

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

June 6, 2024

SOUTH BEACH SEA LEVEL RISE AND CONNECTIVITY FEASIBILITY STUDY

Project No. 24-022-01

Project Manager: Peter Jaraus

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$650,000 to the Elk Valley Rancheria to prepare the South Beach Sea Level Rise and Connectivity Feasibility Study, which will develop and evaluate alternatives for how best to prevent future flooding of a vulnerable section of Highway 101 adjacent to Crescent City, while improving public access to South Beach and protecting the Crescent City Marsh in Del Norte County.

LOCATION: South Beach, Del Norte County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Site Photographs](#)

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 six hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$650,000) to the Elk Valley Rancheria, California (“the grantee”) to prepare the South Beach Sea Level Rise and Connectivity Feasibility Study, which will develop and evaluate alternatives for how best to prevent future flooding of a vulnerable section of Highway 101 adjacent to Crescent City, while improving public access to South Beach and protecting the Crescent City Marsh in Del Norte County.

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 3 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.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$650,000 grant to the Elk Valley Rancheria to prepare the South Beach Sea Level Rise and Connectivity Feasibility Study, which will develop and evaluate alternatives for how best to prevent future flooding of a vulnerable section of Highway 101 adjacent to Crescent City, while improving public access to South Beach and protecting the Crescent City Marsh in Del Norte County.

The project will focus on a 1.4-mile-long section of Highway 101 between Enderts Beach Road in the south and Anchor Way in the north. This stretch of 101 is facing numerous climate related challenges including increased storm surge, sand and sediment buildup, and increased precipitation. The road runs along a low-lying beach and is already prone to flooding during storm events both from storm surge on the west and water draining from Crescent City Marsh on the east. Wave run up from the west also frequently deposits sand and wood on the road. The large amount of water and debris on the road results in closures and cuts off a vital connection for residents, services, and emergency access. Road closures are likely to become more frequent with sea level rise and the increase in storm frequency and intensity predicted due to climate change. Highway 101 in Del Norte County is considered the “lifeline of the California’s North Coast.” It is the primary route that provides direct access for commercial trucking year-round. Maintaining Highway 101 open and in good condition between Humboldt County and the Oregon Border is critical to the economic well-being of Del Norte County and the north coast region.

Crescent City Marsh, to the east of this stretch of Highway 101, is owned by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and is connected to the ocean through several undersized culverts that pass under the highway. These culverts have a direct impact on the water level in the marsh and are a partial barrier to fish passage. Water level has a direct impact on the species in the marsh, which includes several listed species such as the Western Lily. When the marsh is unable to drain, the flood waters spill out onto the roadway and there is also an increase in vehicle/wildlife collisions from otters, elk, and other wildlife seeking a path to dry land.

South Beach, to the west of Highway 101, is a very popular destination for tourists and locals. It is a prime spot to learn how to surf, walk on the beach, and escape the heat in the summer.

Despite this popularity, the parking is informal and there are currently no restrooms or garbage collection. The Conservancy has funded the construction of a permanent restroom on the north end of the beach, which should be completed by 2025. The informal parking areas are often damaged during winter storms. Visitation to the beach is likely to increase as the summers get warmer in interior Oregon and California. This is likely to result in more impacts to the beach and surrounding vegetation.

Approaching the numerous challenges of the project by looking holistically at the needs of the marsh, road, and beach will help foster realistic and supportable solutions. To tackle the multitude of concerns, a Technical Advisory Committee will be formed that includes a diverse group of stakeholders. This includes state and federal agencies as well as local partners. In addition, the Elk Valley Rancheria will partner with an ongoing climate resilience study being spearheaded by the Del Norte Local Transportation Commission. That study addresses a wider area and timeframe and is doing extensive public engagement. Public input from the Del Norte Location Transportation study will be incorporated into this effort, as will direct public comment.

This project consists of preparing a study that assesses the feasibility of solutions for alleviating the ongoing and future impacts of climate change to Highway 101 while improving conditions for the Crescent City Marsh and South Beach. The project includes:

- Mapping and field studies.
- Evaluation of existing and future climate related pressures.
- Analysis of the Hydrological conditions.
- Evaluation of Coastal Access including bicycle/pedestrian use.
- Obtaining public input.
- Identification and evaluation of feasible alternatives.
- Final study report.

The final report will provide 30% designs for a set of projects that address the major concerns of the area including public access to the beach, improvements to Crescent City Marsh, and adaptation of the Highway to climate change. The goal is to have these projects ready for engineering and permitting.

