

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 1, 2023

SURFERS POINT MANAGED RETREAT PROJECT- PHASE 2

Project No. 08-057-02
Project Manager: Kara Kemmler

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$16,200,000 to the City of San Buenaventura (Ventura) to construct Phase 2 of the Surfers Point Managed Retreat Project, a sea level rise adaptation project that relocates existing infrastructure landward and restores beach dune habitat, in Ventura.

LOCATION: Surfers Point, City of Ventura, Ventura County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Site Photos](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [June 2008 Staff Recommendation](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [Phase 2 Renderings](#)
 - Exhibit 5: [Project Letters](#)
 - Exhibit 6: [City of Ventura's CEQA Compliance Memo](#)
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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 sixteen million two hundred thousand dollars (\$16,200,000) to the City of San Buenaventura ("the grantee") to construct Phase 2 of the Surfers Point Managed Retreat Project, a sea level rise adaptation project that relocates existing infrastructure landward and restores beach dune habitat, in Ventura.

Prior to commencement of construction of Phase 2, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy 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 installation of signage to acknowledge Conservancy funding.

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 public access.
2. The proposed project, as augmented, is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize disbursement of \$16,200,000 to the City of San Buenaventura (Ventura, or the City) to construct Phase 2 of the Surfers Point Managed Retreat Project (project), a sea level rise adaptation project that relocates existing infrastructure landward and restores beach dune habitat, in Ventura. The project is located along the coast in the City of Ventura adjacent to the mouth of the Ventura River (Exhibit 1).

Surfers Point is a very popular surfing beach and recreational destination. The project site is a heavily used beach access point and encompasses about 1,800 linear feet of shoreline, a segment of the State Senator Omer Rains Bicentennial Bikeway, which is part of the California Coastal Trail, parking areas, and a public street. For more than three decades, starting shortly after the construction of the existing path and parking lot, the site has experienced severe beach erosion, damaging the path and parking lot, creating hazardous conditions, and resulting in the loss of critical public access resources (See photos, Exhibit 2). The managed retreat project was a collaborative solution that came out of the Surfers Point Working Group, established to address the coastal erosion problem in this area, which included members from the City of Ventura, the 31st Agricultural District (Fair Board), California State Parks, the California Coastal Commission, the Conservancy, State elected officials, Surfrider Foundation, and other local stakeholders.

The project involves removal of all existing improvements seaward of the public road, including the damaged bike path and eroded public parking lot; shortening the public road to allow for the relocation of the path and parking areas including new “surf check” spots further inland; installation of associated landscaping and recreational amenities, such as an entry kiosk, bicycle parking, lighting, a new interpretive area, and signage; installation of a buried cobble berm to provide protection from erosion; and restoration of the retreat zone and the cobble berm area with sandy beach and sand dunes.

The Conservancy authorized a \$1,500,000 grant in 2008 for the Surfers Point Managed Retreat Project and made CEQA findings for the full scope of the project (Exhibit 3). The \$1,500,000 grant was subsequently augmented by \$85,646 by the Executive Officer. Although the Conservancy expected completion of the entire project with that grant, the project was subsequently split into two phases due to funding shortages and the constraints imposed by the coastal development permit which limited the window of construction to avoid access and resource impacts. The division into phases split the project site down the middle. The Conservancy's 2008 grant supported the implementation of Phase 1, which consists of the project components located on the western portion of the project site, adjacent to the river. Phase 1 was completed in Spring 2011. (See pre-post Phase 1 aerial in Exhibit 2). Phase 1 was extremely successful, garnering nationwide attention for its novel approach to addressing long term coastal resilience by restoring coastal habitat while also improving and protecting public access. The project has served as a case study in coastal resilience planning and several projects along the coastline are referencing the approach used in Phase 1.

The recommended grant is for construction of Phase 2, which consists of the project components located in the eastern portion of the project site. Phase 2 will complete the restoration and protection of 1,800 feet of shoreline by relocating infrastructure 60 to 130 feet inland and restoring habitat in the retreat areas (See Exhibit 4). The potential impact of Phase 2 of this project is invaluable as a model for nature-based sea level rise adaptation and this is a unique opportunity to relocate infrastructure inland, which doesn't exist in many places along the coast.

