

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
November 30, 2023

**TORREY PINES STATE BEACH SEA LEVEL RISE ADAPTATION: DESIGN AND ENGINEERING**

Project No. 19-042-02  
Project Manager: Kellan Warner

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$2,268,100 to the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Foundation to conduct outreach and prepare engineering designs and permit applications to relocate parking facilities to preserve public access to North Torrey Pines State Beach in San Diego County.

**LOCATION:** Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve, San Diego County

---

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Feasibility Study](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

---

**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 two million, two hundred sixty-eight thousand, one hundred dollars (\$2,268,100) to the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Foundation (“the grantee”) to conduct outreach and prepare engineering designs and permit applications to relocate parking facilities to preserve public access to North Torrey Pines State Beach, San Diego 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.

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 Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Foundation 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 grant of \$2,268,100 to the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Foundation (LPLF) to conduct outreach and prepare engineering designs and permit applications to relocate parking facilities to preserve public access to North Torrey Pines State Beach, San Diego County (see Exhibit 1 Project Location and Site Maps).

This proposed project is the second phase of an ongoing project that was initiated in 2019 with the support of California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) and funding from the State Coastal Conservancy. The Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve (TPSNR) receives millions of visitors annually due to its world-famous trails, beaches, and iconic views that include coastal waters and sandstone bluffs crowned by a relic forest of Torrey Pines, the rarest pine tree in North America. One of two coastal parking lots in TPSNR, the Torrey Pines North Beach Parking Lot (North Lot) receives approximately 1.8 million visitors annually. A site conditions analysis conducted during previous planning efforts demonstrates that the North Lot's current configuration, a low-lying parking lot with close proximity to the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon, makes it extremely vulnerable to coastal flooding based on projected sea level rise (SLR). Built in the 1960s, most of the North Lot's facilities and infrastructure are outdated and require frequent maintenance. Lack of adequate storm water facilities in the North Lot is also an issue as untreated storm runoff is discharged directly into nearby wetlands, contributing to degraded water quality and establishment of non-native plants. A crushed culvert under McGonigle Road diminishes tidal connectivity to an area of tidal salt marsh located north of the North Lot, and recent undermining of this section of McGonigle Road has further damaged the structural integrity of the North Lot's only vehicular access point.

The previous planning phase of the Torrey Pines State Beach Sea Level Rise Adaptation project, funded by the Conservancy, included a site conditions analysis, technical studies, a feasibility analysis, and an evaluation of three preliminary concept designs. Emphasizing the use of multiple benefit sea-level rise accommodation strategies, including managed retreat, nature-based strategies, and living shoreline design techniques, the previous planning phase developed three strategies and preliminary concept designs for the North Lot. The alternatives developed to support the preferred managed retreat strategy all included reduction in parking spaces, conversion of removed infrastructure to restored native habitat, improved lifeguard facilities,

improved storm water facilities to capture and treat runoff, improving tidal connectivity, and improvement to the North Lot's amenities. These concepts were presented to the public and other key stakeholder groups through public workshops, direct meetings, online surveys, and engagement with resource agency representatives. Based on the results from additional technical analysis and stakeholder input, the Reduced Footprint: Retreat to the North option was selected as the preferred managed retreat strategy (Exhibit 2 Feasibility Study). This strategy presents unique opportunities to expand and re-connect native habitats that support rare/sensitive plants and listed species while still serving the public need for coastal access along with improved amenities and utilities for park patrons and State Parks staff, including first responders. The Reduced Footprint: Retreat to the North alternative will remove parking spaces, convert removed infrastructure to restored habitat area, improve State Parks Lifeguard facilities, construct a stormwater infiltration swale along the edge of the North Lot to capture and treat runoff, provide improved tidal connection to the salt marsh area north of McGonigle Road, and provide other amenities, such as nature trails, interpretive panels, and parking lot amenities. This alternative was developed to the 30% engineering design level and environmental review (CEQA) was completed in July 2023. State Parks determined that the project was exempt from CEQA.

The engineering and design phase will build upon efforts and deliverables generated in project planning and include refining the project design, additional surveys and models needed for engineering, special status species surveys, engineering design for the preferred alternative, generation of construction plans and specifications, and securing project permits needed for construction of the newly designed North Lot. Stakeholder engagement will occur throughout this phase of the project through presentations, meetings, and workshops open to the public, along with outreach efforts targeting key user groups. Through a partnership with Outdoor Outreach, the Torrey Pines Outdoor Advocacy Working Group will also be formed to provide youth development and leadership opportunities for high school age youth and young adults from underserved communities in San Diego (See Project Selection Criteria #6). Additionally, the Torrey Pines Tribal Working Group will be formed to shape and guide the development and design of the Land of the First People Outdoor Exhibits at the North Lot, which is part of the Torrey Pines State Beach Sea Level Rise Adaptation project. The intention of the Land of the First People Outdoor Exhibits at the North Lot is to highlight and inform the public about the presence of the Kumeyaay at Torrey Pines State Reserve while also creating a network of First People Outdoor Exhibits within the San Diego Coast Region that demonstrates both the individual importance of specific locations to the Kumeyaay Nation and their interconnectivity (See Project Selection Criteria #3).

**Site Description:** Owned and managed by California State Parks as part of the TPSNR, the North Lot is a six-acre triangular-shaped asphalt parking lot with 502 parking spaces located near the intersection of Carmel Valley Road and the North Torrey Pines Road section of Highway 101. Vegetation communities surrounding the North Lot include Diegan Coastal Sage Scrub, Coastal Dune, Coastal Salt Marsh, Open Water, and disturbed habitat. These vegetation communities provide habitat for special status plants that include Nuttall's lotus, coast woolly heads, and red sand verbena, and listed bird species that include California gnatcatcher, Belding's savannah sparrow, western snowy plover, and elegant tern.

