

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 30, 2023

BEACH AND COAST ACCESSIBILITY PROGRAM

Project No. 23-069-01
Project Manager: Greg Gauthier

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$250,000 to Orange County Coastkeeper for the Beach and Coast Accessibility Program to provide grants to nonprofits, agencies, and tribes for beach wheelchairs and other equipment to increase accessibility to California’s beaches and coast in coastal counties statewide.

LOCATION: California statewide coastal counties

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
Exhibit 2: [Accessibility Equipment Photos](#)
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 two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) to Orange County Coastkeeper (“the grantee”) for the Beach and Coast Accessibility Program to provide grants to nonprofits, agencies, and tribes for beach wheelchairs and other equipment to increase accessibility to California’s beaches and coast in coastal counties statewide.

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.

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 a System of Public Accessways.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. Orange County Coastkeeper 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 \$250,000 grant to Orange County Coastkeeper (OCCK) for the Beach and Coast Accessibility Program to provide small grants to nonprofit organizations, public entities, and tribes to purchase beach wheelchairs and other equipment to increase accessibility to California's beaches and coast. This project will expand the already successful Conservancy beach wheelchair program to include other low-tech solutions to improve coastal accessibility for people with disabilities. These solutions could include equipment such as roll-out walkways, specially engineered kayak paddles for ease of use for people with limited mobility, and other solutions for access to beaches and the coast. The program will be available for coastal areas statewide, including along the San Francisco Bay shoreline. By providing funding for beach mats, beach wheelchairs, walkers, and other accessibility devices (See Exhibit 2) to maximize barrier-free access to the coast, this program will expand coastal access and increase the number of people able to recreate and enjoy California's coast.

OCCK will develop and distribute a Request for Proposals (RFP) statewide, based on previous RFPs developed by the Conservancy, to solicit funding applications for the purchase of accessibility equipment and devices to be available for use at beaches and coastal access points. Applications for the replacement or repair of existing equipment, some of which may have been purchased with previous Conservancy grant funds, will also be considered. Frequency of the RFP will be based on demand, but no less than annually. Distribution of the RFP will utilize OCCK and Conservancy email lists and websites. Contacts from focus groups established as part of the development of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan will also be utilized.

These small grants will range between \$1,000 and \$30,000. OCCK will require that equipment be maintained and kept in good repair for a minimum of five years. Sand, wind, and salt water present challenges to equipment wear and maintenance so funding for replacement components that have been shown previously to require regular replacement will be built into project budgets. Funding for the purchase of locked storage for the equipment, if needed, may also be included.

Equipment usage will be monitored and documented so OCCK and the Conservancy are able to quantify the impact of the program on coast and beach access. Finally, grantees will be required to implement a plan for disseminating information about the availability of the

accessibility equipment to target communities and organizations to help ensure that people know of and can make use of the equipment.

This quote from one family that has benefited from previous beach wheelchair grants from the Conservancy's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan serves to highlight and underscore the need for this program:

"My mother is now 85 and still loves the beach. She, however, is no longer able to make the walk. After a two-year hiatus, due to the specially designed wheelchairs available at Moro Beach and Crystal Cove, we were able to make three trips during my most recent visit this summer to Southern California. We stayed until 6:30 p.m. each time. Thank you so very much for supplying the beach wheelchairs. You brought us such joy."

Site Description: The Beach and Coast Accessibility Program will solicit proposals from project proponents for a variety of project sites along the entire coast of California, including the San Francisco Bay shoreline. The specific project sites are yet to be identified. Target sites include beaches and coastal access areas that do not have equipment available for use by people with disabilities as well as places that have equipment in need of repair or replacement. Some projects may also include more inland sites for nonprofits, tribes, and agencies that have or will develop programs to bring people from inland communities to the coast. All project proponents and sites will be reviewed and approved by OCCK staff in cooperation with Conservancy project staff to ensure that they are aligned with the purposes and requirements of the funding source (see Project Financing section below) and comply with the CEQA exemptions identified in the CEQA Compliance section of this report below.

Grant Applicant Qualifications:

Orange County Coastkeeper has received more than one hundred grants over its 24-year history. It has well established and proven accounting and grant management business systems to ensure efficient and accurate grant management and reporting. The Conservancy has awarded OCCK numerous previous grants for river education, coastal access management, and marine research and restoration projects that have all produced successful and beneficial results. Further, OCCK has a demonstrated record of long-term management, maintenance, and monitoring of grant-funded 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 program will increase access to California beaches and the coast for persons with disabilities who otherwise could be denied this joyful experience. These small grants, through the Beach and Coast Accessibility Program, for accessibility equipment will provide opportunities for this often-excluded community to visit and enjoy these resources.

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.

