the property, access will be improved from the City of Pacifica to the north.

Progress has been made on long-term management issues as well. After over 20 years in search of a willing landowner, San Mateo County Parks has agreed to take ownership of the both the Conservancy’s and City’s properties at the Pedro Point Headlands. The County Parks Department has won glowing accolades for its design, construction and management of the Coastal Trail and its support facilities at Devil’s Slide County Park, to which Pedro Point Headlands will be added. On March 26, 2015 the Conservancy approved the Pedro Point Headlands Implementation Plan to transfer the property at no cost to San Mateo County for public access, preservation of open space and natural resource protection. Conservancy and City staff are currently undertaking tasks necessary to complete the transfer to the County, including survey work and removing hazardous trees at the urban boundary. Earlier this year, PLT requested assistance from the Conservancy to support PLT’s ongoing improvements to and stewardship of the public access and natural resources at the site.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$41,800
Others	\$0
Project Total	\$41,800

There are three anticipated sources of Conservancy funds for this project.

The first 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 Conservancy to use bond funds for projects that protect and restore the natural habitat of coastal waters and lands, and projects that promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state, in accordance with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation (Pub. Resources Code Sections 75060(b)-(c)).

Use of Proposition 84 funds is appropriate because this project: a) will restore natural habitat of the Pedro Point Headlands, which is along the coast, b) will improve public access to the coastal

resources of the Pedro Point Headlands, and c) is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, including Chapter 9 (Sections 31400-31410) regarding the right of public access and enjoyment of coastal resources, and the goals and purposes of Chapter 4.5 (Sections 31160-31165), the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.

Section 75060(c) allocates funding specifically for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, and states that "not less than 20% of the funds allocated by this paragraph shall be expended on projects in watersheds draining directly to the Pacific Ocean." The Pedro Point Headlands are located in an ocean-draining watershed of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, so the project meets these requirements of Proposition 84. Consistency of the project with the Conservancy's statutory mission is further discussed below in "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation."

The second funding source is an appropriation from the Conservancy's Coastal Access Account (Public Resources Code Section 30620.2), whose funds are derived from coastal development permit application fees required by the California Coastal Commission. Coastal Access Account funds may be used for grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for the development, maintenance, and operation of new or existing facilities that provide public access to the coast, excluding San Francisco Bay. The Pedro Point Headlands border the Pacific Ocean, and a primary purpose of the project is to enhance trails to provide greater access to the coastline.

The third anticipated funding source is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Beach and Coastal Enhancement Account of the California Environmental License Plate Fund (Vehicle Code Section 5067), whose funds are derived from sales of the Whale Tail® License Plate, an official "specialty" license plate issued by the California Department of Motor Vehicles for cars registered in California ("Whale Tail funds"). Under Section 5067(b)(1)(B), the Whale Tail funds may be granted for coastal natural resource restoration and enhancement projects, and for other projects consistent with the provisions of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31000 et seq). Please refer to the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section below for more information on how the proposed project is consistent with Division 21.

PLT will provide in-kind services consisting of volunteer trail and habitat enhancement, maintenance and management services for the property. The value of these services can be considered a match. In addition to funding through the Conservancy, Pedro Point Community Association and San Mateo County Measure A funds will provide equipment and supplies to support volunteer stewardship tasks.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31165 to address the natural resource and recreational goals of the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. Consistent with Section 31162(a), the proposed project will improve public access to the coast through local trails connecting to the population center of Pacifica and to the public facilities at Devil's Slide, and do so without having significant adverse impacts on environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife. Consistent with Section 31162(b), the proposed project will restore and enhance natural habitats, which also serves as a connecting corridor to other open space resources of regional importance, such as thousands of connected

acres made up by Devils Slide County Park, McNee Ranch State Park, and Golden Gate National Recreation Area. 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), the project will enhance public access to the San Mateo coast, a natural area that is within a short drive of the urban population of the Bay Area.

The proposed project is also consistent with Chapter 9 of 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, PLT's program of repairing and enhancing trails and habitat at Pedro Point Headlands will improve the public's access to and along the coast in this area.

Section 31400.1 allows the Conservancy to award grants to a nonprofit organization for development of lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. The proposed grant is consistent with this section because the grant is to a nonprofit organization, PLT, and the project will improve access along the coast to an area that is visited by a large number of people from the region and beyond.

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, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible projects, and the Conservancy's project selection criteria (see Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines).

