

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

February 15, 2024

SEAWOOD CAPE PRESERVE PUBLIC ACCESS PLANNING

Project No. 23-091-01

Project Manager: Peter Jaraus

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$315,150 to The Wildlands Conservancy to prepare a public access plan, preliminary designs, and environmental review for lower cost overnight accommodations and a new section of the California Coastal Trail on the Seawood Cape Preserve in Humboldt County.

LOCATION: Seawood Cape Preserve, north of the City of Trinidad, Humboldt County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [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 three hundred and fifteen thousand one hundred and fifty dollars (\$315,150) to The Wildlands Conservancy (“the grantee”) to prepare a public access plan, preliminary designs, and environmental review for lower cost overnight accommodations and a new section of the California Coastal Trail on the Seawood Cape Preserve 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.

In addition, to the extent appropriate, The Wildlands 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 a system of Public Accessways.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Wildlands 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 \$315,150 grant to The Wildlands Conservancy to prepare a public access plan, preliminary designs, and environmental review for lower cost overnight accommodations and a new section of the California Coastal Trail on the Seawood Cape Preserve. The Seawood Cape Preserve is located four miles south of Sue-meg State Park in Humboldt County (See Exhibit 1).

Visitors from many parts of California travel to Humboldt County in the summer. They come to enjoy the natural beauty, escape the inland heat, and increasingly, to escape wildfire smoke. The need for clean coastal air is particularly acute in late summer and early fall. Tourists from around the world also travel to northern Humboldt and Del Norte Counties to experience the redwoods. In addition, as part of the Pacific Coast Bicycle Route there is a steady stream of bicyclists traveling through the area and in need of overnight accommodation.

Existing accommodations in Sue-meg State Park and in the nearby City of Trinidad are in very high demand during the summer. The State Park campground is typically full and because the area is so popular, the private hotels and campgrounds are expensive. The State Park does try to be as flexible as possible and find spots for bicyclists who need a spot for the night, but this results in some cozy conditions. The limits on the number of camping spots as well as the costs associated with staying outside of the State Park are a barrier for equitable access to the coast.

The Wildlands Conservancy has a great deal of experience providing lower cost accommodations at their southern California preserves, and has begun to expand opportunities to groups who traditionally do not have the resources to visit the coast. The Wildlands Conservancy offers lower cost accommodations at Seawood Cape Preserve on a reservation basis, and hosts Outward Bound Adventures, a portion of Outward Bound that focuses on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) youth and their families. Outward Bound is a national leader in providing outdoor experiences for all ages. The Wildlands Conservancy has also worked with the nearby community to host school and college groups at reduced cost, as well as organizations such as the California Native Plant Society.

The Seawood Cape Preserve currently has only basic campground infrastructure, and 10 of its campsites are undeveloped. In order to serve as a no-cost venue for multi-day and overnight

nature-based programs, as well as camping for hikers and bikers, The Wildlands Conservancy needs to improve the campground. The proposed project will tackle this in two phases. The first phase consists of analysis and outreach to determine the scope of the allowable improvements given environmental constraints, and the second phase will include design, environmental review, and a review of permitting requirements for those improvements. The project is further described below:

Phase 1:

- Technical analyses and resource studies. This will include activities such as a wetland delineation, cultural resources assessment, onsite wastewater treatment assessment, water conveyance and storage assessment, and a trails assessment.
- Integration of tribal and general community input into design plan - area tribes and the general community will be invited to participate in meetings to encourage meaningful input into the development of the plan.

Phase 2:

- Conceptual or preliminary planning to 30% completion - this will include activities such as designing campsites, parking areas, trails, warehouse conversion, and coastal signage, and completing a topographic survey.
- Draft environmental review for CEQA compliance.
- Initiate regulatory review – The Wildlands Conservancy will reach out to regulatory agencies to gain insight into permitting needs that can be incorporated into the 30% design.

Site Description:

The Wildlands Conservancy's Seawood Cape Preserve is located on the Humboldt County coast in northern California, along the California Coastal Trail and Pacific Coast Bike Route, 3 miles north of the town of Trinidad, and 4 miles south of Sue-meg State Park (see Exhibit 1). The Seawood Cape Preserve encompasses 128 acres of diverse ecosystems including spruce-fir and redwood forests, a wet meadow, alder woodlands, and coastal bluffs. The Wildlands Conservancy envisions the Seawood Cape Preserve as a venue that provides a gathering space and basic accommodations for education programs, and for hikers/bikers along the trail, all at no cost.

