

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

April 18, 2024

SAN FRANCISCO BAY STATE OF THE BIRDS DYNAMIC REPORT PROJECT

Project No. 24-005-01

Project Manager: Laura Cholodenko

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$311,900 to Point Reyes Bird Observatory to undertake the San Francisco Bay State of the Birds Dynamic Report Project, which consists of developing a website that provides updated analyses of bird species populations that serve as indicators of San Francisco Bay habitat quality.

LOCATION: San Francisco Bay Area

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 eleven thousand nine hundred dollars (\$311,900) to Point Reyes Bird Observatory (“the grantee”) to undertake the San Francisco Bay State of the Birds Dynamic Report Project, which consists of developing a website that provides updated analyses of bird species populations that serve as indicators of San Francisco Bay habitat quality.

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 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Conservancy's mandate to address the resources and recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay Area.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. Point Reyes Bird Observatory 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 \$311,900 grant to Point Reyes Bird Observatory, doing business as Point Blue Conservation Science (Point Blue) for the San Francisco Bay State of the Birds Dynamic Report Project, which consists of developing a website that provides updated analyses of bird species populations that serve as indicators of San Francisco Bay habitat quality. The San Francisco Estuary is a critical environment for wildlife and for birds in particular. Over a million shorebirds use the estuary during migration each year and it is a high priority area for wintering waterfowl, supporting nearly half of some diving duck species of the lower Pacific Flyway. The estuary also supports several populations of threatened and endangered bird species that rely on shoreline habitats for breeding and foraging.

Birds are relatively easy to monitor and they are highly mobile, making them a good early warning sign of habitat degradation. The proposed project will develop a website that provides population status information for several bird species and bird species groups (e.g., waterfowl, shorebirds, and tidal marsh birds) that serve as indicators of San Francisco Estuary habitat quality (Exhibit 1). These indicators will be used to track habitat quality of four different tidal wetland and non-tidal habitats. Each habitat will have its own section in the Dynamic Report that includes a summary of key threats facing the habitat and associated bird species indicators, tables or figures showing indicator population metrics and status; data visualizations; and recommended actions to improve habitat quality and increase the resilience of the indicator species and all species that rely on that habitat. Indicator species status, trends, or other metrics will be attributed to subregions of the San Francisco Bay Estuary or the estuary as a whole depending on the indicator (Exhibit 1). In addition to the Dynamic Report being available via an interactive website, the project will also develop a slide deck and outreach strategy to maximize the awareness and use of the Report's results and recommendations.

The last State of the Birds Report was a static report published in 2011. That report served the conservation community by providing data-driven conservation recommendations and highlighting threats to species whose populations are at risk of extirpation. Point Blue, the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture, and other project partners have identified a need to provide the State of the Birds Report information at Bay-wide and subregional scales, to keep the data

updated, and make it readily accessible to other entities that are working to accomplish regional conservation goals at the pace and scale that is needed to address pressing climate change and biodiversity challenges.

Synergies in data collection, analysis, and dissemination among partners are critical components to this project. The work is being coordinated with the Wetland Regional Monitoring Program, a regional monitoring effort to assess the effectiveness of San Francisco Bay tidal wetland restoration efforts. The project will also be coordinated with the production of the San Francisco Estuary Partnership's State of the Estuary Report. This coordination will help ensure that region-wide monitoring and reporting initiatives are leveraging each other's effort to track progress and use more real-time data to inform conservation actions. Additionally, the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture, a partner on the project, will engage its multi-sector and region-wide community of natural resource agencies, conservation nonprofit organizations, scientist, and environmental advocates in report development by sharing project updates via a quarterly newsletter and other online communications. The Joint Venture holds regular Conservation and Science Committee meetings that will provide opportunities for obtaining input and establishing collaboration with partners and practitioners who will use the Dynamic Report going forward.