The scope of the entire project remains largely unchanged from its description in the original staff recommendation (see Exhibit 3). The final design of Phase 2 includes some new details, such as the addition of electric vehicle charging in the new parking lot. In addition, in Phase 2 the interpretive elements are being developed further and include a public art piece, a Coastal Trail Mile Marker, and element(s) that will elevate the voices of the local Tribe(s), such as land acknowledgement, storytelling or art. The City is and will continue to engage the Tribes to explore options to meaningfully acknowledge the cultural history of the site. The City will also engage the local community to inform the public art piece and potential enhancements to the project that will increase equity and accessibility for underserved and excluded communities who may face barriers to accessing and/or enjoying the public access and recreation opportunities at the site. The City's engagement efforts will include a variety of tools such as bilingual materials, community workshops, pop-up events at the site, surveys, and more to meaningfully engage the community in the project. This project is located within a severely disadvantaged community ([California Climate Investments Priority Populations 2022 CES 4.0](#)) and will provide improved and resilient recreational opportunities for nearby residents.

This project is one of the first managed retreat projects to be implemented in California. It serves as a model of sustainable shoreline management for other similar projects up and down the California coast and its completion is long awaited.

Site Description: The project site is a cobble and sand beach that stretches approximately 1,800 feet to the east from the Ventura River mouth located along the coast in the City of Ventura. The Phase 1 portion of the site adjacent to the river encompasses half the linear length of the

project site and contains a restored beach profile with sand dune habitat, relocated segment of the Coastal Trail, and a parking area. The Phase 2 portion of the site lies to the east and is developed with a substantially eroded and damaged segment of the Coastal Trail, a parking lot, and a public roadway. The site is bordered to the north by the Ventura County Fairgrounds which is heavily developed including convention facilities, demonstration halls, administrative offices, equestrian facilities, a simulcast horse racing club, a racetrack, an arena and parking areas. Seaside Park hosts the annual Ventura County Fair and other events throughout the year, including trade shows, conventions, concerts, and festivals.

Surfers Point is a very popular recreational destination attracting more than 400,000 visitors annually, including beachgoers, surfers, windsurfers and kite surfers to the beach and pedestrians, rollerbladers, runners and bikers who use the heavily trafficked Coastal Trail. The Coastal Trail also connects to a path that continues upstream along the river serving as an important connection between the beach and the upper watershed.

The City owns a portion of the project site including the public road. The northern portion of the project area is part of the Ventura County Fairgrounds, owned and governed by the 31st District Agricultural Association. The project is being carried out under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City and the Ventura County Fairgrounds.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The City has taken the lead on this project to help facilitate a solution from all affected stakeholders throughout the working group process, has served as the lead for environmental review and permitting, and has managed grants from various funders to carry out the project. The City successfully managed the grants for Phase 1 of the project and subsequently led the final design of Phase 2. The City is well suited to manage the grant for Phase 2 to see the project to its completion.

Under the MOU between the City and the Ventura County Fairgrounds, the City is responsible for major repairs and maintenance of the project components, while the day-to-day operation and maintenance of the project area is the responsibility of the Ventura County Fairgrounds. The City will monitor the project site post-construction for seven years and provide annual reports addressing water quality, site conditions related to erosion, performance of cobble berm, and dunes stability, and maintenance recommendations as described in and required by the coastal development permit.

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 gap in time between the completion of Phase 1 and the final design of Phase 2, largely due to lack of funding, has resulted in a significant cost increase due to global supply chain impacts from the pandemic and inflation. Despite the cost increases, the project is a good investment of state resources because the project advances statewide sea level rise adaptation and climate resilience goals and advances the state's 30 x 30 access priorities. The project preserves critical public access and recreation resources and restores native sand dune habitat. In addition, the project serves as a model for nature-based adaptation and coastal resilience along the California coast and throughout the world.

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 City and the Conservancy have reached out to Tribes who historically inhabited the project area as part of the formal CEQA and government-to-government consultation processes. In addition, the City has engaged the local Tribes to explore opportunities to enable traditional stewardship and cultural practices on ancestral land and ways to provide meaningful acknowledgement at the site. The City will continue to work with interested Tribes throughout the development and implementation of the project.

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

The managed retreat project serves as a model for other beaches along the California coast that are threatened by erosion and sea level rise, combining managed retreat of public facilities and coastal habitat restoration to create a nature-based sea level rise adaptation solution to protect the coastline for decades to come.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The project will rebuild important recreational resources which have not been accessible for several years due to damage from coastal erosion and restore native coastal habitat that will double as sea level rise resiliency providing a multitude of environmental, economic, and public health benefits and increasing the community's resiliency to climate change impacts.

The project provides public access to open space located in a disadvantaged community. In addition, the Tribal engagement will focus on providing meaningful access to and acknowledgement of ancestral lands.

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

The City has a track record working with local community based organizations to gather input for incorporation into planning efforts and public projects. Organizations include Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE), Merito Foundation, Friends of the Ventura River, and others who advocate for excluded communities and climate change resiliency. The City is committed to meaningful engagement with the Tribes and the community to incorporate equity, diversity and inclusion into this project.

