

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
April 6, 2023

ARENA COVE COASTAL TRAIL PLANNING

Project No. 22-087-01
Project Manager: Michael Bowen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$100,000 to the Mendocino Land Trust, Inc. to prepare designs, environmental review documents and permit applications for the Arena Cove Coastal Trail in Arena Cove, Point Arena, Mendocino County.

LOCATION: Arena Cove, Point Arena, Mendocino County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)
Exhibit 3: [Support Letters](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

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

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to the Mendocino Land Trust, Inc. (“the grantee”) to develop designs, environmental review documents and permit applications for a segment of the Coastal Trail at Arena Cove in Point Arena, 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.

In addition, to the extent appropriate, the grantee shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy’s ‘Coastal Access Project Standards.’

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 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding provision of public accessways.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
 3. Mendocino Land Trust, Inc. 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:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed \$100,000 to the Mendocino Land Trust, Inc. ("MLT") to develop designs, environmental review documents and permit applications for the Arena Cove Coastal Trail in Point Arena, Mendocino County (Exhibit 1). The proposed Arena Cove Coastal Trail is a segment of the Coastal Trail and related public access amenities including benches and signage extending from Arena Cove to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-managed Stornetta Bluffs.

The trail is proposed to begin at Arena Cove, the vibrant heart of the local Point Arena Community which includes a working pier for commercial/recreational fishing and a variety of watersports including surfing and kayaking. In addition, Arena Cove, a registered historic district, features a city park, beach, creek, restaurants, lodging, and ample parking for all of these activities. The conceptual plan is for a trailhead to be located on Port Road, with the trail proceeding north across private property owned by the owner of the Coast Guard Inn, who has generously offered to donate a trail easement. The trail would follow the hillside contours to a knoll on Stornetta Bluffs at approximately 200 feet elevation (Exhibit 2). This broad knoll offers a superb view of Arena Cove and is proposed to be the site of several view benches as well as select interpretive/educational signage.

Currently, the Coastal Trail in this area comprises a network of informal trails on the blufftop extending from the Point Arena Lighthouse to the Point Arena City Hall and Highway One. These informal trails provide access to the edge of the bluff but terminate at the bluff top overlooking the Cove. The proposed Coastal Trail segment will enable visitors to hike down from the blufftop to Arena Cove, thereby connecting the Cove to the Point Arena Lighthouse, a distance of 3.5 miles. The proposed trail will reduce social trails and avoid sensitive areas.

The approximate total length of the proposed trail is 1/3 of a mile. A full site assessment must be undertaken, but the designs will likely include a trailhead kiosk at Port Road, dirt steps, a foot bridge, benches, and signage. Signage would include directional, habitat, and interpretive information. Conceptual plans call for a hand-tool built 2-foot wide trail surface consisting of on-site gravel, dirt, and mowed grass.

Development of the Arena Cove Coastal Trail will advance a longstanding goal shared by the community of Point Arena and the Coastal Conservancy. The trail is a logical extension of prior Conservancy investments, such as the Stornetta Brothers Coastal Ranch Acquisition (2010), and the Point Arena Cove Acquisition (2015).

Once constructed, the trail will improve access in and around the Cove and provide a useful linkage from the north to this popular location. The acquisition of the Stornetta Brothers Coastal Ranch, and subsequent designation of that property as part of the California Coastal National Monument prompted an increase in visitation to the City of Point Arena (“City”). The City hopes to improve public access amenities within the city limits to better serve local residents and visitors.

The proposed project consists of preparing environmental review-ready designs for a coastal trail segment extending north from the harbor area of the Arena Cove up the hill to the BLM-owned Stornetta Bluffs. The project includes design of resting and viewing areas, as well as signage, including interpretive panels featuring information about past and present tribal use of the area, Coast Guard history in the region, and natural history of the area. The environmental review documents will be sufficient for both the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The proposed project includes a community outreach effort led by the Arena Cove Stewards in conjunction with MLT and the City. This includes coordination with the Manchester Band of Pomo Indians. Letters of support from the City and the McCullough Family, the property owners over which the proposed trail would pass, indicate their interest in and support of this project (Exhibit 3).

The Conservancy has a long history of supporting public access near Point Arena. Immediately north of the City of Point Arena the Conservancy helped acquire 123 acres and 1 mile of coastline that was transferred to BLM in 2012. This expanded the existing 1,711-acre Stornetta Brothers Coastal Ranch Acquisition which the Conservancy initially supported in 2003. In 2014 the Conservancy funded the Point Arena Cove acquisition of a 1.8-acre parcel in the Cove. These acquisitions have provided for the development of a section of California Coastal Trail connecting the City of Point Arena to the Point Arena Lighthouse, and north to Manchester State Beach. To the south the Conservancy has also helped MLT acquire the Pelican Bluffs property and construct a section of California Coastal Trail with the goal of connecting the City of Point Arena to Moat Creek, an access point owned in fee by the Conservancy.

Site Description: Point Arena is located in southern Mendocino County approximately ten miles north of Gualala. The City of Point Arena wraps around Arena Cove, its harbor. Point Arena Creek flows downhill from the city center and enters the Pacific Ocean on the south end of Arena Cove.

Arena Cove features an historic district of various historic Coast Guard facilities including the Coast Guard Inn (historic Coast Guard residence) and the Coast Guard Boat House (historic rescue boat launch site). The Cove also features Point Arena’s 330-foot long public fishing pier, a hub for sport and commercial fishing activities, kayaking, surfing, and the launch of pleasure craft. Sea urchin, crab, and salmon are popular yields of the commercial fishing vessels that are launched by hoist off the Point Arena Pier, which was reconstructed in 1983 after a storm destroyed its predecessor.

