

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

April 18th, 2024

GOLETA SLOUGH AREA COASTAL RESILIENCE ADAPTATION PLAN

Project No. 24-007-01

Project Manager: Rachel Couch

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Consideration and authorization to disburse up to \$950,000 to Resilient Cities Catalyst to prepare the Goleta Slough Area Coastal Resilience Adaptation Plan, consisting of a plan for priority nature-based sea level rise adaptation projects for the Goleta Slough area to enhance ecological and community coastal resilience in Santa Barbara County, including conducting community engagement, capacity building, and technical studies to inform the Plan.

LOCATION: Goleta Slough, Santa Barbara County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Figures and Photos](#)

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 nine-hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$950,000) to Resilient Cities Catalyst (the “grantee”) to prepare the Goleta Slough Area Coastal Resilience Adaptation Plan, consisting of a plan for priority nature-based sea level rise adaptation projects for the Goleta Slough area to enhance ecological and community coastal resilience in Santa Barbara County, including conducting community engagement, capacity building, and technical studies to inform the Plan.

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 Section 31113 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Climate Ready Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. Resilient Cities Catalyst 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 grant of \$950,000 to Resilient Cities Catalyst (RCC) to prepare the Goleta Slough Area Coastal Resilience Adaptation Plan. The project includes conducting community engagement and capacity building, preparing technical studies, and preparing an adaptation plan for priority nature-based sea level rise resilience projects for the Goleta Slough area to enhance ecological and community coastal resilience in Santa Barbara County (Exhibit 1).

Goleta Slough is an important coastal wetland in Santa Barbara County that connects a large watershed to dynamic shoreline habitats. This ecological system is vulnerable to increased climate-driven impacts, including extreme flooding, coastal erosion, and the loss of sensitive habitats and species. No single entity has management authority over the entire Goleta Slough, and a number of agencies play a major role in the area, including the City of Santa Barbara, City of Goleta, County of Santa Barbara, several special districts, U.C. Santa Barbara (UCSB), and several state and federal regulatory agencies. These different jurisdictions manage critical infrastructure in the area that is already experiencing intense coastal impacts. Storms in early 2023 and 2024 forced the Santa Barbara Airport to shut down runways three times due to fluvial flooding. A recently damaged aging sewer main released over one million gallons of sewage to the slough environment and closed Goleta Beach County Park to the public. Goleta Beach, a 29-acre County Park located at the mouth of the slough, has been subjected to increasingly severe impacts from coastal erosion for the past two decades. This has led to damaged park infrastructure and various management strategies to protect park facilities such as revetment, beach nourishment, and sediment deposition. Recent sea level rise vulnerability assessments have identified increased flooding risks to vulnerable populations in the area and critical infrastructure.

Despite the number of assets at risk and entities involved, there is currently no consensus on sea level rise adaptation strategies for the area. Instead, individual agencies take ad hoc actions, such as emergency dredging and disposal of watershed sediments, in response to critical flooding and erosion problems. An integrated, strategic adaptation plan developed by

community partners is urgently needed to address climate change impacts to the slough and the surrounding human environment.

The proposed project will develop the Goleta Slough Area Coastal Resilience Adaptation Plan and will involve four main components: community engagement, community capacity-building, technical studies, and development of conceptual plans for projects.

Goleta Slough is surrounded by vulnerable community assets, and this project will benefit multiple disadvantaged communities and populations subject to social inequities, including the communities of Old Town Goleta and Isla Vista, recreational beach park users, and the several Chumash tribes for whom Goleta Slough holds special cultural significance (See Project Selection Criteria #3 for more detail on tribal engagement). RCC will develop a community engagement strategy that centers community leadership and builds relationships with local tribes and community groups through focused and large community meetings and workshops. Inclusive community engagement practices will be used, including language interpretation and participation stipends. To directly engage with the community groups invested in the Goleta Slough area, the project plans to work with local Chumash including Barbareño, Santa Ynez, and Coastal bands, the Santa Barbara Regional Climate Collaborative's Equity Advisory & Outreach and Sea Level Rise Adaptation subcommittees, and local non-governmental organizations such as the Santa Barbara County Promotores Network. Through these connections, the project will build community understanding about local issues and use local knowledge and expertise to develop actionable projects that equitably represent community interests. To institutionalize community engagement and partnerships, the project may develop a governance structure for the Goleta Slough Area, such as a Joint Powers Authority, to enable decision-making and implementation of coastal resilience projects.

RCC's team brings deep experience leading community-driven development of climate resilience projects and will bring the knowledge and expertise gained from those projects to help build the capacity of the Goleta Slough community. Recent RCC coastal project development processes that the Goleta Slough effort could draw upon include the San Diego Region Coastal Resilience Roadmap, the City of Oceanside's Coastal Resilience Competition (RE:BEACH), and the San Diego Coastal Exchange. RCC's capacity-building effort will include community-based organizations, social and environmental justice groups, resource and infrastructure management agencies, and the multiple governing authorities. Through the community engagement and capacity building efforts, RCC will guide the development of a shared vision of a community-centered adaptive management plan that integrates across the different priorities of preserving valuable infrastructure, conserving creek, slough, and beach resources, and protecting recreational access to public spaces.

