

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

April 18, 2024

AUGMENTATION FOR COMMUNITY AND CLIMATE CONNECTIONS IN THE NOVATO BAYLANDS

Project No. 94-003-05

Project Manager: Sara Haugen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$2,500,000 to Point Reyes Bird Observatory to augment the Conservancy grant of \$2,150,000 to provide an additional two years of stewarding approximately 177 acres of restored wetlands through engaging the local community to maintain and enhance the wetlands and implementing minor property improvements by repairing and maintaining public access amenities in the Novato Baylands in Marin County.

LOCATION: Novato Baylands, Marin County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Community and Climate Connections in the Novato Baylands](#)
(December 1, 2022 Conservancy Staff Recommendation)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy (the "Conservancy") hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed two million four hundred thousand dollars (\$2,500,000) to Point Reyes Bird Observatory dba Point Blue Conservation Science (the "grantee" or "Point Blue") to augment the Conservancy grant of \$2,150,000 to steward approximately 177 acres of restored wetlands through engaging the local community to maintain and enhance the wetlands and to implement minor property improvements by repairing and maintaining public access amenities in the Novato Baylands in Marin County (the "project") to provide an additional two years of the project.

Prior to commencement of the second two-year project period, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A revised work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any additional contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. Evidence that any additional permits and approvals required to continue the project have been obtained.
4. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to continue to implement, operate, and maintain the project for an additional two years.

The grantee shall comply with all relevant mitigation measures identified in Bel Marin Keys Wetland Restoration Phase 1 Project Addendum to the Supplemental Environmental Impact Report Environmental Impact Statement for the Bel Marin Keys Unit V Expansion of Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project and the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Plan – Volume II: Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. Point Blue is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy (the “Conservancy”) authorize disbursement of up to \$2,500,000 to Point Reyes Bird Observatory dba Point Blue Conservation Science (“Point Blue”) to augment the Conservancy grant of \$2,150,000 to steward approximately 177 acres of restored wetlands through engaging the local community to maintain and enhance the wetlands and to implement minor property improvements by repairing and maintaining public access amenities in the Novato Baylands in Marin County (the “project”) to provide an additional two years of the project (see Exhibit 1, “Project Location

Map”). The Conservancy grant is currently funding two years of the project and the augmentation of \$2,500,000 will extend the project period to four years.

The project goals and history are described in detail in the December 1, 2022 staff recommendation (see Exhibit 2). The Conservancy’s December 1, 2022 authorization covers work from January 19, 2023 through December 31, 2024. The recommended augmentation is to extend the work through December 31, 2026.

The project consists of stewarding or enhancing approximately 177 acres of wetland habitat: 60 acres of tidal wetlands, 60 acres of managed wetlands, and 57 acres of seasonal wetlands through volunteer and student activities and workforce development at the Novato Baylands. Project activities include the following: monitoring and adaptive management (e.g., adjusting water levels in seasonal ponds, monitoring vegetation, monitoring bird numbers and behaviors), developing planting plans, propagating and planting native plants, controlling non-native invasive plant species, monitoring and managing planted areas, and controlling problematic erosive areas using small-scale nature-based solutions. This will provide opportunities for practical workforce development; cultivate a substantial volunteer cohort; provide educational programming for school, professional, and community groups about wetland ecology; and engage community members in wetland restoration activities. Point Blue will engage underserved communities through partnerships and create a positive and inclusive space.

The project is intended to result in high-quality habitat characterized by native vegetation and controlled populations of high-threat invasive non-native plant species throughout the designated stewardship areas. Other expected outcomes include progress towards desired soil salinities and native vegetation patterns in the Hamilton north seasonal wetlands; control of problematic erosive areas; and data contributions to monitoring reports based on four years of bird use data that will be combined with an existing dataset and analyzed as an indicator of habitat value.

Since the project commenced in early 2023, Point Blue has scaled up their educational programming with the Students and Teachers Restoring a Watershed (STRAW) program, contributed to workforce development through conservation corps teams, and cultivated the longstanding volunteer cohort at the Novato Baylands. Point Blue has controlled a problematic erosive area by planting 3,460 native plants in that area, and worked with partners, students, and volunteers to plant additional native plants, over 4,400 in total, at both Bel Marin Keys and Hamilton. Hundreds of students from first through eighth grade from at least twelve different schools have engaged in project-based learning activities on the site. In coordination with partners, Point Blue has managed water levels and resulting vegetation in the North Seasonal Wetlands to support the endangered Western snowy plovers found nesting there. Additionally, Point Blue addressed erosion around the North Seasonal Wetland water control structure by placing rock around the eroded areas. Point Blue has also contributed monitoring data to annual reports on outcomes for both the Hamilton and Bel Marin Keys Phase 1 restoration projects.

Finally, Point Blue has carried out minor property improvements, such as coordinating the process of installing new interpretive signage.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy 2022 Authorization	\$2,150,000
Proposed Authorization	\$2,500,000
Project Total	\$4,650,000

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purposes of “urgent sea level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies” (Budget Act 2022, SB 154 as amended by the Budget Act of 2023, SB 101). The coastal resilience funds are available as described in Section 52 of SB 155 (Chapter 258, Statutes of 2021), which sets forth a detailed description of the purposes of the coastal resilience funds, including projects for the purposes of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program established pursuant to Chapter 4.5 (commencing with Section 31160) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it is located within the geographic boundary and supports the goals of San Francisco Bay Program.

Point Blue will continue to provide in-kind services through the community volunteer program, environmental education program, and local conservation corps teams. The Conservancy does not typically require in-kind services, nor does it require documentation of expenditures of in-kind services.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is being undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (sections 31162-31165), as described in the December 1, 2022 staff recommendation.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 1.3**, the proposed project will provide funding for activities that directly benefit systemically excluded communities.

Consistent with **Goal 1.4**, the proposed project will support workforce development by working with Conservation Corps and providing training to community college interns.

Consistent with **Goal 3.2**, the proposed project will enhance 177 acres of wetlands habitat.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

Augmenting the Conservancy grant to fund an additional two years of the project does not require any additional CEQA documentation and complies with CEQA as described in the December 1, 2022 staff recommendation.