Prior to the 1860s, Point Arena was one of many sites along this stretch of coast which utilized chutes and wire trapeze rigging to load the small coastal schooners with redwood lumber and other cargo. Most of these ports were so small they were called dog-hole ports—since they supposedly were just big enough to allow a dog to get in and out. Dozens of these were built,

and almost any small cove or river outlet was a prime candidate for a chute. Luckily, the captains of these schooners were masters of their art and were able to get in and out of places like Hard Scratch and Nip-and-Tuck. Nonetheless, shipwrecks were common, hence the emphasis on and reverence for Coast Guard history.

The proposed trail provides a linkage for hikers to travel from the Cove to the Point Arena Lighthouse to the north, which hosts a museum dedicated to Point Arena and its maritime history. The proposed trail will be located on several properties: Port Road, which is owned by the City, on private property via a trail easement that MLT intends to acquire from McCullough Family prior to completion of the proposed project, and on Stornetta Ranch, which is owned by BLM. The City, the McCullough Family, and BLM have each indicated their support for the proposed Coastal Trail segment.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Mendocino Land Trust is uniquely qualified to carry out this project. The organization has completed numerous trail planning and Coastal Trail construction projects throughout the Mendocino Coast (Shady Dell, Old Smith Ranch, and Pelican Bluffs being among the more recent). Arena Cove Stewards (ACS) is an organization that focuses on Arena Cove related environmental conservation, restoration and protection, and improvement to the equilibrium between the community and nature.

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 project is a good investment of state resources for several reasons. First, it is cost effective for a steep and complicated site. Second, the owner of the property featuring a large portion of the proposed trail has offered to donate an easement for the trail.

The project leverages non-state resources in the form of a valuable donation by the property owner and volunteer contributions by several important coastal partners including ACS, MLT, and others. Moreover, it is possible that once the trail designs are completed, BLM may fund the implementation of the trail.

3. Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area.

The ACS, a partner to MLT, has initiated outreach to the Manchester Band of Pomo Indians. As part of the proposed project, the ACS will engage with the Manchester Band of Pomo Indians to communicate early the nature of the trail, and the desire and opportunity to describe traditional stewardship and cultural practices in the interpretive materials. MLT and partners

will also seek input on how to design the trail amenities to enable future educational opportunities at the site, and guidance on conducting archaeological evaluation of the project area. The outreach will be conducted in a manner that seeks to be as respectful of time limits and capacity as possible.

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

The Cove is highly susceptible to sea level rise. Wave overwash during large storms already extends across the parking lot and past the main commercial zone. By siting the coastal trail segment well back from the waterfront and at a relatively high elevation, the trail will remain safe and secure for years to come.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

Decidedly disadvantaged, Point Arena represents a side of the Mendocino coast that has largely faded from view. Comprised of its original development and surrounded by agricultural or timber-oriented properties, the area is a refreshing departure from that portion of the coastline that has given way to multi-million dollar bluff-top vacation estates. The hard-working harbor, in combination with a vital lighthouse and miles of coastal trail atop an undeveloped bluff, provides visitors with a unique combination of open space and coastal dependent uses uncluttered by challenging access and rampant commercialization of the waterfront.

Because the site is within striking distance of the San Francisco Bay Area and Sonoma County, it provides a low-key and affordable coastal experience for the visitor. The geography of the area, sited on a high coastal bluff, ensures longevity in an age of rising seas.

6. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

ACS held two community meetings to discuss Cove related priorities and the trail link was identified as an important coastal trail link. ACS has also reached out to the Manchester Band of Pomo Indians to discuss the project (see, below). MLT will work hand in hand with the ACS, a non-profit dedicated to the protection and enhancement of this working North Coast harbor. ACS, MLT, and others are in strong support of this effort to connect the Coastal Trail all the way from the Lighthouse to the Cove.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$100,000
Mendocino Land Trust	\$5,000
Project Total	\$105,000

Conservancy funds are anticipated to come from the Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of climate resilience (The Budget Act of 2022, SB 154). These funds are available as described in Section 52 of Chapter 258 of the Statutes of 2021, which sets forth a detailed description of the purposes of the climate resilience funds. The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it will

facilitate development of a portion of the California Coastal Trail, a nonmotorized trail of statewide significance.

The MLT and ACS will provide cash match for survey work, as well as significant in-kind match in the form of public outreach meetings, coordination with the property owner and more.

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:

Pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 31400.1 of Division 21, the Conservancy is authorized to provide grants for development, operation or management of public accessways. Consistent with this provision, the proposed project will facilitate development of a Coastal Trail segment between Arena Cove and the Point Arena Lighthouse.

The Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of the acquisition of interests in lands and the initial development of public accessways by any public agency or nonprofit organization. See Public Resources Code § 31400.2. Section 31400.2 requires the Conservancy to consider a number of factors in determining the amount of funding for initial development of an accessway. 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).

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

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective 2.4**, the proposed project will plan and prepare permit applications for a 1/3 mile trail segment of the California Coastal Trail that will provide a crucial link to an additional three miles of Coastal Trail extending north to the Point Arena Lighthouse.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective 2.5**, the proposed project will include interpretive materials and thereby “support educational and interpretive facilities...that enable people to enjoy natural, cultural, and historical resources.....”

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project consists of feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded, and data collection and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The project is therefore statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262 and categorically exempt pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15306.

Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Determination.