

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 14, 2023

Sue-Meg State Park Rim Trail Project

Project No. 23-059-01
Project Manager: Morgan Wright

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$168,256 to the Redwood Parks Conservancy to construct the Sue-Meg State Park Rim Trail Project, consisting of a 262-foot trail realignment and the replacement of a temporary bridge with a 33-foot footbridge to reestablish California Coastal Trail continuity and increase accessibility in Sue-Meg State Park in Humboldt County.

LOCATION: Sue-Meg State Park, Trinidad, Humboldt County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Project Support Letters](#)
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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 one hundred sixty-eight thousand, two hundred and fifty six dollars (\$168,256) to the Redwood Parks Conservancy (“the grantee”) to construct the Sue-Meg State Park Rim Trail Project consisting of a 262-foot trail realignment and the replacement of a temporary bridge with a 33-foot footbridge to reestablish rim trail continuity and increase accessibility in Sue-Meg State Park in Humboldt 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.
5. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement, operate, and maintain the project.
6. In addition, to the extent appropriate, the Redwood Parks Conservancy 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 public access.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Redwood Parks Conservancy is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$168,256 grant to the Redwood Parks Conservancy (RPC) to construct the Sue-Meg State Park Rim Trail Project, consisting of a 262-foot trail realignment and the replacement of a temporary bridge with a 33-foot footbridge to reestablish California Coastal Trail (CCT) continuity and increase accessibility in Sue-Meg State Park in Humboldt County as shown in Exhibit 1.

The Rim Trail is an ADA accessible, heavily used trail in Sue-Meg State Park that is part of the CCT. It connects with short spur trails that allow visitors to enjoy breathtaking coastal views. A bridge along the Rim Trail allowed trail users to cross Beach Creek, until about 10 years ago when it was damaged from erosion. The deteriorated cribbed abutments and wooden mud sills left in place have become unstable. The bridge was replaced with a seasonal pipe bridge. The temporary bridge poses a risk of injury for hikers and limits ADA access. The temporary bridge has been in place for 10 years and must be replaced to ensure safe and equitable access. The temporary pipe bridge will be replaced with a 33-foot fiberglass footbridge, allowing for safe public access along the Rim Trail.

60,000 visitors per year hike on the Rim Trail and public users have expressed the need to improve the bridge. The project is a priority because it will bring safety, ADA access and Tribal access year-round. A Tribal path follows a portion of the bridge section and reestablishing access will provide safe passage to sites within the Tribe's ancestral lands. Tribal engagement regarding the project is discussed in Project Selection Criteria #3 below.

Project activities consist of trail realignment, removal of the temporary pipe bridge and replacement with a fiberglass footbridge. The 262-foot trail reroute will be constructed on the south end of the new bridge and will reconnect into the existing trail alignment. Preparation and leveling of the bridge site for construction will include excavations on both ends of the bridge. One and a half cubic yards of soil, excavated during construction, will be used for backfilling to the approach ramps for the bridge, building a multi-tier rock causeway approach on the south end of the bridge will form an even, linear grade to the trail surface. The trail surface will be hardened using a crushed quarry shale aggregate base. The 33-foot fiberglass footbridge will be constructed using plastic, wood, mud sills, and fiberglass stringers. The materials were chosen for a lightweight build to increase the maneuverability and ease of transport, as well as for durability, and availability. No trees will be removed for trail construction. The trail realignment and bridge have a life expectancy of at least 20 years. No known cultural sites or special status plants and animals have been found within the construction zone and surveys will be conducted by specialists prior to the start of work verify.

RPC will administer the grant and manage the proposed project. For the construction work, RPC will contract with National Park Service or California State Parks (referred to collectively as Redwood National and State Parks), whose crews have experience working on constructing bridges and trails near creeks. Trail crews employed by Redwood National and State Parks will implement the project. Local Tribal members will be offered the opportunity to work on the project with training provided to further workforce development. Trail crews will monitor the completed trail and conduct routine maintenance.

The trail realignment and bridge reconstruction will provide a vital connection point for the California Coastal Trail (CCT), provide ADA access for trail users of all abilities, and provide a safe and established trail to minimize human impact on the environment, reduce the risk of the introduction of invasive species, and maintain natural water flow patterns for resilience against climate change issues such as flooding.

Site Description: The Rim Trail at Sue-Meg State Park is a 1.7-mile section of trail that follows the coastal bluff of the park. An average of 60,000 visitors per year hike at this location, making it a vital segment of the California Coastal Trail (CCT). The CCT is an integrated network of trails that, when completed will provide a multi-modal opportunity to walk and bike the length of California's Coast and will span over 1,230 miles from Oregon to Mexico. The Rim Trail follows a Yurok path along the edge the State Park headlands. The Rim Trail provides ADA access to breathtaking coastal views and an intimate look at the wild side of Sue-Meg State Park that allows people of all abilities to recreate and experience nature.

