

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

February 15, 2024

**CITY OF EUREKA COASTAL ACCESS AND RESILIENCE PLAN**

Project No. 23-093-01

Project Manager: Michael Bowen

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$1,090,000 to the City of Eureka in Humboldt County to prepare the City of Eureka Coastal Access and Resilience Plan to protect and enhance existing and future use of the Eureka waterfront for ecological, recreational, and commercial purposes, and to prepare conceptual designs and environmental review for four sea level rise adaptation projects identified in the Plan.

**LOCATION:** City of Eureka, Humboldt County.

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [City of Eureka Sea Level Rise Vulnerability & Capital Improvement Adaptation Plan](#)

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 one million ninety thousand dollars (\$1,090,000) to the City of Eureka (the “grantee”) to prepare the City of Eureka Coastal Access and Resilience Plan to protect and enhance existing and future uses of the Eureka waterfront for ecological, recreational and commercial purposes, and to prepare designs and environmental review for four sea level rise adaptation projects identified in the Plan (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.

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 Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Climate Ready Program, 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 \$1,090,000 grant to the City of Eureka (the "City") to prepare the City of Eureka Coastal Access and Resilience Plan (CRP) to protect and enhance existing and future use of the Eureka waterfront for ecological, recreational and commercial purposes, and to prepare conceptual designs and environmental review for four sea level rise adaptation projects ("resilience projects") that will be identified in the CRP (collectively the "project"). The CRP will address the length of Eureka's waterfront, from Elk River Slough to Eureka Slough (Exhibit 1).

The City of Eureka's shoreline and landward areas are increasingly exposed to sea level rise and other climate-related impacts. The City, along with the rest of the Humboldt Bay area, is experiencing the fastest relative rate of sea level rise anywhere on the California Coast, with up to four additional inches of sea level rise projected by 2050 compared to the state average. In response, the City recently completed a Sea Level Rise Vulnerability & Capital Improvement Adaptation Plan (SLR-CIP, Exhibit 2), developed following extensive public outreach and presented to the Eureka City Council in February 2023. The SLR-CIP identified and characterized sea level rise vulnerabilities for utilities, transportation assets, and public facilities along the City's shoreline extending from Elk River Slough to Eureka Slough. The purpose of the SLR-CIP was to identify the inundation pathways, and the extent and duration of flooding over a twenty-year planning horizon with an estimated 1.5 foot increase in sea level. Conceptual adaptation strategies were identified that included both traditional and nature-based approaches to flood and erosion prevention and adaptation to changing conditions wrought by rising seas and increasingly severe storms. This effort builds on the Sea Level Rise Adaptation Planning Report prepared by the City in 2016, incorporating updated sea level rise projections and providing more detailed analysis.

The City of Eureka is now prepared to plan resilience projects that protect and enhance City infrastructure and the broader community. The project, comprising the CRP and four resilience projects, consists of six tasks.

First, the City will develop the Coastal Access and Resilience Plan by expanding the SLR-CIP. The CRP will provide a comprehensive sea level rise adaptation strategy combined with extensive

community input and engagement, all of which will be utilized to garner support from regulatory agencies and stakeholders and identify pathways and triggers for how and when to implement specific resilience projects. The proposed Coastal Resilience Plan and related work includes Task 6 for coordination and stakeholder meetings, described below.

Second, and in order to advance resilience project development and CEQA review, the City will conduct supporting environmental analyses at four sites previously identified in the SLR-CIP. Three of the sites were identified as suitable for use of nature-based approaches and include the Pound Road/Seasonal Marsh Area, Palco Marsh Area, and a segment of shoreline between Hilfiker Avenue and Truesdale Avenue.

These three areas are collectively called the nature-based design areas. Nature based methods to be explored/implemented may include: Removal of fill, contaminated soils, and hardscape; Modification of existing levees and man-made dikes; incorporation of horizontal levees, eco-berms, living shorelines; creation or expansion of existing wetlands; placement of fill as appropriate to create high-marsh; removal of plumbing, gates and tide-gate infrastructure to re-connect wetlands; consolidation of disconnected wetland and habitat areas; excavation of channels to improve hydrology and expand tidal inundation areas; excavation of ponded depressions to create off-channel habitat and expansion of tidal inundation capacity; and design of wetland features that allow for sediment accretion and long term up-slope migration of marsh habitat

A fourth site, the Wastewater Treatment Plant outfall standpipe at the Elk River spit, was also identified as a priority site to address future sea level rise impacts. This site is less suitable for a nature-based solution, but crucial to City operations, nonetheless. These four resilience projects will be further analyzed and designed during this second stage of the overall Project.

Third, the City will develop conceptual designs for the four resilience projects. Fourth, the City will develop the designs for the four resilience projects to 30% level and complete CEQA analysis. Fifth, the City will develop a permitting strategy memo for the four resilience projects that will outline recommended permitting pathways; this step will also include four pre-application meetings with key regulatory agencies.

The final task will be ongoing throughout the Project. The City will conduct an extensive coordination and stakeholder outreach process to ensure that regulatory agencies, interest groups, and the general public will be involved in the development of the CRP and resilience projects.

