

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
September 6, 2018

**GGNRA Hawk Hill Access Improvements**

Project No. 18-018-01  
Project Manager: Peter Jaraus

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to three hundred thousand dollars to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy to restore wildlife and historic resources and upgrade access improvements at Hawk Hill, Marin County.

**LOCATION:** Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Marin County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

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

Exhibit 2: [Site plans](#)

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 31400-31410 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) to Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (“the grantee”) to preserve and restore natural resources, rehabilitate historic structures, and upgrade the public access amenities including the trail system and restrooms at Hawk Hill in Marin County. The proposed authorization is subject the following conditions:

1. Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (“Executive Officer”) the following:
    - a. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
    - b. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
    - c. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.
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2. Prior to disbursement of funds, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer
  - a. evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained, and
  - b. An agreement with the owner of the property on which the project will be carried out sufficient to enable the grantee to implement and maintain the project and to protect the public interest in the project.
3. To the extent appropriate, the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's 'Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development' and the requirements of all applicable federal laws governing barrier-free access for persons with disabilities into 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 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding a system of public accessways.
3. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines."
4. Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy is a nonprofit organization organized 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 the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to \$300,000 to increase accessibility and safety of the Hawk Hill area at the Marin Headlands by upgrading the public access amenities including the trail system and restrooms, restoring wildlife habitat, and rehabilitating historic structures. (Exhibit 1: Project Location). When complete, improved trails will provide access from the Conzelman Road parking area to overlooks, seating, panoramic views, and a number of rehabilitated historic features. The area currently receives over 150,000 visitors a year and improvements are needed to better serve the visitors, restore degraded areas and prevent damage to natural and historic resources.

The proposed project, Phase 2 of a larger historic restoration and visitor access project at Hawk Hill, will create an accessible loop from the parking area on Conzelman Road, through three tunnels and past two enhanced overlooks at the casemates (large structures that house WWII gunpits), and back to Conzelman Road. It will also connect with an accessible trail to the hilltop installed in Phase I and the California Coastal Trail. To connect this loop, an accessible ramp will be installed at Casemate 2, and an accessible pedestrian bridge will be installed in Casemate 1. Overlooks will be created outside of each casemate with accessible seating and sweeping

views of the Point Bonita Lighthouse and the Pacific Ocean. New visitor amenities will be installed, including a new restroom structure with vault toilets adjacent to the Conzelman Road parking area, new railings, bollards, bike racks, kiosk signs, and trash cans. Unsafe historic air shaft and fuel tanks will be sealed and existing damaged railings will be replaced with new railings where needed, to improve visitor safety. The highly degraded trails at the site will be re-routed to a sustainable alignment to meet the Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards (ABAAS) for outdoor recreation facilities. (See Exhibit 2: Site Plan)

This project will expand educational opportunities through new interpretive signs, improve the sustainability of the trails and overlooks, and improve visitor amenities, while protecting natural and cultural resources. The project builds upon several decades of native habitat restoration at Hawk Hill and includes native plantings, resource protection fencing, and removal of site contaminants. Interpretive and wayfinding signs will be installed, providing the public with greater information about the natural and cultural resources of the site as well as better directional information to connect to the extensive trail network in the Marin Headlands, including the popular California Coastal Trail.

This project will benefit the programs that utilize Hawk Hill as an outdoor classroom for all ages. The Golden Gate Raptor Observatory (GGRO) attracts about 1,600 participants each Fall, including approximately 400 youth, to help track raptors in the Pacific Flyway over Hawk Hill. GGRO provides programming to an additional 400 youth between the ages of 5 and 18 throughout the year. Each year, NatureBridge, an environmental education nonprofit organization brings over 1,000 youth to Hawk Hill and the Point Bonita YMCA brings over 300 kids. NPS trail counters recorded about 149,000 users in 2016 and the daily average was 407 users.

**Site Description:**

Located within five miles of the Golden Gate Bridge, the Presidio, Sausalito, and Fort Baker, Hawk Hill is accessible via car, bicycle, or on foot, and attracts both local residents and visitors from all over the world.

