

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

April 18, 2024

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY SEDIMENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Project No. 24-009-01

Project Manager: Rachel Couch

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,200,000 to the County of Santa Barbara Flood Control District to develop the Santa Barbara County Sediment Management Program for southern Santa Barbara County, which consists of a program for redirecting ongoing sediment management to support beach-enhancement, living shoreline, and other sea level rise adaptation projects; including conducting community and tribal engagement and technical and feasibility studies to inform the Program; and preparing environmental review documents and permit applications for the Program.

LOCATION: Santa Barbara County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Photos and Figures](#)

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 one million two hundred thousand dollars (\$1,200,000) to Santa Barbara County Flood Control District (“the grantee”) to develop the Santa Barbara County Sediment Management Program for southern Santa Barbara County, which consists of a program for redirecting ongoing sediment management to support beach-enhancement, living shoreline, and other sea level rise adaptation projects; including conducting community and tribal engagement and technical and feasibility studies to inform the Program; and preparing environmental review documents and permit applications for the Program.

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.

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 31113 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding addressing climate change and potential climate change impacts.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a grant of up to \$1,200,000 to Santa Barbara County Flood Control District (District) to develop the Santa Barbara County Sediment Management Program for southern Santa Barbara County (the project). The Program will provide for redirecting ongoing sediment management to support beach-enhancement, living shoreline, and other sea level rise adaptation projects. The project includes conducting community and tribal engagement and technical and feasibility studies to inform the Program; and preparing environmental review documents and permit applications for the Program (Exhibit 1).

Santa Barbara County is known for its warm weather, dramatic mountain scenery, and beautiful coastline with accessible beaches. Sand is transported to the shoreline by wave action along the coast as well as by coastal rivers and streams that deliver sediment during storms. Dams, debris basins, and other forms of urban infrastructure have reduced natural sediment transport to the coast, exacerbating coastal erosion and sea level rise impacts and necessitating mechanical intervention to move sediment from upstream catchment basins.

In the late 60s, the District assumed responsibility for debris basins built by the federal government several years earlier. The basins, designed to protect downstream urban infrastructure and properties, periodically fill with sediment during storms and floods. The accumulated sediment must be excavated in order to maintain the function and safety of the community's drainage infrastructure. The accumulated sediment in debris basins was historically treated as a by-product to be disposed offsite, hauled to rock quarries, stockpile sites, or held indefinitely until it could be used elsewhere for fill material at unrelated construction projects. These structures interrupt watershed-driven sediment transport processes that would otherwise help to replenish sand supply along the region's coastline. At a few individual sites, captured sediment has been transported to and deposited along the coastline leading to increased beach widths and a more resilient coast (Exhibit 2). However, most of this work has occurred under emergency permits because the existing regulatory

framework does not authorize a regional approach to beneficial use of watershed sediments along the coast.

The proposed project will address this issue through development of a regional program for directing ongoing sediment management activities in support of living shoreline and other sea level rise adaptation projects. Improving regional sediment management has been identified as a draft strategy as the County updates its General Plan Safety Element to include a Climate Adaptation Plan. By undertaking the project, the District will modernize its sediment management practices and create an innovative model that better serves multiple communities, addresses sea level rise and storm impacts, and increases climate resiliency.

Sediments of varying sizes – from sand to pebbles to cobble and rocks – comprise a critical component of living shorelines and other nature-based solutions that can assist communities in adapting to coastal erosion, sea level rise, storms, and other projected impacts of climate change. The project will create a sediment-management framework and strategies that are expected to lead to on-the-ground implementation of beach-enhancement, coastal resiliency, and living shoreline projects in the future. This approach reflects a growing recognition that watershed sediment is a resource to be valued and utilized, rather than a byproduct to be discarded. The project will analyze options for sediment and floodwater management that support nature-based solutions and improve conditions for native species, such as removing fish-passage barriers and restoring riparian, beach, and dune habitats.

The project includes conducting outreach that will seek to enhance community understanding and appreciation of coastal and watershed processes, flood response, debris and sediment management, and utilizing innovative nature-based solutions to address climate change impacts and improve coastal resilience. Community engagement will seek input on community priorities, interests, and concerns to help shape the sediment management program. The District will conduct tribal and community engagement in English and Spanish. Tribal engagement is anticipated with representatives of several local Chumash bands, including the Barbareño Band of Chumash Indians, Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation, and Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians. Community engagement will include local residents, business and property owners, and out-of-town visitors to local beaches. To expand their reach, the County will partner with the Santa Barbara County Promotores Network, a grassroots network of members who help agencies promote and integrate views of the Latino community into projects, programs, and policies. In addition, the County will consult on development of the program with existing committees such as the Goleta Slough Management Committee, the County's Climate Collaborative's Sea Level Rise and Equity Advisory and Outreach Committees, and the Beach Erosion Authority for Clean Oceans and Nourishment (BEACON)-led regional coastal adaptation Monitoring Project. The project will also coordinate with existing coastal adaptation planning efforts at UC Santa Barbara and in the Cities of Goleta, Santa Barbara, and Carpinteria.