A long-term management and monitoring plan will be developed as part of the design and engineering project phase during 90% Design. This plan will include biological monitoring of restored habitat, physical monitoring of the nature-based shoreline protection system, and an adaptive management plan to allow for project elements to be modified or maintained over time as triggers are met. The plan will be refined through coordination and collaboration with State Parks staff that includes the Park Maintenance Chief at TPSNR to ensure that long-term management and maintenance will be implemented through their facilities maintenance program for the Reserve. A Resource Agency Committee set up during the planning phase will be consulted during engineering and design efforts for input on the draft long-term maintenance and management plan before it is finalized and submitted as a requirement for project permits.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** Since 1983, LPLF has improved communication and coordination between state and federal agencies, landowners, local municipalities, and other key stakeholder groups for the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon. LPLF’s Board of Directors is comprised of representatives from key stakeholder groups that include community members, experts in coastal policy and environmental protection, wetland scientists, the City of San Diego, and State Parks – the primary landowner. LPLF utilizes a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) comprised of experts in coastal engineering and wetland scientists from the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve and Scripps Institution of Oceanography. Since its inception, LPLF has worked closely with State Parks and the Conservancy to develop and fund many important projects.

**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 will advance implementation of sea level rise adaptation strategies to protect public coastal access, restore wetland habitat, and reduce or eliminate existing and projected flooding. The scope of work for the recommended grant is feasible, the budget is reasonable, and the LPLF is well qualified to manage the project.

**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.**

LPLF will continue to coordinate with State Park’s San Diego Coast District’s Archaeologist and Tribal Liaison to engage local tribes and bands of the Kumeayaay Nation. In addition, the Torrey

Pines Tribal Working Group (Tribal Working Group) will be formed to shape and guide the development and design of Land of the First People Outdoor Exhibits at the North Lot. State Parks will lead the effort in contacting Tribal representatives and engaging Tribal leadership in determining the selection of the Tribal Working Group. It is anticipated that the Tribal Working Group will consist of up to twelve representatives of the Kumeyaay Nation and will meet at least six times.

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

Longevity of benefits served as a primary criterion considered during the feasibility study's evaluation of alternative designs for the North Lot in the previous planning phase. The preferred alternative is designed to be resilient to 3.5 feet of SLR with identified adaptation pathways to 6 feet of SLR, consistent with the State's SLR Action Plan that seeks to build pathways to resiliency against 3.5 feet by 2050 and 6.0 feet by 2100. Based on the best-available science for the region, 3.5 feet of SLR has a reasonable chance of occurrence in the 2070-time horizon. The elements proposed within the project (coastal parking lot, shoreline protection system, culvert/bridge, and lifeguard facility) have design lives of at least 25-50 years.

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

The project will generate multiple benefits, including shoreline protection from sea-level rise through managed retreat, enhancing public access through improved connectivity with beach access points and established trails, improved public amenities, and restored native plants in place of current hardscape.

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

During the previous project phase, three public workshops and two online surveys were conducted to implement a stakeholder driven process to help guide the development and selection of managed retreat approaches and design concepts for the managed retreat of the North Beach Parking Lot.

The stakeholder engagement process will continue throughout this phase of the project through presentations, meetings, and workshops open to the public along with outreach efforts targeting key user groups. At least three public workshops will be conducted to re-engage stakeholder groups from project planning efforts and to solicit input/feedback at key project milestones. LPLF will continue to coordinate announcement stakeholder engagement efforts with local groups that include the Torrey Pines Docents, Torrey Pines Conservancy, Sea Point Town Home Homeowners Association, Point Del Mar Homeowners Association, and Torrey Pines Community Planning Board.

LPLF will also partner with Outdoor Outreach to form the Torrey Pines Outdoor Advocacy Working Group to provide youth development and leadership opportunities for high school age youth and young adults from underserved communities in San Diego. Members of this working group will come from the Outdoor Voices Club, a program run by Outdoor Outreach that develops coastal stewardship advocates to serve as voices of their communities to help shape coastal policy and removing access barriers to outdoor areas. LPLF will work with Outdoor

Outreach to develop the appropriate themes and topics for engagement with the working group based within the context of the project and TPSNR.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$2,268,100</b>
California State Parks	\$27,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$2,295,100</b>

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a FY 2022/23 appropriation to the Conservancy from the General Fund for the purpose of “urgent sea level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies” (Budget Act of 2022, SB 154 as amended by the Budget Act of 2023, SB 101). The coastal resilience funds are available for the purposes described in Section 52 of SB 155 (Chapter 258, Statutes of 2021). The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it is a coastal resilience project along the coast and will build resilience for public access. Restoration of the coastal habitat will enhance and protect wetland and coastal watershed resources for the benefit of local wildlife and the public.

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 will 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. Consistent with this section, the proposed authorization awards grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake the projects described in the “Project Summary” section, which maximize public benefits by facilitating the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, reducing coastal hazards due to sea level rise, enhancing coastal wetlands and natural lands, and conserving biodiversity.

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

Consistent with **Goal 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects**, the recommended grant is for planning a project that will increase resiliency by adapting ecosystems to protect communities, public access infrastructure, and natural resources from sea level rise.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed project is exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15304, which exempts projects that consist of 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. The project site is currently developed as a parking lot. No healthy, mature, scenic trees will be removed as part of the project. The project will consist of minor alterations to land, such as minor grading, landscaping, and backfilling (see Guideline 15304 subsections (a), (b), (c), and (f)). State Parks determined that there was no potential to affect wildlife habitat and that the project qualifies as exempt under Guideline 15304.

Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption that this proposed project is exempt from CEQA.