California State Parks owns and operates the 640-acre State Park and manages the visitor center, campgrounds, and facilities. The forested area of the park features tree species such as Sitka spruce, Douglas-fir, western hemlock, lodgepole pine, and red alder. Plants include salmonberries, huckleberries, and thimbleberries. Wild mushrooms grow in fall and early winter. Black bears and birds such as winter wrens and red crossbills inhabit the area. Migrating whales, seals, and sea lions can be seen in the waters surrounding the park. Limpets, orange cup coral, northern red anemone, and purple shore crabs are some species that can be found in the Park's diverse tidepools.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Redwood Parks Conservancy (RPC) was established to foster understanding, enjoyment, and stewardship of public lands through educational outreach, visitor services, and to support partners entrusted with the care of public lands along the northern California coast. RPC provides support to the National Park Service, California State Parks, Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, and Tribal Partners. RPC will provide funds to Redwood National and State Parks, whose specialized and professional trail crews will complete the work. The crews have many years of experience working on similar projects of bridge construction and creek-side trails.

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 will protect and enhance a significant section of the CCT, which will be enjoyed by approximately 60,000 visitors annually. The trail realignment will reduce the risk of future erosion impacts. The new footbridge will be ADA compliant and will make it easier for all visitors to safely enjoy the site. The trail has Tribal importance and restoring the trail will benefit the Tribe.

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.

Sue-Meg State Park has a strong working relationship with a local Tribe whose ancestral lands include the project area. In April of 2023, California State Park and the Trinidad Rancheria entered into an agreement which grants Tribal members access to gather on their ancestral lands and establishes a cooperative partnership between the Rancheria and State Parks. In 2021, Sue-Meg State Park became the first California State Park to have a traditional Yurok name restored to the North Coast area. RPC participates in joint management sessions with the Tribe and Park staff to discuss projects in the park and address concerns. The Project was discussed with the Tribal Council and was highlighted as important due to portions of the trail following a Tribal path. Additionally, RPC will offer Tribal members the opportunity to work on the project and build trail construction and maintenance skills.

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

The project will benefit visitors to Sue-Meg State Park and hikers on the CCT for at least the next twenty years by realigning the trail with longevity, sustainability, and climate resilience in

mind. Sustainable materials include a quarry shale aggregate base to ensure durability for the heavily trafficked trail, and long-lasting materials for the construction of the fiberglass bridge. The trail redesign has a negligible ecological footprint. The established trail will encourage hikers to remain on the designated path which minimizes human impact on the environment, prevents erosion and disturbance of wildlife habitats, reduces the risk of invasive species instruction, and maintains natural water flow patterns for resilience against flooding and erosion. The North Coast Redwood trail crew will conduct routine monitoring and maintenance of the completed trail and bridge.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The project will increase equity and environmental justice by restoring safe public and Tribal access and increasing ADA access. The project will increase Park preparedness and resilience to future climate change impacts, such as flooding, by installing a durable bridge, while promoting the use of sustainable materials and construction techniques. It will also allow for the continuity of the CCT system. The project will hire and train local Tribal crew members for implementation, creating jobs and incorporating workforce development into the project by providing trail construction training.

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

The planning effort for the Rim Trail realignment and bridge replacement addressed public, Tribal, and State Park concerns over the safety and use of the trail. Public engagement included dialogue between RPC, State Parks, and a Tribe; and took into consideration public users of the Trail who have expressed the need to improve the Trail and bridge.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$168,256
Project Total	\$168,256

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of climate resilience. (Budget Act 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, including nonmotorized trails of statewide significance. The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it will repair a section of the California Coastal Trail, closing a significant gap in the trail, which is a nonmotorized trail of statewide significance.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31410), regarding public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. 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. Through the proposed project, the Conservancy will help enhance a coastal accessway and thereby improve access to and enjoyment of coastal resources along the Northern California Coast.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.4 Incorporate Workforce Development in Our Projects**, the proposed project will hire and train local Tribal members to provide workforce development and trail construction training.

Consistent with **Goal 2.3 Expand Accessibility**, the proposed project will complete an ADA compliant section of the Rim Trail in Sue-Meg State Park, so people of all abilities can recreate and experience the beauty of the Northern California coast.

Consistent with **Goal 2.4 Build Trails**, the proposed project will realign 262 feet of the Rim Trail in Sue Meg State Park, a portion of which includes the California Coastal Trail, and expands access to and along the coast.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

All components of the proposed project are categorically exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines at California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15301, 15302, and 15304. Section 15301 (existing facilities) exempts the operation, repair, maintenance, or minor alterations of existing structures, facilities, or topographical features, involving negligible expansion of existing of existing or former use of the site. Section 15302 (replacement or reconstruction) exempts the replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities where the new structure will be located on the same site as the structure replaced and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structure replaced. Section 15304 (minor alterations to land) exempts minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes. Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.