

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
November 30, 2023

**ARENA COVE HARBOR ACCESS AND RESILIENCE PLAN**

Project No. 23-070-01  
Project Manager: Michael Bowen

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$485,000 to the City of Point Arena in Mendocino County to prepare the Arena Cove Harbor Access and Resilience Plan, which will include plans, designs, and environmental review for a variety of improvements to protect and enhance existing and future use of the Point Arena Pier, Harbor, and Cove for commercial and recreational purposes.

**LOCATION:** Arena Cove, City of Point Arena, Mendocino County.

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)  
Exhibit 2: [Point Arena Pier Conditions Assessment Report](#)  
Exhibit 3: [Project 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 four hundred eighty-five thousand dollars (\$485,000) to the City of Point Arena (the “grantee”) to prepare the Arena Cove Harbor Access and Resilience Plan, which will include plans, designs, and environmental review for a variety of improvements to protect and enhance existing and future use of the Point Arena Pier, Harbor, and Cove for commercial and recreational purposes in the City of Point Arena, Mendocino County (the “project”).

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. 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 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding Urban Waterfront Restoration and a System of Public Accessways, respectively.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

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## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

### PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$485,000 grant to the City of Point Arena (the "City") to prepare the Arena Cove Harbor Access and Resilience Plan (the "project"). The project includes preparing designs and environmental compliance materials for a variety of improvements intended to protect and enhance existing and future use of the Point Arena Pier, Cove, and Harbor for commercial and recreational purposes in light of sea level rise.

Although popular with visitors and residents alike, infrastructure in the Harbor, specifically the Pier, is deteriorated and in dire need of both repair and adaptation to changing conditions wrought by rising seas and increasingly severe storms. Wave overwash has played an important and destructive role at this exposed coastal site.

The original wood pier was destroyed by unprecedented El Niño storms in 1983, prompting a series of Conservancy actions in Arena Cove. First, the Conservancy authorized funds in 1984 to study the feasibility of and prepare designs for the repair of the Pier. Later that year, the Conservancy authorized a grant of \$265,000 to the City to acquire 38 acres in the Cove to facilitate rebuilding the Pier and Harbor. Finally, the City proceeded to secure \$1.97 million to replace the Pier with a new 320 foot pier, built in 1985 with steel pipe piles and precast concrete caps and panels. The Pier replacement project, funded in part with a \$200,000 grant from the Conservancy, was constructed with an estimated 30-year life expectancy. The Pier has survived well past its anticipated life and is in need of repair.

Nearly forty years later, the Point Arena Pier, the centerpiece of the Harbor, has been professionally evaluated for stability at the direction of the State Lands Commission and found to be deficient (Exhibit 2). In fact, a recent failure of the boat cable caused a commercial fishing vessel to fall into the sea, causing minor damage. Wave overwash has damaged pier fender pilings and the floating dock/gangway popular with kayakers. The pier pilings are deteriorating, and some require immediate replacement. The safety railings along the edge are severely corroded, placing visitors at risk. The high-demand public restroom located on the existing pier is at the end of its useful life. The proposed authorization will provide necessary funding for planning and design to address these issues.

In addition to designing repairs and amenities at the Pier, the project will provide the City with the opportunity to conduct a full-scale resilience planning effort for the Cove, including the Harbor (see Exhibit 1). The now closed public restrooms in the upper Cove (Rockwall) sit atop a failed septic system located along the floodplain of Point Arena Creek, and the plan will identify feasible alternative sites for restrooms and possible lower cost overnight accommodations at this highly popular coastal destination. These efforts are intended to diversify the range of uses in the Cove.

Specific elements of the project include:

- Engineering services for pier structural components;
- Design/architectural plans for pier harbormaster office and public restroom/shower;
- Design/architectural plans for Rockwall property public restroom/showers;
- Design plans for commercial fishing ice machine;
- Design plans for improved beach access to Arena Cove Beach;
- Community plan for lower cost overnight accommodation in the Cove; and
- Environmental surveys, environmental review, and permit application materials.

The proposed project will advance and enhance both urban waterfront restoration and public access in light of sea level rise and increasingly severe storm events along this exposed and breathtakingly scenic portion of the northern California coast.

Changing conditions along waterfronts everywhere dictate a more thoughtful and innovative approach to developing design standards for urban waterfront restoration and public access where the built environment is exposed to new risks. The proposed plan will incorporate state of the art adaptation designs and resilience features for harbor infrastructure and amenities.

Though a city with a small population, Point Arena has an active community dedicated to engagement and participation. Arena Cove Stewards, Mendocino Land Trust (MLT), the City and the Kashiya Pomo have all expressed interest in this planning process as well as participation in its development. 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 are attached (Exhibit 3).

