

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
February 2, 2023

**JUG HANDLE FIRE SAFETY PROJECT**

Project No. 22-049-01  
Project Manager: Fanny Yang

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$33,300 to Jug Handle Creek Farm and Nature Center (JCFNC) to remove a minimum of 95 high-fire-risk invasive trees, plant 30 redwood trees and shrubs, and install signage on the JCFNC property located in the community of Caspar, Mendocino County.

**LOCATION:** Caspar, Mendocino County

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed thirty-three thousand three hundred dollars (\$33,300) to Jug Handle Creek Farm and Nature Center (JCFNC) (“the grantee”) to remove a minimum of 95 high-fire-risk invasive trees, plant a minimum of 30 new redwood trees and native shrubs, and install interpretive signage at the JCFNC property adjacent to the Jug Handle State Reserve in Mendocino County.

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:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.

4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Climate Ready Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The JCFNC is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

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## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$33,300 grant to Jug Handle Creek Farm and Nature Center (JCFNC) to remove a minimum of 95 high-fire-risk dead and dying invasive Monterey Pine trees, plant native trees and shrubs, and install interpretive signage, on the campground portion of its property, which is located in Mendocino County, as shown in Exhibit 1.

JCFNC provides lower-cost accommodations and nature education programs to a wide range of people including low and middle income families and school groups, Native American and Indigenous tribes, and nonprofit organizations. In 2021, JCFNC served over 17,250 people, providing hostel rooms, camping and cabins, nature experiences, Indigenous retreat spaces, and cultural educational activities. The proposed project will increase the fire safety of the JCFNC property for visitors and surrounding properties.

The project site was planted with hundreds of invasive Monterey Pine trees in the 1960s. As these trees are approaching the end of their natural life cycle, either already dead or in the process of dying, the Monterey Pines are at risk at falling and contributing to fire risk. The trees surround JCFNC's popular low-cost camping facility, which has 11 sites. The 8-acre campground site that sits within the larger JCFNC property is also in a Very High Fire Risk area as determined by the Fort Bragg Rural Fire District Hazard Zones and Responsibility Area. The site is also identified by CalFIRE's Fire and Resource Assessment Program as fire priority level 3, the highest priority or Very High Fire Risk, on the program's Priority Landscape Maps. This indicates high prioritization for investment in these areas to treat and reduce fire risk. Implementation of the proposed project will help to reduce the fire risk to the adjacent Jug Handle State Reserve from future potential fire on the JCFNC site.

The proposed project follows a series of Conservancy funded planning and implementation projects at JCFNC to increase lower-cost coastal accommodations (LCCA) and other visitor

serving amenities on the property. In 2007, the Conservancy provided a \$87,300 grant to JCFNC to prepare an enhancement plan to guide improvements to the site's facilities, such as additional lodgings, classrooms, and sanitary facilities, and trail improvements. The Conservancy granted another \$275,000 to JCFNC in 2010 to continue architectural programming, schematic designs, and construction and permitting cost estimates for the envisioned site and trail, including cabins for student groups and counselors, two bathhouses, and a teaching shelter. In 2020, JCFNC completed the construction of a bunkhouse and educational space, funded through a \$883,500 Conservancy grant. JCFNC subsequently constructed a bathhouse using privately donated funds. Earlier this year, JCFNC received a \$508,400 grant from the Conservancy to build new cabins, additional campground bathroom facilities, and related infrastructure on the JCFNC property.

The proposed project includes removing a minimum of 95 dying or dead Monterey Pine trees with hand equipment such as chainsaws to minimize understory damage. The project will take place in JCFNC's 8-acre campground, specifically within a 4.9 acre area that is located in the forested part of the campground. Felled trees will be cut into rounds for firewood, with slash - coarse and fine woody debris - to be chipped or burned on-site during the winter season. After tree removal, restoration planting will commence in the spring with limited plantings of a minimum of 30 native Redwoods and shrubs. The project includes installation of an interpretive panel that will explain the importance of the project, the restoration process, and the benefits of fire safe clearing around buildings and campsites. Project work will be spread over two years, to minimize disruption and allow the site to adjust to the tree removal activities. The proposed project will result in a larger cleared area (meadow with some scattered trees) and a more open forest with ladder fuel and dead trees removed and replacement of Monterey Pine with fire resistant Redwood trees. The goal of the proposed project is to replace a non-native, fire-prone forest with a native coastal Redwood forest, providing opportunities for interpretative education and enjoyment for the more than 9,500 campers that utilize the campground per year.