To develop the Goleta Slough Area Coastal Resilience Adaptation Plan, RCC and project partners will gather existing information and studies, identify relevant information gaps, and engage with interested parties, and the wider community to integrate independent coastal resilience efforts around a shared set of objectives and strategies. This task will include compiling and reviewing planning and coastal resilience information related to the Goleta Slough and Goleta Beach area. There are several existing and in-development resources that the team will draw on to make the planning process both thorough and efficient. To coordinate across ongoing

efforts, RCC will engage in the bi-monthly meetings and networking of the Goleta Slough Management Committee (GSMC), a multi-sector collaborative forum. Led by the GSMC facilitator, RCC will leverage the technical expertise and local knowledge of GSMC members, such as California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Coastal Commission, Beach Erosion Authority for Clean Oceans and Nourishment (BEACON), environmental nonprofit organizations, University of California Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara County, and the Cities of Goleta and Santa Barbara. These resources will be synthesized to characterize the Goleta Slough system and produce updated website resources and tools that can be used in tandem with the community engagement process.

Building off the available information, RCC will synthesize all the information into a system characterization, perform additional technical studies to close information gaps, and develop near-, mid- and longer-term project concepts based on the shared vision and objectives developed through community engagement and capacity building efforts. RCC will undertake technical studies needed to push the project concepts forward which may include coastal processes, geotechnical, hydrologic and hydraulic, geomorphic, cultural or biological studies, or engineering analysis. The specific studies needed will depend on the project concepts identified. Project planning and development will utilize an adaptation pathways approach undertaken in other areas including UCSB, the City of Imperial Beach, and the City of Santa Cruz. This pathways approach includes identifying triggers and thresholds for taking action directed towards realizing the shared vision for adaptation as identified impacts occur. RCC will model multiple potential strategies and develop conceptual plans for the near-term strategies that are rated as the highest priorities based on both desired outcomes and feasibility. The projects will be developed to sufficient detail to enable local partners to pursue the next steps in planning and funding to move the projects towards implementation. Strategies may span jurisdictions and may include policy and governance needs, so forming strong partnerships and coordination will be necessary.

When complete, the Goleta Slough Coastal Resilience Adaptation Plan will be a portfolio of priority nature-based projects and adaptation pathways designed to increase ecological and community resilience to sea level rise and other coastal impacts affecting Goleta Slough and its associated watershed and shoreline.

Site Description: Goleta Slough is a large coastal wetland located on the south coast of Santa Barbara County. The Slough represents the northern limit of distribution for several plant and animal species found in southern California estuaries. Historically, Goleta Slough supported 1,800 acres of tidal salt marsh, but the site has been degraded and greatly reduced in size through both natural sedimentation and artificial filling. In the 1940s, a substantial portion of the western Slough was filled to construct a military airfield, which later became the Santa Barbara Airport. Today, the 47 square mile Goleta Slough watershed encompasses seven creek sub-watersheds and spans a multijurisdictional area that includes UC Santa Barbara, the Santa Barbara Airport, the cities of Goleta and Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara County, and the culturally significant lands of the Barbareño and Coastal bands of the Chumash. Major infrastructure in and around the slough include the Santa Barbara Airport, Goleta and Goleta West Sanitary Districts, SoCal Gas facilities, State Highway 217, and Goleta Beach County Park,

which attracts up to 1.5 million users annually to one of the only public beaches in the area with free parking and amenities.

Goleta Slough is a Core 1 watershed in the Southern California Steelhead Recovery Plan and supports multiple other sensitive species within the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Ecological Reserve and Campus Point State Marine Conservation Area. Goleta Slough 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. While public access is somewhat restricted on Airport property for safety reasons, recreational activities at the Slough include birdwatching, kayaking, biking, jogging, and coastal access at Goleta Beach County Park. The slough is typical of many southern California estuaries in that it has been directly and indirectly subjected to extensive public and private development (airport, buildings, roads, and gas and sanitary utility lines) and extreme flooding events that have caused considerable damage to infrastructure and property. The slough, valuable infrastructure, and the neighboring communities are all vulnerable to inundation from increased flooding, sea-level rise, and storm surges.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Resilient Cities Catalyst is a global nonprofit organization that designs and manages multi-sector and multi-stakeholder processes that acknowledge the complexities of an uncertain future and bring forward the best possible solutions for communities to survive and thrive. In partnership with CivicWell and the Alliance of Regional Collaboratives for Climate Adaptation, RCC leads the California Resilience Partnership (CRP), a public and philanthropic partnership that brings government, non-profit, private, and public organizations, community groups, and individual community members together to increase investments in a pipeline of high-impact, scalable projects across the state. CRP is currently working in the greater Los Angeles, San Diego, and Sacramento regions, and will bring resources to support project development to the Goleta Slough area, offering technical assistance and fostering collaborative knowledge exchange.