**Site Description:** The City of Point Arena is located in southern Mendocino County approximately ten miles north of Gualala and the Sonoma/Mendocino County line. The City wraps around Arena Cove, which in turn accommodates the Arena Cove Harbor. Point Arena Creek flows downhill from the city center and enters the Pacific Ocean on the south end of the Cove.

The 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 Pier for fishing, 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 Pier, which was reconstructed in 1983 after a storm destroyed its predecessor.

Prior to the 1860s, The Cove 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 plan will expand upon earlier investments to Point Arena described below.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The City has administered Conservancy and other grants before, including for pier repairs and property acquisitions in the Harbor, and, as owner of the Pier and much of the Harbor, is uniquely qualified and appropriate to serve as grantee.

**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.**

Recreation and tourism long ago replaced logging and commercial fishing as the key economic mainstays on the Mendocino Coast. Yet just as the historic industries face challenges, so, too, do new industries in this sparsely populated region. State assistance to rural economies is crucial to the well-being of those communities and the people who visit and enjoy them.

The Harbor is a challenging environment for the hearty sport and commercial fishermen who depend on it. The nearest harbor to Point Arena is Noyo Harbor, approximately 40 miles north of Point Arena. The few fishermen still utilizing the pier must travel that distance to obtain ice for their holds, unnecessarily consuming diesel and contributing to emissions. The proposed project will provide the necessary plans, designs and environmental review for improvements to help revitalize this small urban waterfront.

Point Arena has benefitted from an influx of tourism following the Conservancy funded acquisitions of the Stornetta Ranch and Point Arena Ranch, now part of the Bureau of Land Management’s California Coastal Monument. The subsequent opening of the Point Arena Bluff Trail to hikers, along with the Cove and its pier, remains a big draw for visitors seeking proximity to the water. The Cove is popular with kayakers, surfers, and birdwatchers in addition to sport and commercial fishermen. State investment in this area is vital to the economic survival of this remote and disadvantaged community.

**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 has initiated outreach to the Manchester Band of Pomo Indians as well as Kashiya Construction (a tribally-owned and operated construction firm) about this proposal. As part of the proposed project, the City will engage with the Manchester Band of Pomo Indians to communicate early the nature of the plan and the desire and opportunity to describe traditional stewardship and cultural practices in any the interpretive materials. The City will seek input on how to design the infrastructure in order to promote future traditional uses, educational opportunities for visitors, and appropriate archaeological evaluation of the project area. The outreach to tribes will be conducted in a manner that seeks to be as respectful of time limits and capacity as possible, including compensation for assistance developing the plan.

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

The purpose of the project is to develop plans for harbor and access improvements that will be resilient to sea level rise and other impacts from climate change such as anticipated stronger storm surges. Primary project elements proposed for planning will ensure durability of marine and land-based infrastructure for at least twenty years, inclusive of sea level rise projections during that period.

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

With limited opportunities to access waterfront property directly and easily in southern Mendocino County due to its marine terraces and bluffs, the Cove and its surroundings provide a fully accessible site that is level, mostly paved, yet stunningly beautiful and relatively uncrowded. This setting is an excellent site for people with mobility impairments. In addition, the Mendocino Land Trust, supported by the Coastal Conservancy, is currently advancing a coastal trail link from the Cove to the Stornetta Bluff trail, which in turn leads all the way to the Point Arena Lighthouse two miles to the north.

The proposed plan will ensure that the City and its coastal resources are prepared to withstand sea level rise as well as increasingly severe storms while still maintaining a viable harbor and visitor serving destination on the beautiful Mendocino Coast.

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

The City is a hotbed of community engagement. The City and other interest groups locally have held numerous community meetings to discuss Cove-related priorities over the years. Community input has been forceful and influential locally. The City held a round table with community members in 2019 (fishermen, game warden, harbor staff) to gather input on how to solve wave overwash problems, as well as ideas for small boat and kayak launch alternatives. Nearly all participants supported a retreat from the west end of the parking lot and rip rap removal along the coast.

Lacking community support, the City nonetheless applied for funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and permits to restore the parking lot and add new armoring, including construction of a new seawall. In response, the City, population 460,

received a petition with over 600 signatures requesting that the City seek a better alternative. Accordingly, the City conducted parking lot repairs with a reduced length sea wall, drainage and bioretention facility, all FEMA funded. Outflow from Point Arena Creek in 2022-23 promptly undercut the new seawall. The project will provide the community with suitable resources and expertise to develop realistic alternatives for this exposed site that are both resilient over time, and supportive of the recreation and access-based economy the Cove now supports.