JCFNC staff has engaged and met with stakeholders including tribal representatives, schoolteachers, and environmentalists on site to discuss the proposed projects. JCFNC will coordinate school group volunteers to propagate and plant replacement native trees and shrubs for the restoration component of the proposed project. In addition, as a separate project, JCFNC is working with the Caspar community and Mendocino County to remove gorse infestations from over 150 acres within Caspar; the proposed project fits within the restoration activities in the area and allows JCFNC to showcase restoration on their own property.

**Site Description:** The JCFNC property is comprised of 33 acres, and includes forests and meadows, nature trails, a century-old Victorian farmhouse, an eleven-site campground with one group campsite, bunkhouse with classroom, cabins, and a nursery and greenhouse. The site is located adjacent to Highway One just east of the town of Caspar in Mendocino County and was originally a dairy ranch supporting cows and sheep. The farmhouse, which currently provides lodging for up to 17 visitors, was built in the 1870's and the old creamery (a former dairy barn) serves as office space and a residence for the JCFNC caretaker. JCFNC was established at the same time as the Jug Handle State Reserve and is about a five-minute walk to the Reserve's 1.74 miles of trails and 1,000 acres of trail networks.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** JCFNC is a nonprofit organization that provides environmental education programs for youth from Mendocino County and other areas, lower-cost lodging and camping for tourists and environmental groups, and a greenhouse and nursery where students, youth groups, and others can learn about and participate in native plant restoration projects. JCFNC staff is dedicated to improving the property and facilities at JCFNC and is experienced in handling and managing state grants. The Executive Director has managed numerous large and small state and federal grants totaling more than \$30 million over the course of her career; the Finance Director has managed state grants of more than \$800,000 for the Bunkhouse Expansion Project previously funded by the Coastal Conservancy's lower-cost coastal accommodations program and currently a \$508,400 grant for cabin construction and related amenities improvement. The organization has sufficient cash reserves to be able to address cash flow for the proposed project. JCFNC has demonstrated its ability to work with subcontractors and permitting agencies to plan for facilities enhancement projects. JCFNC has staff trained in tree removal for the proposed project.

JCFNC's long-term management and maintenance of the proposed project and site will consist of continuing to remove Monterey Pine tree seedlings throughout the campground, replace any planted native trees that have not survived with new seedlings, rake decayed organic material that accumulate on the forest floor for spruce seed drop, and mow the meadow.

#### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

##### **Selection Criteria**

**1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.**

See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Strategic Plan" section below.

**2. Project is a good investment of state resources.**

The proposed project is a good investment of state funding. The project is feasible, has a reasonable budget, and addresses a demonstrated need. The project implements many statewide wildfire and forest resiliency goals. The proposed project is consistent with several state plans, and specifically with the following:

- California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan (Governor's Forest Management Task Force, January 2021), which calls for activities such as fuels reduction, forest thinning, vegetation management, prescribed fire, shaded fuel breaks, defensible space, and enhancement of fire-prone habitats to reduce fire risk.
- The California Forest Carbon Plan (CNRA, 2018), which calls for restoration of natural fire regime and forest composition through a multitude of approaches including thinning, prescribed burns, invasive vegetation management, and shaded fuel breaks.

- The Community Wildfire Prevention & Mitigation Report (Cal Fire, 2019), which urges state and local agencies to implement the goals of the Carbon Forest Plan and lays out recommendations to agencies to increase the scale and pace of management and mitigation actions to improve forest health and resiliency.