Tribes will constitute a vital target audience when a Request for Proposals is released by OCK for the proposed program. The goal is to include as many tribes as possible as grant recipients. Tribes located in areas not on the coast will be eligible for grants to partner with coastal site entities to help provide opportunities for tribal people with disabilities that have never been to the beach and coast to be afforded this opportunity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that Native American people overall are 50.3 percent more likely to have a disability, when compared to the national average (2008).

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

Beach wheelchairs and other low tech accessibility equipment at the beach and coast are naturally exposed to sand, wind, and salt water that consequently necessitates regular maintenance and repair schedules and implementation. The grants under this program will require equipment operation for a minimum of five years and a maintenance and repair plan. The grants will allow for the purchase of equipment components frequently requiring replacement based on experience from past beach wheelchair grants provided by the Conservancy.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$250,000
Project Total	\$250,000

The anticipated source of funding for the proposed project is an FY 2022-23 appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68, Public Resources Code (PRC) Division 45, Chapters 1-13, Sections 80000-80173). These funds are available for, among other things, protection of beaches. Based on the definition of "protection," this includes actions to improve access to beaches and enable continued use and enjoyment of beaches. (PRC Sections 80002(l) and 80120(c))

Prop 68 sets forth requirements and priorities for selecting projects that it will fund. One of the priority areas is funding for increased outdoor access. Prop 68 directs agencies receiving funding, to the extent practicable, to "consider a range of actions" that derive from the Presidential Memorandum - Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Our National Parks, National Forests, and Other Public Lands and Waters, January 12, 2017. These actions direct agencies to

expand outreach efforts, create new partnerships and improve programs to increase access by diverse populations. These actions are consistent with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan which identifies Environmental Equity and Justice as one of the global drivers of our work.

To the extent practicable, the Conservancy seeks to fund Prop 68 grants that:

- Create new partnerships with state, local, tribal, private, and nonprofit organizations to expand access for diverse populations. (PRC section 80001(b)(8)(C).)
- Identify and implement improvements to existing programs to increase visitation and access by diverse populations, particularly minority, low-income, and disabled populations, and tribal communities. (PRC section 80001(b)(8)(D).)

Consistent with these Prop 68 priorities and requirements, this program will increase visitation and access by people with disabilities by providing beach wheelchair equipment and other accessibility equipment to allow access to the coast.

Each of the grantees funded through the proposed program will provide maintenance, reservations, storage, and/or marketing services as in-kind contributions. Additionally, OCCK intends to raise additional funds to help grow the program beyond the funding provided by the Conservancy.

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 program will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (PRC), Section 31400 to 31410, regarding public access to and enjoyment of coastal resources. PRC Section 31400 states that it is the Legislature's intent that the Conservancy play a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline, including San Francisco Bay. Through the proposed action, the Conservancy will play a primary role in increasing public access to the state's coastline by funding accessibility equipment at multiple sites along the California coast and San Francisco Bay shoreline, increasing public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 31400.3 provides that the Conservancy may provide assistance as required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the PRC. The availability of beach wheelchair equipment and other accessibility equipment at coastal beaches is a related and necessary function to fulfilling the objectives of Chapter 9, which are to "effectively guarantee" the right of the public to access and enjoy coastal resources. Without the equipment funded through this program, large segments of the California public would be unable to access and enjoy the coast.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2.3, Expand Accessibility**, of the Conservancy's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan the proposed program will grant funds to nonprofits, tribes, and agencies to acquire beach wheelchairs, beach mats, and other accessibility devices for use at numerous locations on the California coast. These projects will reduce barriers to coastal access for people with disabilities and maximize barrier-free access to the coast. This proposed program will significantly contribute toward the Conservancy's Strategic Plan goal of implementing 35 projects (Metric 2.3.1) that expand accessibility to the coast by completing at least 12 projects.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The Beach and Coast Accessibility Program, which includes the acquisition or repair of manual and power beach wheelchairs, walkers and other low-tech accessibility equipment is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, 14 Cal. Code of Regulations (CEQA Guidelines) Section 15301, which exempts the operation and minor alteration of existing structures, facilities and mechanical equipment involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. All projects funded through this program will take place at existing beach and coast facilities that currently accommodate many users. The new and repaired wheelchairs, walkers, and other low-tech equipment will facilitate safe access by certain beach users as part of the operation of those beaches and will not expand current use of these beach facilities.

The program also is categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15303, which exempts the installation of small new structures and installation of small new equipment and facilities in small structures. The program will include storing new wheelchairs, walkers, and other equipment in existing or new small storage sheds, which qualify as small structures under this exemption.

Finally, the projects are exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15311, as accessory structures that are temporary use items in generally the same locations from time to time in publicly owned parks and other facilities designed for public use.

Upon Conservancy approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.