

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
April 18, 2024

**SAMOA DUNES AND WETLANDS: PUBLIC ACCESS AUGMENTATION**

Project No. 16-010-03  
Project Manager: Michael Bowen

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$24,000 to augment an existing grant to Friends of the Dunes to provide up to an additional two years of interim management of the 356-acre Samoa Dunes and Wetlands Complex on the North Spit of Humboldt Bay in Humboldt County.

**LOCATION:** Samoa Dunes and Wetlands, between the communities of Samoa and Manila on the north spit of Humboldt Bay, near Eureka, Humboldt County.

---

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [September 3, 2020 Staff Report](#)

---

**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS**

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

Resolution:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to twenty-four thousand dollars (\$24,000) to augment an existing grant to Friends of the Dunes (“grantee”) to provide up to an additional two years of interim management of the 356-acre Samoa Dunes and Wetland Complex in Humboldt County, CA.

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.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.

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 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 and Guidelines.
3. The Friends of the Dunes is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

---

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the State Coastal Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to twenty-four thousand dollars (\$24,000) to augment an existing grant to Friends of the Dunes to provide up to an additional two years of interim management of the 356-acre Samoa Dunes and Wetland Complex (the property) in Humboldt County, CA. This augmentation will enable Friends of the Dunes to continue to provide interim management of the property as it awaits transfer to the Wiyot Tribe or another suitable partner.

The Conservancy authorized disbursement of \$673,350 to the Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation, and Conservation District (“District”) to acquire the property on September 6, 2018 (Exhibit 2). The expectation at that time was that the District would be an interim owner/manager of the property until the Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”), could take title to the property. The District withdrew from the project due to concerns about the challenges of land management, but Friends of the Dunes took title to the property to facilitate its transfer to BLM and ensure its protection and stewardship in the interim. The acquisition was completed and the property was transferred to Friends of the Dunes for interim ownership and management while awaiting the BLM’s conclusion of their property review process.

In order to ensure successful implementation of public access to this previously closed area, the Conservancy provided a grant to Friends of the Dunes in 2020 to assist them with their opening and management of public access at the site (Exhibit 2).

BLM’s review remained incomplete after two years, but in 2021 the Wiyot Tribe expressed interest in taking title to the eastern 40-acre section of this portion of their ancestral territory. BLM reiterated its interest in long-term ownership of the western portion of the property. Subsequently, as the parties prepared to bifurcate the transfer, the Wiyot announced in 2023 that they wished to take title to the entire property. Having completed their property review process, the BLM then promptly withdrew their interest in receiving the property.

Throughout this period, Friends of the Dunes continued to manage the property independently and successfully, which involved significant effort to address a substantial amount of legacy trash from the previous ownership, while also curtailing further illegal dumping, encampments, and other forms of resource-damaging trespass. Since their engagement, Friends of the Dunes

has opened trails, provided docent services, established a volunteer trail steward program for the property, and ensured that their two staff are routinely onsite to address the many challenges that arise at the property.

Since at this time the Wiyot have not yet opened an escrow account to receive the property, this proposed augmentation will enable Friends of the Dunes to continue their successful management for up to two years, until the entire property is transferred to the Wiyot Tribe or another suitable entity. Access management will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- **Trail Oversight**: An informal trail network is located on the property. Friends of the Dunes will review, patrol, and clean as necessary those trails deemed optimum for existing levels of public use at the site.
- **Routine Patrols**: Friends of the Dunes will patrol the property no less frequently than biweekly, and work with community volunteers and local partners via a memorandum of understanding to expand patrol and clean-up of the property during the interim ownership period.
- **Trash Cleanup**: Friends of the Dunes will ensure that the property is maintained in a clean and safe condition during the interim ownership period.
- **Public Education and Signage**: To the extent allowable under the Coastal Act, Friends of the Dunes will ensure that existing trails and resources are clearly marked and maintained to reduce or avoid damage to sensitive coastal resources.

**Site Description:** The property is located on the north spit of Humboldt Bay between the towns of Manila and Samoa (Exhibit 1). The property is bounded on the west by one mile of Pacific Ocean coastline and on the east by Humboldt Bay. The City of Eureka is a short distance away, which presents both wonderful opportunities for public access, while also presenting challenges with site management resulting from illegal dumping and encampments. The property includes approximately 81 acres of wetlands consisting of 9 acres palustrine shrub, 56 acres palustrine forested, and 16 acres estuarine emergent wetland; 84 acres of open dunes; and 139 acres of coniferous forest including declining and rare Beach pine-Sitka spruce forest. The property provides habitat for numerous rare, threatened, endangered and protected species.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** Over the past two years Friends of the Dunes has shown their remarkable capability to steward and make available this unique coastal property. Friends of the Dunes is described in greater detail in Exhibit 2.

**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.**

See Exhibit 2.

**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 purpose of the proposed augmentation is to support the transfer -in good condition- of property that lies at the center of Wiyot ancestral territory. To facilitate this process, the Conservancy has supported property management, a lot line adjustment and associated fees, and a revised transfer agreements to expedite the transfer of the property to the Wiyot Tribe.

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

The augmentation is anticipated to provide up to two additional years of suitable access enhancement at the site.

**5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.**

The acquisition and management of this property has provided a unique and popular coastal access opportunity in an unusual dune setting close to the City of Eureka. Now, with the proposed transfer to the Wiyot, the acquisition also presents a large and highly visible Land Back opportunity for future ownership and stewardship of the property. Support of Friends of the Dunes during the interim will hopefully ensure the success of this transition.

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

Following decades of inaccessibility at the property, the coastal access provided at the site has become highly popular year-round, and heavily utilized by the surrounding community. The acquisition and management have also afforded the opportunity for a remarkable Land Back effort so that the property may also be used for cultural purposes such as ceremonies and plant gathering. Due to the stewardship provided by Friends of the Dunes, the property has remained free of the public safety problems in surrounding areas caused by illegal encampments, trash dumping and crime.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$24,000</b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$24,000</b>

The expected source of funds for the property management activities is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the Coastal Access Account in the State Coastal Conservancy Fund. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 30620.2, these funds are available to the Conservancy for “grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for the development, maintenance, and operation of new or existing facilities that provide public access to the shoreline of the sea.” The proposed authorization enables the operation and maintenance of an existing informal trail network that will provide public access to the beach, ocean and coastal trails at Samoa Dunes and Wetlands. The proposed project will be carried out by a nonprofit organization. Thus, the proposed project is an appropriate use of these funds.

Additional funding for interim management has included direct contributions from the District, the Pacific Coast Joint Venture, and numerous private sources arranged by Friends of the Dunes.

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 remains consistent with the Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation as described in Exhibit 2.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2.5, Recreation Facilities and Amenities**, this authorization will ensure that the existing and proposed trail network at the property is safe, clean, and easily accessible.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed project is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15301, which exempts operation and maintenance of existing facilities and topographical features that does not involve expanding the existing use of the property. This project consists of the operation and maintenance of existing facilities and topographical features, and does not involve expansion of existing use.

Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.