As the grantee, RCC will play a facilitating role in the Goleta Slough Coastal Resilience Adaptation Plan by working closely with local partners representing community-based organizations, local governments, tribes, and nonprofits to elevate local expertise and build institutional capacity for the Goleta Slough area. RCC will leverage its partnerships through CRP, the California Project Preparation Initiative, and the development of a new international Adaptation Standard to help guide the design, implementation, and verification of climate adaptation projects. In 2021, RCC received OPC Proposition 68 funding to develop the San Diego Coastal Resilience Roadmap with regional partners. RCC is also a major partner in the ongoing \$4 million U.S. Department of State funded Cities Forward program, which works with 24 cities in the U.S., Caribbean, and Latin America to develop projects that address critical urban resilience challenges.

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 for several reasons. First, it provides important benefits to Californians by addressing the ecological and socio-economic vulnerability challenges facing the Goleta Slough watershed, which is home to sensitive species and critical infrastructure. Second, the project is feasible, leveraging existing knowledge, expertise, and community partnerships to develop an inclusive and effective adaptation strategy. Third, the budget is reasonable and leverages non-state resources through partnerships with local government, tribal organizations, and social and environmental justice organizations provided as in-kind staff time. Overall, the project represents a strategic and forward-thinking investment in the future resilience of the Goleta Slough watershed and its surrounding 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.

This project recognizes the historical and cultural significance of Goleta Slough to the Santa Ynez, Barbareño, and Coastal Bands of Chumash, who have stewarded the area for thousands of years. The project will work collaboratively with tribal representatives to create a shared, nature-based coastal resilience vision. The engagement process will include field meetings with tribal representatives and ongoing communication to ensure that tribal perspectives are integrated into the project. RCC will provide tribal engagement stipends for the planning project.

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

The adaptation pathways developed as part of the proposed project will be based on the best available science as articulated in the latest California sea level rise guidance to ensure the sustainability and resilience of the project benefits over its lifespan. By engaging a wide range of stakeholders, the project will foster a shared understanding of the ecological and social dimensions of the area. This collaborative approach will ensure that the project's outcomes reflect the community's core values, concerns, and vision for the future, enhancing its long-term viability.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The proposed project will produce a practical community-centered adaptive management strategy, identifying near and mid-term actions needed to implement an equitable nature-

based resilience strategy for the area. These actions will result in multiple benefits including improving the ecological health and function of Goleta Slough, protecting the airport, roadways, and other critical infrastructure, reducing the impact of flooding and other climate impacts on the surrounding disadvantaged community, and maintaining equitable access to recreational resources. These resilience measures will benefit both current and future generations.

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

As described above, the proposed project will actively involve a diverse range of stakeholders throughout the planning and design process. The engagement process will involve up to 30 meetings, presentations, field trips, small group discussions, and other activities over three years, ensuring diverse community voices are heard. Additionally, the project will continue to engage with the Equity Advisory & Outreach Committee of the Santa Barbara County Climate Collaborative, which represents under-resourced and marginalized populations, as well as other climate and social equity networks, to ensure their perspectives are included.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$950,000
Project Total	\$950,000

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 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;
- Leverage funds to provide multiple benefits and to maximize benefits.

The proposed project will meet these objectives by contributing to future coastal adaptation implementation projects that will support resilience to sea-level rise and storm surge, thereby increasing carbon sequestration and reducing flooding and infrastructure damage resulting in reduced GHG emissions from remediation and rebuilding. The adjacent community is a low-income community identified as a California Climate Investment priority population. The proposed planning project will develop priorities for future nature-based strategies to reduce the impacts of sea level rise on this community. These strategies will protect economic, environmental, and recreation assets in the community. The creation of nature-based strategies to sea-level rise is in line with the State Agency Sea-Level Rise Action Plan for California. Approximately \$100,000 of leverage will be provided. \$25,000 in-kind contribution will come from the City of Santa Barbara (contract for Goleta Slough Management Committee facilitator) and \$75,000 from Goleta Slough Management Committee participating agency staff time.

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 award grants for projects that 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 public agencies and nonprofit organizations for 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 and providing recreational opportunities. 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 prepare a coastal resilience adaptation plan for the Goleta Slough area. As discussed above, the proposed project will

develop a coastal resilience plan including nature-based strategies for protecting against severe storms, sea level rise, flooding, and other coastal hazards in order to benefit the surrounding land uses including valuable coastal wetlands, the Santa Barbara Airport, commercial uses, and a low-income community. The recommended authorization is thus consistent with Section 31113.

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**, the proposed project will commit funding to benefit systemically excluded, disadvantaged community, and support meaningful engagement by that community in the planning for coastal adaptation that will affect their community.

Consistent with **Goals 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects** and **4.3 Multi-Benefit Nature-Based Climate Adaptation**, the proposed project will develop a coastal resilience adaptation plan that assesses 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 engagement and technical studies and preparing conceptual project plans. 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 California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) 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.