The proposed project has enjoyed widespread community and public agency support since the development of the project concept to today. The project is supported by Senator Monique Limon, Assemblymember Steve Bennett, County Supervisor Matt LaVere, the multi-stakeholder

Surfers Point Working Group, including California State Parks, the California Coastal Commission, Surfrider Foundation, and BEACON. Project letters are attached as Exhibit 5.

PROJECT FINANCING

Previous Funding (Phase 1 Construction):

Coastal Conservancy 2008 Authorization and Augmentation	\$1,585,646
Federal Highway Administration/Caltrans Grant	\$1,226,862
City of Ventura (Grantee)	\$732,056

Proposed Authorization (Phase 2 Construction):

Coastal Conservancy	\$16,200,000
City of Ventura (Grantee)	\$200,000
Project Total	\$19,944,564

Conservancy funding for this authorization is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) to the Conservancy for the Climate Ready program for purposes of nature-based projects that address sea level rise (Budget Act of 2022, as amended by AB 178, Chapter 45, Statutes of 2022). The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund Investment Plan and Communities Revitalization Act (Health and Safety Code (HSC) Sections 39710 – 39723) requires that GGRF funds be used to (1) facilitate the achievement of reductions of GHG emissions consistent with the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (HSC sections 38500 *et seq*), and (2) to the extent feasible, achieve other co-benefits, such as maximizing economic, environmental and public health benefits and directing investment to disadvantaged communities (HSC section 39712(b)). The Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 sets forth (among other things) certain GGRF funding priorities (HSC section 38590.1). The California Legislature has also appropriated GGRF funds to the Conservancy to protect communities and natural resources from sea level rise (The Budget Act of 2022, as amended by AB 179, Chapter 249, Statutes of 2022).

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) has adopted guidelines that establish program goals that agencies must achieve with their GGRF funds. Consistent with the CARB 2018 Funding Guidelines, the proposed project will help the Conservancy meet its GGRF program goals because the project will:

- Facilitate GHG emission reductions (which includes carbon sequestration) and further the purposes of AB 32 and related statutes;
- Benefit Priority Populations (disadvantaged communities, low-income communities, or low-income households);
- Maximize economic, environmental, and public health co-benefits to the State.

The proposed project will meet these objectives by planting native sand dune habitat which will increase carbon sequestration and protect the bike path, which provides an alternative transportation option reducing GHG emissions; investing in a disadvantaged community, engaging the community to explore opportunities to enhance equity and accessibility to the project site, including engaging Tribes to enable Tribal stewardship and practices onsite and provide meaningful acknowledgement; relocating existing infrastructure landward to avoid erosion and flooding reducing economic impacts, protecting natural lands and restoring habitat, and preserving public access and recreation resources essential to public health maximizing co-benefits to the State. The proposed project is also consistent with this funding source because it will protect communities and natural resources from sea level rise.

The grantee will provide funding to support five years of additional monitoring beyond the two included in the grant for a total of seven years at an estimated value of \$200,000.

The grantee will provide in-kind staff time for the duration of the project estimated to be \$90,000.

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 proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Chapter 6 regarding coastal resource enhancement and Chapter 9 regarding public access, as detailed in the June 5, 2008 staff recommendation (See Exhibit 3).

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.1 Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will improve environmental and recreational conditions within a disadvantaged community and improve resiliency to sea level rise. The City is also engaging with local Tribes in an effort to elevate the voices of those that historically inhabited the project area.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5 Recreation Facilities and Amenities**, the proposed project will relocate, enhance, and construct new recreational facilities to support public access to and along the coast, including a segment of the Coastal Trail, a parking lot, surf check spots, signage, a Coastal Trail Mile Marker, and other associated amenities.

Consistent with **Goal 3.2 Restore or Enhance Habitats**, the proposed project will restore 2.5 acres of sand dune habitat.

Consistent with **Goal 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects**, the proposed project is a sea level rise adaptation project designed to preserve coastal access and recreation resources using a managed retreat and nature-based approach of dune restoration.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

On June 5, 2008, the Conservancy reviewed and concurred with the Surfers Point Managed Shoreline Retreat Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The project remains substantially unchanged from its description in the EIR. There are minor updates to the design, including the addition of public art, bike racks, and electronic vehicle (EV) chargers. However, the City's environmental consultant determined that none of these changes will result in a new significant environmental effect or a substantial increase in severity of a previously identified environmental effect, and no new environmental information or change in circumstances require a re-evaluation of the potential environmental effects of the project (Exhibit 6). Conservancy staff concurs with that determination. (14 Cal Code. Regs. Section 15162(b)). Accordingly, the proposed authorization remains consistent with the CEQA findings made by the Conservancy in connection with the June 5, 2008 authorization (Exhibit 3).