Hawk Hill, or Battery Construction 129, is home to structures from two distinct eras in our military history, World War II and the Cold War. In preparation for the new and improved battleships used in World War II, the military installed two large pits to hold guns that could shoot up to two miles offshore. By the time the tunnels, magazines, and gunpits were built, the war was over and the guns were never installed. In addition to the gunpits, a Battery Commander station was installed on the hilltop and camouflaged with soil and native plants.

Hawk Hill is surrounded by the 75,000-acre Golden Gate National Recreation Area. It overlooks the Pacific Ocean to the south and to the north provides a view over public lands which stretch all the way to the summit of Mount Tamalpais. The area consists largely of rolling hills covered in coastal scrub and grasslands. It is also a critical location for migrating raptors which rest and then use the area gain elevation for their crossing of the entrance to San Francisco Bay.

In addition, the site is bordered to the east and west by endangered Mission blue butterfly habitat. The Mission blue butterfly has attracted ecologists' attention for decades as it was one the first invertebrates to be protected under the Endangered Species Act. In recent years, efforts have

been made at Hawk Hill to enhance the Mission blue butterfly's habitat and prevent further degradation of historic structures by removing non-native invasive trees and restoring the native grassland. These efforts were augmented with comprehensive vegetation management that has included native species out-planting and invasive species removal.

**Grantee Qualifications:**

The Parks Conservancy is one of the most accomplished national park partners in the nation, having completed major park building and restoration projects across the 84,000-acre Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA, also known as the Golden Gate National Park), hosting award-winning public programs at the Crissy Field Center, and providing more than \$400 million in support to the parks. The Parks Conservancy has completed numerous projects with state funds including several major Coastal Conservancy grants and has an established/excellent fiscal system and dedicated finance staff. The Parks Conservancy has a strong track record of partnering with the NPS in the planning and implementation of major priority projects in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Notable projects that were partially funded by the Conservancy include: the restoration of Crissy Field (San Francisco), Mori Point (San Mateo County), Redwood Creek watershed/Muir Beach (Marin County), Presidio Trails (including California Coastal Trail) and Lands End (San Francisco).

**Project History:**

This project implements several key elements of the 2015 NPS General Management Plan. The General Management Plan envisions that pedestrian, bike, and motor vehicle access to overlooks and to interpretive and recreation opportunities would be provided. Specifically, "overlooks, such as Hawk Hill, would be improved with amenities including interpretive signs, restrooms, and benches." Additionally, this project is a top priority for the park's "Trails Forever" program. The project responds to the NPS "Call to Action" goal: #4 "In My Backyard: Improve urban residents' awareness of and access to outdoor and cultural experiences close to home."

The GGNRA developed a specific plan for the improvements on Hawk Hill over ten years ago and then incorporated those actions into the Park's updated 2015 overall management plan. Both the specific planning for Hawk Hill as well as the overall management plan were developed with significant public outreach. Phase I of the project (completed in 2017) installed an outdoor accessible trail to the top of Hawk Hill. The new, accessible section of the Hawk Hill Trail connects the Coastal Trail to the hilltop following a gentle path up the northwestern side of the hill, providing resting and passing areas. The existing Hawk Hill Trail section and adjacent social trails were decommissioned and are being planted with native plants. The area above Casemate 1 (one of two structures that house the historic gunpits) was recontoured and is being restored to native habitat. Phase 2 of the plan, the subject of the proposed authorization, would be constructed in 2019/2020, if funds are approved. Phase 3, still to be funded, includes improvements that will improve the visitor experience and safety at the top of Hawk Hill. This includes a better gathering area for school groups, stabilization of the radar tower, as well as a short bridge for public access to the tower.

In the spring of 2018, the Parks Conservancy obtained a significant commitment from a private donor to contribute much of the match needed for the project. The Parks Conservancy then approached the Coastal Conservancy to close the final funding gap needed to construct the project.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>
Helium Act (Federal)	\$1,523,000
Community Support (GGNPC Fundraising)	1,352,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$3,175,000</b>

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. Twenty percent 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 for projects that are consistent with Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation. Under Chapter 4.5, PRC § 31162(a), the Conservancy may award grants that will “improve public access to, within, and around the bay, coast, ridgetops, and urban open spaces, . . . through completion . . . of regional bay, coast, water, and ridge trail systems . . . which are part of a regional trail system and are consistent with locally and regionally adopted master plans and general plans, and through the provision and preservation of related facilities.” The proposed project will improve public access by upgrading trails and related public facilities along the Marin Headlands ridgetop as part of the GGNRA trail system. Similarly, under subsection (d) of the same section, the Conservancy may “promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes.” Because the project is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, it is an appropriate use of Proposition 84 funds that are designated for ocean-draining watersheds in the Bay Area.