**Site Description:** Eureka is the County Seat and Humboldt County's largest city. The population of the greater Eureka area is approximately 45,000. Eureka's shoreline extends six miles along Humboldt Bay, between Elk River Slough and Eureka Slough. The shoreline conditions were mapped in 2013 using a rapid assessment approach as part of the Humboldt Bay Shoreline Inventory, Mapping and Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment (Laird et al, 2013). Since 2013, segments of the shoreline have changed due to erosion and other physical processes. The 2013 evaluation will be updated to provide additional details such as new erosion areas, changes to extent of armoring, type of armoring, condition of armoring, proximity to utilities and services, adjacent elevations and flood pathways.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The City has administered many large-scale projects and Conservancy and other grants before, including for the Eureka Waterfront and the Elk River Estuary Restoration Project. The current City government has exhibited an ambitious approach to public access improvement and habitat restoration and is uniquely qualified and appropriate to serve as grantee for critical infrastructure protection 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.**

Once the economic mainstays of this Northcoast harbor, the remnants of the timber and commercial fishing industries are nearly gone. In their place, a renewable energy boom in the form of offshore wind power installations is commencing. The adjustment of the industrial waterfront, in combination with low but exposed populations and rapidly changing conditions, provides an excellent opportunity for regional shoreline planning that ensures economic development opportunity for this disadvantaged region, while also maximizing ecological restoration and public access opportunities. State assistance to rural economies is crucial to the well-being of those communities and the people who visit and enjoy them.

**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 Wiyot Tribe, the Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria and the Blue Lake Rancheria to apprise them about this project. As part of the proposed project, the City will engage with these entities to communicate early the nature of the plan, the need to identify and protect cultural resources potentially at risk due to sea level rise and related resilience projects. This will also provide the opportunity to incorporate traditional stewardship and cultural practices in any interpretive materials. The City will seek input on how to site and design 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 and environmental review for four specific improvements that will be resilient to and provide resilience against sea level rise and other impacts from climate change such as anticipated stronger storm surges. Resilience projects

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.**

The City has invested heavily and worked aggressively over the last ten years to restore habitat along its waterfront, and to expand public access opportunities there. Through development of the Waterfront Trail, the Bay to Zoo Trail, the Elk River Estuary Restoration, and other efforts, the City has consistently used public investment to enhance its waterfront. Meanwhile, the City is looking towards the future and the extent to which these enhanced and accessible areas are at risk. City staff are pursuing nature-based solutions to make the waterfront more resilient to the challenges of sea level rise.

The CRP will help 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, working waterfront and visitor serving destination at beautiful Humboldt Bay.

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

The City and other interest groups locally have held numerous community meetings to discuss sea level rise and resilience planning over the years. Recent efforts occurred during the previously discussed 2013 Vulnerability Assessment, the 2016 Adaptation Planning Report, and the more recent SLR-CIP Plan adopted by the City Council in February 2023. More recently, the Planning Commission held a hearing on their Flooding and SLR plan to modify stormwater infrastructure August 14, 2023.

The proposed project includes a significant community engagement component. The adaptation strategies developed in the CRP will highlight potential impacts and identify neighboring property owners, utility jurisdictions, and related parties for each of the shoreline planning areas. Similarly, regulatory and resource agencies will be contacted to identify a lead-staff person to participate as an agency stakeholder representative. More broadly the stakeholder group will include Caltrans and Wiyot Tribal representatives. The CRP will summarize the recommended stakeholder agencies and propose a sequence of stakeholder meetings for each related shoreline planning area and/or conceptual design area.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$1,090,000</b>
City of Eureka	\$110,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$1,200,000</b>

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2023/24 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy to address "urgent sea-level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies" (The Budget Act of 2023,

Chapter 38, Statutes of 2023 (AB 102)). The project is consistent with this fund source because it will plan sea level rise adaptation projects for the Eureka waterfront.

The project will leverage funds from the City of Eureka, which will contribute \$110,000 to support the planning component of the project. The project leverages prior state and federal investments in the sea level rise planning for the waterfront.

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. Pursuant to Section 31113(d), the Conservancy must prioritize projects that use natural infrastructure to help adapt to climate change, prioritize projects that have multiple benefits and give consideration to projects in a variety of ecosystems.

Consistent with these provisions, the recommended authorization is to award a grant to the City of Eureka, a public entity, to prepare a waterfront access and resilience plan, and to produce designs and environmental review for four projects identified in the plan to protect the waterfront against severe storms, sea level rise, flooding and other coastal hazards. The plan will include proposals to diversify the harbor's uses and income sources. The city's diversification will focus on new approaches to protection of natural resources along the waterfront, improvement of boating access, and development of recreational and visitor-serving facilities. The recommended 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 Meaningful Engagement by Systematically Excluded Communities)**,

respectively, the proposed project will commit funding to benefit systemically excluded, disadvantaged, rural, and tribal communities of the Humboldt Bay Area, and support meaningful engagement by those systemically excluded communities in the improvement of their local infrastructure.

Consistent with **Goal 2.6 Piers and Waterfronts**, the proposed project will prepare a plan to adapt waterfront facilities to sea level rise. In doing so, the project supports a multi-benefit, coastal resilience project that revitalizes an important but susceptible, and, in some cases deteriorating, waterfront.

Consistent with **Goal 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects**, the proposed project will prepare plans for four projects that will adapt public access infrastructure, an urban waterfront, and port facilities to sea level rise.

**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 Exemption.