The City has reached out to the Manchester Band of Pomo Indians to discuss the project. The City will work hand in hand with the Arena Cove Stewards (ACS), a non-profit dedicated to the protection and enhancement of this working North Coast harbor.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

|                            |                  |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Coastal Conservancy</b> | <b>\$485,000</b> |
| Arena Cove Stewards        | \$5,000          |
| <b>Project Total</b>       | <b>\$490,000</b> |

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) to the Conservancy for urgent sea level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs (Budget Act of 2022, as amended by the Budget Act of 2023, SB 101, Chapter 12, Statutes of 2023). 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 39712(b)). The Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 sets forth certain GGRF funding priorities (HSC Section 38590.1).

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 greenhouse gas 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;
- Foster job creation and job training, wherever possible;
- Avoid substantial burdens to disadvantaged communities and low-income communities;
- Leverage funds to provide multiple benefits and to maximize benefits; and

- Conduct outreach to help potential applicants access funding, particularly for disadvantaged communities, low-income communities, or low-income households.

The proposed project will meet these objectives by planning for reconstruction of a fishing pier and boat launch, and appurtenant structures, to be resilient to urgent sea-level rise, storm surge, and tsunamis, which will enable avoidance of flooding and infrastructure damage and the resulting greenhouse gas emissions from remediation and rebuilding. The plan will also evaluate the potential for development of a commercial ice machine so that fishing boats do not need to travel 40 miles north to the next nearby harbor to obtain ice, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions due to that travel. In addition, the project will explore incorporating habitat features on the new pier and supports, thereby supporting the research, development, and deployment of innovative measures and practices. The project also benefits disadvantaged communities and fosters job training by facilitating a construction project in a disadvantaged community. The project will provide economic benefits to the State by facilitating reconstruction of a commercial fishing dock thereby protecting jobs in the commercial fishing industry.

Arena Cove Stewards has raised \$5,000 (an average of \$11/resident) to support the Citizens' Dock planning component of the project. Indicative of Point Arena's community spirit, these funds derive from a fish taco event held to raise funds for this purpose. While a relatively small contribution, it is significant for a small and disadvantaged community of 460 residents.

The proposed project will meet these objectives by enhancing public access to the Cove. It will provide public access and recreation opportunities for the public including neighboring disadvantaged communities. The project leverages prior federal investments in the upkeep of the Pier.

In selecting this project for a grant, the Conservancy has considered its Strategic Plan, the State Agency Sea Level Rise Action Plan, geographic areas of vulnerability, disadvantaged communities, and opportunities for federal financial support.

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 authorization is undertaken pursuant to and is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, specifically Chapter 3 (Sections 31113 and 31111).

Section 31111 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies to fund plans and feasibility studies that implement Division 21.

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy to undertake projects to

address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy's jurisdiction.

Pursuant to Section 31113(b), the Conservancy is authorized to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects, including those that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or address 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 enhancing coastal natural lands and reducing flood risk.

Consistent with these provisions, the proposed authorization would award a grant to the City of Point Arena, a public entity, to prepare a harbor access and resilience plan. The plan will produce designs for the pier and harbor that ensure protection against severe storms, sea level rise, flooding and other coastal hazards. The plan will also make proposals to diversify the harbor's uses and income sources, by examining new approaches to protection of natural resources in the Cove, improvement of boating access, development of recreational and visitor-serving facilities. The proposed authorization is thus consistent with §31111.

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

Consistent with **Goals 1.1 (Commit Funding to Benefit Systematically Excluded Communities) and 1.3 (Support Systematically Excluded Communities)**, respectively, the proposed project will commit funding to benefit systemically excluded, disadvantaged, rural, and tribal communities of the Mendocino coast, and support meaningful engagement by those systemically excluded communities in the improvement of their local infrastructure.

Consistent with **Goal 1.4 Incorporate Workforce Development in Our Projects**, this planning grant and future implementation grants will identify means to incorporate local workforce development into the community planning and revitalization of this important coastal community asset.

Consistent with **Goal 2.3 Access Projects That Reduce Barriers to Coastal Access**, this planning grant will ensure that public access improvements at the Cove reduce barriers to coastal access for people with disabilities.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5 Enhance Recreational Amenities**, this planning grant will prepare the community to enhance recreational amenities including restrooms, parking, paths, interpretive centers, picnic areas, water fountains, camping, and signage.

Consistent with **Goal 2.6 Piers and Waterfronts**, the proposed project will result in the completion of one of the eight plans identified under this Goal. In doing so, the project supports a multi-benefit, coastal resilience project that revitalizes an important but deteriorating waterfront.



**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. Consistent with Section 15262, the project will consider environmental factors.

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