The project activities consist of analyses and synthesis of existing data, conducting community engagement, preparing technical and feasibility studies, and drafting the program as a regional collaborative vision for process-based sediment management. The project activities include conducting environmental review of and preparing permit applications for the program. District

staff will coordinate among the District, County Community Services and Planning Departments, BEACON, and community stakeholders. To develop the Sediment Management Program, the District will first analyze existing data from prior sediment reuse events in the County to better understand how coastlines will evolve with future sediment placement. This information along with community input will inform the development of project alternative sites. The feasibility study will examine potential sediment source and beach receiver sites as well as opportunities for incorporating nature-based solutions into County-managed projects and activities.

The above will be compiled into a draft Regional Sediment Management Program to include strategies for actionable items, methods, standards, and protocols for future implementation. The District will conduct environmental review of the draft Program and will likely prepare an Environmental Impact Report. The environmental review process will identify opportunities for mitigating the impacts of the proposed sediment management strategies. Finally, the project will include permitting for preferred alternative actions. In total, future implementation of the project will result in multiple community benefits including increased flood protection, a focus on systemically excluded and tribal communities, increased community preparedness and resilience, enhanced recreational beach amenities, reduced carbon emissions compared to pre-project conditions, and integration of nature based coastal adaptation solutions.

Site Description: The project involves multiple locations owned by or under easements held by the District and the County, including source-sites which may provide beach compatible sediment and coastal receiver-sites which may benefit from sediment transport processes. The sediment source-sites include flood control channels and debris basins located along creeks from the foothills of the steep and sediment-laden Santa Ynez mountains to the coastal plain. These areas provide habitat for fish and wildlife including steelhead trout, red-legged frog, tidewater goby, and migratory birds. These basins and channels are periodically cleared to prepare for seasonal storms. In larger storms, especially during especially wet winters, or after fires, catastrophic mudslides and debris flows can occur generating tens or hundreds of thousands of cubic yards of sediment that must be managed.

Goleta Slough is another source site where periodic sediment dredging occurs to increase channel flood capacity. Goleta Slough wraps around the Santa Barbara Airport and provides vital coastal tidal and fresh-water wetland habitat for migratory birds, shorebirds, land mammals, and a wide variety of marine/brackish water species. The Slough is habitat for the federally listed endangered tidewater goby, and the State-listed Belding's savannah sparrow and loggerhead shrike. Goleta Slough also serves as nursery for numerous juvenile fish species.

Existing coastal receiver-sites are located at Goleta Beach and Carpinteria City Beach. Potential alternative beach sites will be analyzed with Tribal and community input as part of the project. The existing receiver-sites are popular coastal access and recreational destinations, and both occur along the California Coastal Trail; both have also been subject to coastal erosion and reduction in recreational potential for decades. In addition to recreation and coastal access, the beach areas provide habitat for coastal and dune species, shorebirds, kelp, eelgrass, and surf grass in the nearshore marine environment.

Goleta Beach is a 29-acre County Park located adjacent to UC Santa Barbara at the mouth of Goleta Slough. It is located adjacent to a disadvantaged community. The park is popular with

the local community and visitors and charges no admission fee, making it a valuable recreational and coastal access resource. The beach park contains parking lots, a pier, upland lawn area with picnic tables and barbecue pits, a playground, and several restrooms with outdoor showers. The park also contains a sewage outfall line and other underground utility lines. The beach is home to numerous natural resources and is a spawning site for California grunion and is adjacent to Goleta Slough, described above. The beach park is vulnerable to coastal impacts caused by climate change-induced sea level rise and storms. It has experienced increasingly severe erosion and damage to park infrastructure over the past three decades. This has led to various management strategies to protect park facilities including revetment, beach nourishment, and sediment deposition during storm season. The pier is open to the public for subsistence fishing but is periodically closed due to coastal damage.

Carpinteria beaches provide free coastal access to a wide sandy beach used for sunbathing, recreational activities, and safe swimming access for local residents and approximately one million visitors per year. Much of the Carpinteria coastal area is designated as a low-income community. Tourism-related travel to the City is highly dependent on long-term coastal access and recreational opportunities. City beaches require seasonal grading and berm building to abate coastal flood hazards to local businesses and residences. The beach has been highly impacted by coastal erosion, interrupted sediment transport due to creek channelization and upstream flood detention debris basins, pollution, and loss of natural morphology due to beach grooming and other maintenance activities leading to the decline of ecosystem function.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Santa Barbara County Flood Control District is a special district governed by Directors who also serve as the County Board of Supervisors. The District has managed large-scale sediment management and beach operations for decades. The Flood Control District has experience administering state and federal grant funds, most recently administering multiple simultaneous flood control and fish-passage projects with a combination of California Department of Fish and Wildlife, National Marine Fisheries Service, and other federal grants, for projects ranging up to \$6 million.