Section 31400.3 states that the Conservancy may assist nonprofit organizations in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The proposed project will further these goals by assisting a nonprofit, PLT, in improving existing trails and revegetating old, retired trails on the property that now pose erosion problems.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2018 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective D** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in the reconstruction of dilapidated trails at the Pedro Point Headlands to increase and enhance coastal recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

Consistent with **Goal 4, Objective A**, the proposed project will support educational and interpretive programs that improve understanding and promote stewardship of coastal resources through on-the-ground work days at Pedro Point Headlands where volunteers restore habitat and trails.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective B**, the proposed project will result in the restoration and enhancement of coastal scrub habitat on the Pedro Point Headlands property.

Consistent with **Goal 12, Objective G**, the proposed project includes work days focused on the eradication of non-native invasive species that threaten important habitats on the Pedro Point Headlands property in the San Francisco Bay Area.

**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:** By maintaining safe, sustainable trails and restoring natural habitat, 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."
 - *California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report (2015)*, which includes stewardship and protection of natural landscapes as one of the five key areas that guide the goals.
 - *California Wildlife Action Plan (2015)*, including Goal 2, to Enhance Ecosystem Conditions, through the removal of non-native/invasive plant species and restoring native habitat at Pedro Point Headlands.
4. **Support of the public:** The broad level of support for environmental restoration and trail-work activities at the Pedro Point Headlands is indicated by the large numbers of people that have participated in PLT's programs over the past three years. In addition, letters in support of the project are attached to this recommendation as Exhibit 3.
5. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the coastal zone of San Mateo County.
6. **Need:** Without funding from the Conservancy, PLT would not be able to continue its program of habitat and trail enhancement on Pedro Point Headlands.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed project serves communities throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond. On a typical weekend, 50-60 people can be found hiking on the Headlands. In addition, PLT brings hundreds of volunteers from around the Bay Area to

participate in stewardship efforts, including middle schools, high schools, corporations, Boy and Girl Scouts, and the general public.

8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed project area is not vulnerable to sea level rise, as it is located on the top and the inland sides of the Pedro Point Headlands, which rise to 625 feet above sea level.

Additional Criteria

9. **Urgency:** Pedro Point Headlands has gained in popularity due to the opening of Devil’s Slide Coastal Trail in 2014. With increasing use of the trails and no land manager, PLT’s work is crucial for maintaining safe access, removing invasive species, restoring habitat, and providing stewardship opportunities for the regional community.
10. **Readiness:** The proposed authorization would enable the continuation of a project that is already underway.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
12. **Cooperation:** This project is the result of cooperation among PLT, the City of Pacifica and the Coastal Conservancy.
13. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** Enhancement of habitat on this property will improve landscape-scale connectivity, increasing suitable habitat that can provide resilience to future changes in climate.
14. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The proposed project will not result in significant production of greenhouse gas emissions. Trail and habitat enhancement work is done by hand. Because PLT members are located in Pacifica near the property, they do not have to travel far to implement their program—closer than if Conservancy staff had to travel 30 miles from Oakland to inspect the property on a regular basis.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is consistent with the County of San Mateo’s Local Coastal Program, specifically with:

- Policy 10.9-10, which calls for providing safe access to shoreline destinations, discouraging public use of hazardous trails, and protecting sensitive habitat.
- Policy 11.13, which establishes a trails program for the Coastal Zone with the objective of linking existing and proposed recreation facilities along the coast.

Consistent with these policies, the project will protect sensitive habitat by providing and directing public access along trails so that environmentally sensitive and hazardous areas are avoided, scenic views are protected, and the public has access to views of the shoreline for recreation. Also consistent with these policies, the proposed project will maintain trails that link the Pedro Point Headlands to the existing park facility at Devil’s Slide County Park.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from review of impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA, Public Resources Code Section 21000 *et seq.*) under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Sections 15304 (minor alterations to land) and 15301 (minor alteration of existing facilities).

Section 15304 exempts the minor public or private alterations in the conditions of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy mature scenic trees. The proposed project involves community members using hand tools to remove exotic species, grow and plant native species, and enhance trails. The project includes removal of three dead pine trees, but does not include removal of healthy scenic trees, nor will the project involve removal of species that would require permits from regulatory agencies.

Section 15301 exempts operation, repair, maintenance, and minor alteration of existing structures, facilities and topographical features involving negligible or no expansion of use beyond existing conditions. The trail improvements of this project will be done on existing trails to address erosion and will involve negligible expansion of use.

Upon Conservancy approval, staff will file Notices of Exemption.