The proposed project provides important benefits to Californians by reducing fire risk in a high risk area, reducing fire risk in a public campground that is adjacent to the Jug Handle State Reserve, and restoring the site with native fire-resistant Redwood trees and a variety of shrubs. The project budget is reasonable and leverages non-state resources from JCFNC. The project scope was developed in partnership with a registered Forester, who prepared a Forest Management Plan and worked with JCFNC staff to identify hazard trees that are in decline for removal. The total cost is estimated to be \$350 per tree removed, including post removal site restoration. JCFNC will provide \$23,700 of private donations to cover 25% of project costs.

**3. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.**

The proposed project will help increase fire resiliency in the context of anticipated climate change by removing mature non-native Monterey Pine trees and replacing them with longer-lived fire resilient Redwood trees. Increasing forest resilience to wildfire is critical due to increased average temperatures, reduced marine fog, and longer and more severe droughts. California is facing unprecedented fire risk due to climate change and a growing populace. Both the 2020 and 2021 fire seasons broke numerous records. The proposed project will result in a more sustainable landscape; additionally, the long-term monitoring and maintenance program will remove any non-native resprouts.

**4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.**

The proposed project delivers multiple benefits and a significant positive impact for the public. The project reduces fire risk to Jug Handle State Reserve and to JCFNC, which provides coastal access, accommodations, and environmental education to the public. The project improves native habitat and provides an opportunity to teach many campers about the benefits of fire safety and fire resilient native plants.

**5. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.**

The proposed project includes meaningful community engagement and demonstrates broad community support; JCNFC has strong working relationships with tribal groups in the community, incorporating their restoration advice for the proposed project. As part of community engagement, JCNFC staff met with schoolteachers, tribal representatives, and environmentalists to coordinate group volunteers for the native species restoration component of the project.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$33,300</b>
Jug Handle Creek Farm and Nature Center	\$23,700

Community Foundation of Mendocino	\$17,876
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$74,876</b>

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding is the Fiscal Year 2021-22 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of wildfire risk reduction in the Budget Act of 2021, as amended by SB 170 (2021). The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it will help reduce the risk of wildfire.

Unless specifically identified as “Required Match,” the other sources of funding and in-kind contributions described above are estimates. The Conservancy does not typically require matching funds or in-kind services, nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders or of in-kind services. Typical grant conditions require grantees to provide any funds needed to complete a project.

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

The recommended project would be undertaken pursuant to Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy’s jurisdiction (Section 31113(a)).

Pursuant to Section 31113(b), the Conservancy is authorized to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects that include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and addressing extreme weather events, sea level rise, flooding, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources.

Pursuant to Section 31113(c), the Conservancy must prioritize grants for projects that maximize public benefits and have one of several purposes, including reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.

Consistent with these sections, the proposed project will restore the health and resilience of California forests, grasslands, or natural lands and reduce fire risk to communities. The project will help California’s natural lands to be more resilient to catastrophic wildfires which may ultimately reduce greenhouse gas emissions released from increased wildfires due to climate change.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 1.1**, which seeks to commit funding to projects that benefit systematically excluded communities, the proposed project reduces wildfire risk located within a disadvantaged community.

Consistent with **Goal 4.2.2**, the proposed project will implement a project to restore the health and resilience of California forests, grasslands, and natural lands in a manner that reduces fire risk to communities. The project will help California’s natural lands to be more resilient to catastrophic wildfires.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

On October 1, 2015, the Conservancy adopted the “Initial Study/Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Jug Handle Creek Farm and Nature Center Enhancement Project” (IS/MND) and authorized funding for the project. The project remains substantially unchanged from its description in the IS/MND, which includes landscape improvements that cover removal of invasive dead and dying Monterey Pines throughout the campground to address fire danger and to facilitate restoration with native trees and plants. No new environmental information or change in circumstances require a re-evaluation of the potential environmental effects of the project. (14 Cal Code. Regs. Section 15162(b)). Accordingly, the proposed authorization remains consistent with the CEQA findings adopted by the Conservancy in connection with the October 1, 2015 authorization.