The District will coordinate with other County Departments including Community Services (County Parks Department and Sustainability Division) and Planning and Development on the County's Climate Adaptation Plan and Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment. The Sustainability Division manages the Santa Barbara County Climate Collaborative and its committees, administers the contract with the Santa Barbara County Promotores Network, and would coordinate with Promotores on outreach to Latinx communities. The County will also coordinate with the BEACON, a joint powers agency comprised of local jurisdictions in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties focused on beach nourishment and coastal erosion.

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 sediment management program is a good investment of state resources because it will result in multiple community benefits including increased flood protection, increased community preparedness and resilience, enhanced recreational beach amenities, and reduced carbon emissions compared to pre-project conditions. By integrating sediment management within the County with nature based coastal adaptation strategies, the sediment management program will be a cost-effective strategy for the District. It may also serve as a demonstration project for other coastal communities.

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 District has already begun working with local tribes to develop the Climate Adaptation Plan. The proposed project includes dedicated efforts to involve local tribal representatives to protect archaeological resources and incorporate future tribal needs, such as coastal access to historic resources and fisheries. Any new management action considered in the feasibility analysis will include Tribal participation and evaluation, as well as historical traditional ecological knowledge on coastal resources and beach conditions.

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

The proposed sediment management program is intended to support coastal resiliency and shoreline adaptation as described in the project summary. The proposed program will not make future climate adaptation more difficult; but instead, would organize and streamline efforts for further sea level rise adaptation strategies such as living shorelines and beach restoration as coastal protection.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

As described above, the sediment management program would result in multiple benefits including increased flood protection, community preparedness, climate resilience, and recreation amenities. The program will serve low-income communities in Goleta, Carpinteria, and perhaps elsewhere. Beneficial use of sediment in the coastal environment saves time, money, and fossil-fuels as compared to existing means of sediment management approaches.

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

The proposed project includes community engagement at all phases, from data analysis and feasibility studies, to environmental review with the expressed goal of fostering public trust and co-visioning in the process of developing future actions. Public engagement may include in-person meetings, on-site field tours, digital media, social media, and educational materials in

multiple languages. Engagement activities will involve multiple communities including disadvantaged communities, tribes, recreational users, and the community at large.

PROJECT FINANCING

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|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Coastal Conservancy | \$1,200,000 |
| County of Santa Barbara | \$1,000,000 |
| Project Total | \$2,200,000 |

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding is 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 using nature-based solutions or other strategies” (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 GHG 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;
- Avoid substantial burdens to disadvantaged communities and low-income communities.

The proposed project will meet these objectives by developing a management plan for beneficial use of sediment that will avoid the costs and emissions of transporting excess sediment to offsite disposal areas while helping to build the resilience of local coastal areas to sea level rise. These coastal areas provide economic, environmental, and public health benefits to local communities including neighboring disadvantaged and low-income communities in Goleta and Carpinteria, so building their resilience will provide multiple benefits.

The County of Santa Barbara, through its Flood Control District and other departments, will provide both funding and in-kind staff support for the proposed project.

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 31111 and 31113). Section 31111 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to fund plans and feasibility studies that implement Division 21.

Section 31113 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 Sections 31113(b), the Conservancy is authorized to award grants to public agencies to undertake projects within the Conservancy's jurisdiction, "including, but not limited to, those that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, address extreme weather events, sea level rise, storm surge, beach and bluff erosion, saltwater intrusion, 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 preservation and enhancement of coastal wetlands and natural lands, providing recreational opportunities, and projects that beneficially reuse excavated sediment to enhance shorelines or ecosystems. Pursuant to Section 31113(d), the Conservancy must also prioritize projects that use natural infrastructure in coastal communities to help adapt to climate change and projects that provide multiple public benefits, including, but not limited to, protection of communities, natural resources, and recreational opportunities.

Consistent with these sections, the proposed project will address the impacts of sea level rise and other climate change impacts by preparing a program to facilitate beneficial reuse of sediment to build the resilience of local coastal areas to sea level rise and other climate change impacts. As discussed above, the program will plan for use of sediment for nature-based strategies for enhancing beaches for recreational purposes and protecting coastal habitats and coastal communities from coastal hazards. The proposed authorization is thus consistent with Section 31113.

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

Consistent with **Goals 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects** and **Goal 4.3 Multi-Benefit Nature-Based Climate Adaptation**, the proposed project will develop a sediment management program that will support nature-based strategies to achieve multiple benefits while adapting to the impacts of climate change.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed planning project consists of conducting community and tribal engagement, and preparing technical and feasibility studies, environmental review documents, and permit applications. Thus, the proposed project involves only data gathering, resource evaluation, planning, and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted, or funded. These activities are statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to Title 14 of the 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 an environmental resource. Consistent with Section 15262, the project will consider environmental factors. Consistent with Section 15306, the data collection 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.