Site Description:

The project area is an approximately 1.4-mile long stretch of a low lying coastline. It includes a wide beach, a section of Highway 101, and the Crescent City Marsh. It is just to the southwest of the Elk Valley Rancheria and adjacent to the City of Crescent City. During the summer it is a popular tourist destination, which helps bring important revenue to the area. In the winter it is subject to frequent storms, which create flooding and cause sand and debris to wash across the road. Construction of the initial road created a barrier between the low dunes/beach and the Crescent City Marsh. This cut off the marsh from the Pacific Ocean and has prevented the low dunes and beach from migrating during the winter.

Grant Applicant Qualifications:

The Elk Valley Rancheria, California has an excellent track record of successfully managing state and federal grants, with a portfolio of over \$18 million. The Tribe has the financial capacity and integrity to successfully manage these funds. The Tribe recently successfully acquired a property adjacent to the project area through a grant from the Coastal Conservancy. The Tribe is a Federally Recognized Tribal Government and operates an Office of Self-Governance.

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.

Highway 101 south of Crescent City is a critical transportation corridor for Del Norte County. It provides the only direct overland connection to Humboldt County and the rest of the State of California. It provides for local transportation and goods movement from outside of the area. It also supports the tourism economy by providing access to Del Norte County for tourists exploring the stunning beauty of the coast and redwoods.

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 project is being undertaken by the Elk Valley Rancheria. The Tribe's land is located on both sides of the stretch of Highway 101 that is the focus of this study. Tribal management of the study will help ensure that the alternatives developed consider the Tribe's needs and perspectives, along with those of other project partners.

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

The purpose of the project is to develop a feasibility study for improvements that will be resilient to sea level rise and other impacts from climate change such as stronger storm surges. Resilience projects proposed through the project will ensure the durability of the area for at least twenty years, inclusive of climate change.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The holistic nature of the project is designed to provide multiple benefits to the area. The project will identify climate resilient actions to improve the habitat in Crescent City Marsh by more effectively connecting it to the Pacific Ocean. It will also plan projects for improved public access to South Beach as well as a more resilient section of Highway 101. The project area is a severely disadvantaged community per the State Parks Program Community Finder. The project will facilitate future improvements to protect access for tourists that are critical to the

community’s economy and will facilitate increased community-preparedness and resilience to future climate change impacts such as storm surge and sea level rise.

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

The proposed project has a comprehensive plan for public outreach. The public will be actively engaged in guiding and selecting the direction for the project as well as evaluating the feasibility of the proposals. In addition, the project will incorporate public input from a parallel climate feasibility study being led by the Del Norte Local Transportation Commission. Finally, a diverse set of advisors will participate directly through the project’s Technical Advisory Committee.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	<u>\$650,000</u>
Project Total	<u>\$650,000</u>

Conservancy funding is anticipated from a Fiscal Year 2023/24 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy to address “urgent sea-level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies” (The Budget Act of 2023, Chapter 38, Statutes of 2023 (AB 102)). The project is consistent with this fund source because it will plan for sea level rise adaptation along South Beach adjacent to the City of Crescent City.

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 31113 and 31111).

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

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which 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 Section 31113(b), the Conservancy is authorized to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects, including those that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or address extreme weather events, sea level rise, 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 enhancing coastal natural lands and reducing flood risk. Pursuant to Section 31113(d), the Conservancy must prioritize projects that use natural infrastructure to help adapt to climate change, prioritize projects that have multiple benefits and give consideration to projects in a variety of ecosystems.

Consistent with these provisions, the recommended authorization is to award a grant to the Elk Valley Rancheria, a public entity, to conduct a resilience study for the South Beach area that will identify feasible projects to protect the waterfront against severe storms, sea level rise, flooding and other coastal hazards. The recommended authorization is thus consistent with §31111 and §31113.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.1 ,Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will fund a project undertaken by the Elk Valley Rancheria which will also benefit the southern portion of Crescent City, a severely disadvantaged community.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5, Recreation Facilities & Amenities**, the proposed project will create one plan for improved access to South Beach, an important recreational resource for Del Norte County.

Consistent with **Goal 4.1 ,Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects**, the proposed project will prepare a plan that will adapt infrastructure and public access to sea level rise.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project consists of feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded, as well as data collection and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The project is therefore statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262 and categorically exempt pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15306. Consistent with Section 15262, the project will consider environmental factors.

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