Site Description: The project area encompasses tidal marsh, subtidal habitat, non-tidal wetlands and waters, and tidal flats of the San Francisco Bay, including Suisun Bay (Exhibit 1). The non-tidal wetlands and waters encompass diked baylands that would be under tidal influence if they were not surrounded by berms or levees, such as managed seasonal wetlands and perennial marshes, artificially muted tidal marshes and lagoons, managed ponds, and salt production ponds.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Point Blue and the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture successfully co-produced the original San Francisco Bay State of the Birds Report in 2011 by coordinating with and directing the work of dozens of researchers, decision makers, and others. More recently, Point Blue produced the State of the Birds Report Framework in 2022 that serves as a blueprint for this project. Future updates to the report as well as continued website maintenance and implementation of the outreach strategy will be pursued in two to four years when the Report's content requires an update. Point Blue has successfully managed multiple Conservancy grants.

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 benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.

The project will rely heavily on an existing avian dataset—the Avian Knowledge Network—to reduce the costs of aggregating data from disparate sources. Other datasets will be provided by the U.S. Geological Survey. Because the survey data and associated metadata such as survey location retain the same structure year after year, analytical tools can be developed and continue to be used in the future with very little additional effort. These cost-saving measures will make updating the Dynamic Report efficient and affordable over the long-term.

The dynamic structure of the report will allow for updates to specific report sections as needed. For example, information on status can be updated while retaining other content such as introductory and supporting narratives that do not warrant costly updates. This flexibility to update or alter specific content streamlines the reporting process and will allow for adaptation as regional reporting initiatives of the Wetland Regional Monitoring Program and other programs evolve and the needs of the audience change. The San Francisco Bay Joint Venture has committed to hosting the State of the Birds Dynamic Report website and will be responsible for making updates for at least five years after the project is complete. After five years, another entity involved in regional scale monitoring and reporting may take over hosting and updating the website.

3. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The proposed project will provide entities across the region with the latest information on bird species allowing them to understand how habitat quality is changing across the San Francisco Bay at three to five year intervals. Information will be updated at a frequency that is based on factors such as the indicator’s rate of change and the information needs of key stakeholders. This information will inform the Wetland Regional Monitoring Program, helping practitioners compare tidal marsh restoration sites around the estuary in order to better understand how various restoration projects are performing.

Bird species conservation must be conducted across political boundaries to effectively conserve migratory species. The North American Bird Conservation Initiative produces State of the Bird reports on a regular basis for Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. The project will leverage the upcoming U.S. State of the Birds Report to inform the project and potentially showcase the San Francisco Bay region in the national report.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$311,900
Project Total	\$311,900

It is anticipated that the Conservancy’s funding will come from an FY22/23 appropriation of General Funds to the Conservancy for “urgent sea level rise adaptation needs and coastal resilience using nature-based solution and other strategies.” (Budget Act of 2022, SB 154, as amended by the Budget Act of 2023, SB 101.) The proposed authorization qualifies for use of these funds because the information generated by the project will inform tidal and non-tidal wetland restoration projects that are creating habitat that is resilient to the long-term effects of sea level rise.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Section 31162, to address resource goals in the San Francisco Bay Area. Section 31162(b) authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations for projects that will protect, restore, and enhance natural habitats and connecting corridors, watersheds, scenic areas, and other open-space resources of regional importance. The proposed project will provide information that is critical to protecting and restoring wetlands and other habitats along the shoreline of San Francisco Bay.

Pursuant to Section 31163(c) the proposed project is: 1) supported by an adopted local plan, the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture's 2022 Implementation Strategy, 2) will serve the restoration, planning, and scientific community working in areas around the tidal wetlands and waters of San Francisco Bay, 3) is ready to be implemented because a framework for the project was created in 2022; 4) will provide critical information that helps conserve habitats that are at risk of being negatively impacted by sea level rise and other effects of climate change.

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

Consistent with **Goal 3.2, Restore or Enhance Habitats**, the proposed project will help identify the need to restore or enhance tidal wetlands and non-tidal wetland habitats adjacent to the shoreline for the benefit of birds and other wildlife.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal Code of Regulations Section 15306, which exempts basic data collection, research and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

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