The west side of SCP is open daily free of charge from sunrise to sunset for a short hike out to Scotty Point for breathtaking views of the coastline and for a chance to view wildlife such as the seasonal whale migrations in the spring and fall. The east side of Seawood Cape Preserve has an undeveloped parking area and 10 undeveloped campsites that host public groups by reservation.

Grant Applicant Qualifications:

Over the past 27 years, The Wildlands Conservancy has acquired 25 nature preserves totaling 209,000 acres of land in California, Oregon, and Utah. These preserves are open to the public free of charge for passive recreation including hiking, picnicking, and camping. The organization

has ample experience managing planning projects and grant funding in order to develop public recreation facilities throughout their preserve system. Examples include planning for constructing a parking lot, restroom, and trailhead on Highway 1 for the Jenner Headlands Preserve on the Sonoma Coast, and the acquisition and management of the Lone Pine Property in Trinity, Mendocino, and Humboldt Counties. The Wildlands Conservancy has successfully managed multiple grant-funded projects from the State Coastal Conservancy and other funds from local, state, and federal agencies over the past decade.

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 is a good investment of state resources as it contributes to the State's objective to provide lower-cost accommodation to the California coast and will also advance planning for the California Coastal Trail. The proposed project has a reasonable budget covering planning and design, environmental review, and to start permitting. The grantee will provide access to the preserve at no cost to the public.

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.

Phase I of the project will directly involve tribes in the project. The Wildlands Conservancy will reach out directly to the tribes for their input. The project is divided into two phases so that tribal and community engagement can have a direct impact on the design of the project before environmental review is started.

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

The proposed project will integrate design elements that protect and conserve coastal resources. This planning phase will ensure that sensitive flora and fauna are identified and protected. The trail and campsite improvements will also be designed to require as little maintenance as possible. Both the proposed trail and camping area are well back from the bluff and will not be impacted by increased erosion due to climate change.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The proposed project will plan for additional lower cost accommodations to a popular part of the California coast. These accommodations will benefit both the visitors who will be able to spend the night as well as the local economy which relies on tourism. In addition, the new

section of trail to be planned will increase opportunities for wildlife viewing, particularly when whales are migrating up the coast, as well as improve public health by providing a new opportunity for outdoor recreation.

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

The proposed project involves meaningful community engagement. Phase I of the project will focus directly on community outreach and involvement of the local tribes. The Wildlands Conservancy has already established itself as a community partner by working with the local school districts and Cal Poly Humboldt to host field trips at the preserve.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$315,150
Project Total	\$315,150

The expected source of funds for this project is the FY 2020/21 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 Sections 80000-80173). Chapter 9 of Proposition 68 (section 80120-80121) allocates funds to the Conservancy to enhance and protect coastal and ocean resources by granting funds to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for development of lower-cost coastal accommodations. (Public Resources Code Section 80120(b)).

Consistent with the purposes of this funding source, the proposed project consists of planning, design, and environmental review for the development of lower cost accommodations, including the development of approximately 10 new camping sites on the Humboldt County coast. The project will be carried out in accordance with Chapter 10 of Division 21 regarding lower-cost coastal accommodations (see “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section below).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 (Sections 31400 et seq.) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Section 31400.1 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to develop, operate, or manage lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. Consistent with these provisions, the proposed project will plan and design for improved campsites and a new section of trail along the coast. The Wildlands Conservancy is a non-profit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

The proposed project is also consistent with Section 31408, which authorizes the Conservancy to coordinate development of the Coastal Trail.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2.4, Build Trails**, the proposed project will prepare plans and designs for a new one-mile section of the California Coastal Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5, Recreation Facilities and Amenities**, the proposed project will prepare plans and designs to enhance a recreational facility.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262, which exempts planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted, or funded; and categorically exempt under Section 15306, which exempts data collection and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to and environmental resource.

The proposed project consists of planning for and designing campground enhancements and a future section of the California Coastal Trail, as well as drafting an environmental review document. Thus, the proposed project involves only data gathering, resource evaluation, planning, and feasibility analysis for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded. Consistent with Section 15262, the project will consider environmental factors. Consistent with Section 15306, the data collections and resource evaluation components of the project will not cause major or serious disturbance to the environment. Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.