GGNPC in partnership with GGNRA has also secured a grant from the Federal Helium Act, money available to agencies within the Department of Interior from the selling off the Federal Helium Reserve. In addition, GGNPC is nearly finished raising the remaining funds from individual donors.

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

In addition to consistency with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 as described above, the proposed project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (§§ 31400 et seq.) relating to the provision of public access to the coast. 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.

In particular, this project is consistent with PRC § 31400.1, which allows the Conservancy to provide grants to nonprofit organizations to develop lands for public access purposes to and along the coast; and § 31400.3, in that the Conservancy may provide such assistance as is required to aid nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public accessways. The proposed authorization will enable the GGPC to improve access for all abilities to a coastal viewpoint. Consistent with § 31400.2, the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy for this project is based upon the amount of funding available for coastal public accessway projects, the fiscal resources of the Golden Gate Parks Conservancy, the urgency of this project and the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, as described below.

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

**Standard No. 5, Environmentally Sensitive Areas:** The proposed alignment will travel through sensitive areas. The trail is designed to minimize any impacts to these areas.

**Standard No. 13, Barrier-Free Access:** The trail and other improvements are designed to meet the applicable accessibility standards.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2018-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will implement a project that expands and enhances opportunities for access for people with disabilities to and along the coast.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective D** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will fund the construction of a new facility to enhance coastal recreational opportunities.

**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:**  
*California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report.* The project is consistent with Pillar 5: stewarding natural resources to enhance environmental benefits.

*California Wildlife Action Plan:* By restoring habitat for state-listed species including the endangered Mission blue butterfly, the project will support the goals of the California Wildlife Action Plan: Goal 1 – Abundance and Richness: Maintain and increase ecosystem and native species distributions in California while sustaining and enhancing species abundance and richness. Goal 2 - Enhance Ecosystem Conditions: Maintain and improve ecological conditions vital for sustaining ecosystems in California.

4. **Support of the public:** see Exhibit 3: Project Letters.
5. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of Marin County.
6. **Need:** Without support from the Conservancy the project would not be able to meet its federal match requirement and the project could not take place.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** Approximately 150,000 people visited Hawk Hill last year. Visitors come from all parts of the USA and it is a favorite spot for international tourists as well.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project is at a high enough elevation that sea level rise is not an issue.

#### **Additional Criteria**

9. **Urgency:** The Conservancy’s funding is critical to meeting the federal match, otherwise the federal funding will revert at the end of 2018 and the project will not take place.
10. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
11. **Readiness:** The grantee has experience implementing complex restoration and trail projects in partnership with staff from the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.
12. **Cooperation:** GGNPC will partner with the National Park Service (manager for the GGNA) on the implementation of the project.

#### **CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

Staff has determined that the proposed actions are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under the CEQA Guidelines, title 14 California Code of Regulations, §§ 15301, 15303, 15304, and 15333.

Section 15304 exempts minor alternations in the condition of land, water, and vegetation. The trail rehabilitation and other improvements to the site, including native plantings will involve minor trenching and backfilling and the area will be restored once the trail construction is complete.

The restoration and rehabilitation of deteriorated or damaged structures is categorically exempt under § 15301, which exempts projects that restore structures to meet current public health and safety standards. The project will fill in dangerous portions of the degraded historic battery site and provide for a safe path of travel through the site.

Section 15303 exempts the construction and location of limited numbers of new, small facilities or structures, including accessory structures. The project will construct and locate several small accessory facilities, including a new small vault toilet, interpretive signs, fencing and bike racks as accessory to the buildings and facilities already at the site.

The restoration of native plants and vegetation is categorically exempt under § 15333, which exempts small habitat restoration projects not exceeding five acres in size, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife. These activities meet the additional conditions of this exemption in that there would be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat; there are no hazardous materials at or around the site; and the project will not result in significant impacts when viewed in connection with the effects of past, present, or probably future projects.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval.