

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

March 14, 2019

PISMO RANCH PRESERVE PUBLIC ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS AUGMENTATION

Project No. 14-015-02

Project Manager: Timothy Duff

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$500,000 to the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County to augment the Conservancy's May 26, 2016 authorization of \$200,000 to the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County for the construction of public access improvements at the Pismo Ranch Preserve located adjacent to the City of Pismo Beach in San Luis Obispo County.

LOCATION: Adjacent to the City of Pismo Beach, San Luis Obispo County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [May 26, 2016 Staff Recommendation for Pismo Ranch Preserve Public Access Improvements](#)

Exhibit 3: [Photos](#)

Exhibit 4: [County of San Luis Obispo Letter](#)

Exhibit 5: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

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

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby augments its May 16, 2016 authorization to disburse \$200,000 to the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County (LCSLO) for the purpose of constructing public access improvements at the Pismo Ranch Preserve by authorizing the disbursement of an additional five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) for the project. Prior to the disbursement of these additional funds, LCSLO shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) an amended work program, budget, schedule, and names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed for these tasks.

All conditions imposed by the May 26, 2016 authorization remain in effect.

Prior to disbursement of the additional funds, LCSLO shall enter into and record an updated

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agreement pursuant to Public Resources Code 31116(c) sufficient to protect the public interest in the improvements.

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 remains consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access.
2. The proposed project remains consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The LCSLO 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.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Conservancy staff recommends that the Conservancy augment its May 26, 2016 authorization (Exhibit 2) to disburse an additional \$500,000 to the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County (LCSLO) for the construction of public access improvements (the project) at their Pismo Ranch Preserve property located adjacent to the City of Pismo Beach in San Luis Obispo County (Exhibit 1). The project consists of construction of parking, restrooms, 11 miles of trails, and trail amenities. The Conservancy awarded LCSLO \$4 million in 2014 towards the \$11.5 million acquisition of the 880-acre property with the understanding that the public would eventually be able to access and enjoy the site’s magnificent open space and scenic resources. The proposed augmentation would help cover the increased costs of the project and is being matched by private donations secured by LCSLO. Completion of the proposed project will enable the public to access and enjoy property every day of the year weather permitting.

Since the Conservancy awarded LCSLO \$200,000 for the project, LCSLO has developed over 11 miles of trails on the property with the help of over six thousand hours of volunteer labor. To date, over 8,000 people have visited the Preserve during docent-led hikes hosted by LCSLO. However, the parking area and restrooms have not yet been constructed, and as a result, the property is only open at limited times. Due to the discovery in 2017 of significant Native American cultural resources including a cemetery, the proposed project required modifications to address and protect these resources. The discovery of the cultural resources and the steps needed to ensure their protection led to a significant increase in project costs, as did new requirements by the City of Pismo Beach to upgrade the adjacent road and entrance, including a sidewalk and retaining wall. In addition, construction costs, including labor rates and materials, have increased by as much as 50% in just the past three years due to the active construction market and other forces in the region.

In order to protect the cultural resources, the project has been redesigned and has consolidated the original concept for two parking areas, one specifically for equestrians, into one multi-use parking lot. The revised parking area will accommodate up to 50 passenger vehicles, four Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible parking spots, and four equestrian truck and trailer spots. The parking lot design also allows ample space for public transit and school buses.

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Scheduled to be completed by the spring of 2019, the construction of the first phase of the project entails installing water and sewer connections, including a fire hydrant for fire suppression, and enhancing the Preserve entrance with formal signage, gates, and landscaping to improve aesthetics as well as security. In addition, a new sidewalk will be installed to facilitate safe pedestrian access under the freeway from the oceanside of Highway One/101 to the Preserve entrance. A retaining wall will be constructed to stabilize the hill slope adjacent to the sidewalk, and sight lines will be improved to increase safety for vehicles exiting the Preserve. These improvements will be completed with funds provided by the City of Pismo Beach, San Luis Obispo Council of Governments and private donations, all of which were secured by the LCSLO.

The second phase of the construction includes building the parking lot, installation of the restroom building that has already been fabricated offsite with funds awarded by the Conservancy in the May 2016 authorization (Exhibit 2), and construction of an ADA-accessible path. In addition, informational kiosks, picnic areas, safety lighting, wayfinding features, and drought-tolerant landscaping will also be installed. LCSLO is still raising money to complete all of the planned improvements. With an additional \$1 million beyond the proposed authorization, LCSLO could complete the parking lot, bathroom, and landscaping sufficiently to formally open the preserve to the public. LCSLO anticipates doing this in the summer or fall of 2019. An additional \$1.2 million will still be needed for the future construction of the ADA accessible path.

Site Description: See Exhibit 2.

Grantee Qualifications: LCSLO has had an outstanding record working with the Conservancy over the past three decades on both acquisition and restoration projects. The LCSLO has extensive experience owning and managing conservation preserves and its professional staff is well prepared to take on the proposed project and the day-to-day responsibilities that come with owning and operating a preserve that allows for public access and recreation. The LCSLO will dedicate a staff person responsible for maintenance and enforcement on the preserve.

Project History: In May 2016 the Conservancy awarded the LCSLO \$200,000 for the construction of access improvements at the Preserve. These funds were directed to the fabrication and pending installation of a restroom building. Due to the discovery in 2017 of significant Native American cultural resources the proposed project required adjusting the size and location of the parking area and related amenities. The cost to construct the revised project increased due to both the design changes as well as to dramatically rising construction costs. The LCSLO completed the required modifications to the project design and contacted Conservancy staff with a request to provide additional match funding, and in the summer of 2018 Conservancy staff agreed to request board approval for the grant award at its March 2019 meeting.

PROJECT FINANCING

This authorization

Coastal Conservancy	\$500,000
San Luis Obispo Council of Governments	\$400,000
City of Pismo Beach/Hoteliers	\$500,000

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Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo	\$500,000
<i>Previous Authorization</i>	
Coastal Conservancy	\$200,000
San Luis Obispo Council of Governments	\$175,000
Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo	<u>\$500,000</u>
<i>Remaining balance to be secured</i>	\$2,000,000
Project Total	\$4,775,000

The anticipated source for the Conservancy funds for this project 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 Sections 75001-75130 (Proposition 84). Proposition 84 authorizes the use of bond funds for projects that promote access to the coastal resources of the state and are consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation (Division 21 of the Public Resources Code). Consistent with these provisions, the proposed project will serve to protect and improve the use and enjoyment of property and scenic coastal resources at the Pismo Preserve Ranch property by planning and developing physical improvements of real property. The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21, as discussed in the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section of Exhibit 2. The proposed project is thus consistent with the funding requirements of Proposition 84.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation as described in the May 26, 2016 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

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

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A** of the Conservancy’s 2018-22 Strategic Plan, the project will expand or enhance opportunities for access for people with disabilities to trails with scenic coastal vistas.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective B** of the Conservancy’s 2018-22 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will open a coastal area that is currently inaccessible or closed to public use.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective D** of the Conservancy’s 2018-22 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will fund construction of new facilities including picnic areas, parking lots, restrooms, and natural play spaces, to increase and enhance coastal recreational opportunities and enable people to enjoy natural, cultural, and historical resources.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on October 2, 2014, as described in the May 26, 2016 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project remains consistent with the City of Pismo Beach Local Coastal Plan (LCP) as described in the May 26, 2016 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The County of San Luis Obispo (County), as the lead agency for purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), prepared an Initial Study/ Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the proposed project. The County adopted the IS/MND on November 18, 2015, and on February 22, 2016 the County filed a Notice of Determination with the State Clearinghouse. Conservancy staff reviewed and considered the IS/MND when it first recommended funding for the project at the Conservancy's May 26, 2016 meeting. Based on staff's recommendation, the Conservancy found at that time that there was no substantial evidence that the project, as mitigated, would have a significant effect on the environment.

As described above, the project was subsequently revised to avoid cultural resources. Upon review of the revised project, the County determined the revised project resulted in less site disturbance and less overall impacts to site resources. No further environmental review was considered necessary because 1) the areas to be disturbed were within the scope of the original project, 2) impacts in this area were evaluated under the approved Mitigated Negative Declaration, and 3) none of the conditions described in CEQA Guidelines section 15162 were applicable that would have required a subsequent Negative Declaration. The County's summarized its determination in a December 20, 2018 memo to LCSLO (Exhibit 4).

Conservancy staff have independently reviewed the revised project and original IS/MND and agree with the County's determination that no further environmental review is necessary as a result of the project revisions.