

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
September 5, 2024

**LOST COAST REDWOODS  
DEVILBISS RANCH ACQUISITION**

Project No. 23-084-01  
Project Manager: Joel Gerwein (Lisa Ames)

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$8,500,000 to Save the Redwoods League to repay private loans used to acquire the 3,187-acre DeVilbiss Ranch to facilitate transfer of ownership of the 4,566-acre Lost Coast Redwoods property in northern Mendocino County to the United States Bureau of Land Management for the purposes of natural resource and water quality protection, restoration, and enhancement, open space preservation, California Native American tribal cultural resources protection, wildfire resilience and restoration forestry, and public access compatible with cultural and natural resource protection.

**LOCATION:** Lost Coast Region, Northern Mendocino County

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Maps](#)
  - Exhibit 2: [Mendocino County Assessor Parcel Numbers](#)
  - Exhibit 3: [Project Photos](#)
  - Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)
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**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 eight million five hundred thousand dollars (\$8,500,000) to Save the Redwoods League (“the grantee”) to repay private loans used to acquire the approximately 3,187 acres of real property known as the DeVilbiss Ranch, Mendocino County Assessor Parcel Numbers as depicted in Exhibit 2 to the accompanying staff recommendation, to facilitate the transfer of ownership of

the 4,566-acre Lost Coast Redwoods property to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds for the transaction, the grantee shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer):
  - a. All relevant documents for the current and previous transactions including, without limitation, loan documents, appraisals, purchase and sale agreement, deed, escrow instructions, environmental or hazardous materials assessment, and title reports;
  - b. A baseline conditions report; and
  - c. Evidence that BLM is prepared to complete the acquisition of the Lost Coast Redwoods property.
  - d. Evidence that the grantee paid no more than fair market value for the DeVilbiss Ranch property, and that BLM will not pay more than fair market value for the Lost Coast Redwoods property, as established in appraisals approved by the Executive Officer.
2. The Lost Coast Redwoods property shall be managed and operated for natural resource and water quality protection, restoration, and enhancement, open space preservation, California Native American tribal cultural resources protection, wildfire management and restoration forestry, and public access compatible with cultural and natural resource protection. The property shall be permanently dedicated to those purposes by an appropriate instrument approved by the Executive Officer.
3. Conservancy funding shall be acknowledged by erecting and maintaining a sign on the Lost Coast Redwoods property or in a nearby publicly viewable area, the design and location of which are to be approved by the Executive Officer.

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 8 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding reservation of significant coastal resource areas.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. Save the Redwoods League is a nonprofit organization incorporated under U.S. Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3), and whose purposes are consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation (Division 21 of the Public Resources Code).

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## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a grant of up to \$8,500,000 to Save the Redwoods League (SRL) to repay private loans used to acquire the 3,187-acre DeVilbiss Ranch to facilitate SRL's transfer of ownership of the 4,566-acre Lost Coast Redwoods property, which

includes the DeVilbiss Ranch, in northern Mendocino County to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the purposes of natural resource and water quality protection, restoration and enhancement, open space preservation, California Native American tribal cultural resources protection, wildfire resilience and restoration forestry, and public access compatible with cultural and natural resource protection. The project will permanently protect unique habitat and public recreation opportunities while providing carbon sequestration, climate resilience, landscape connectivity, erosion control, watershed health, and water quality benefits.

The DeVilbiss Ranch is part of the 4,566-acre Lost Coast Redwoods property currently owned on an interim basis by SRL. The Lost Coast Redwoods property contains an eight mile stretch of coastline adjacent to the offshore Double Cone Rock State Marine Conservation Area and the California Coastal Monument, managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Once in public ownership, it will comprise a key section of a connected landscape along a 45-mile stretch of California's renowned Lost Coast. The property is adjacent to the 7,800-acre Sinkyone Wilderness State Park to the north and the 49,500-acre Redwood Forest Foundation property to the east, which is protected by a working forest easement. Also, to the north is the 4,531-acre Sinkyone Intertribal Wilderness Council land, which connects to the 60,000-acre King Range National Conservation Area, managed by BLM. (Exhibit 1)

The Lost Coast Redwoods property includes 3,166 acres of forested land, including old-growth and mature second-growth California redwood, Douglas-fir forest, and some mixed hardwoods, as well as 30 miles of Class I, II, and III salmonid and fish bearing streams. The land and streams provide high quality wildlife habitat for sensitive and endangered species including northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, pacific fisher, coho salmon and steelhead trout. The islands just offshore, including Vizcaino Rock, support more than 11,500 nesting sea birds. The property also has expansive coastal views and contains seven miles of forest roads, which could serve as public access trails in the future (Exhibit 3).

To protect the sensitive habitat and potential public recreational area from industrial timber use, SRL proactively acquired in fee title the three tracts comprising the 4,566-acre Lost Coast Redwoods: the 400.5-acre Cape Vizcaino tract was acquired in 2008; the 978.5-acre Shady Dell tract was acquired in 2011; and the 3,187-acre DeVilbiss Ranch tract was acquired in 2021. Timeline and public funding availability considerations precluded the possibility of SRL acquiring the Cape Vizcaino and DeVilbiss Ranch using public funds. Instead, SRL funded these acquisitions using donations and private loans. SRL acquired the DeVilbiss Ranch property for \$36,900,000 which represented less than fair market value based on a November 2021 appraisal. As of August 1, 2024, SRL has an outstanding loan amount of \$11,130,500 on the DeVilbiss Ranch property. The Conservancy granted \$3,000,000 to SRL to acquire the Shady Dell property, for which SRL paid a total of \$5,500,000 and which is now permanently protected for public access, open space, and habitat conservation. The Conservancy subsequently funded the planning and development of 6.8 miles of the California Coastal Trail on the Shady Dell property. Originally, SRL intended to transfer the three tracts comprising the Lost Coast Redwood property to the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) for long term management but has subsequently determined that BLM has the resources to best manage the

property for habitat conservation, wildfire resilience, restoration forestry, and public recreation.

If SRL had not taken the initiative to acquire the properties quickly when the opportunities arose, an industrial timber company would have acquired them, threatening the old-growth and second-growth redwoods, fragmenting habitat, reducing watershed health, and hampering climate resilience of the Mendocino coast. SRL is now seeking to sell the entire Lost Coast Redwood property to BLM for public ownership and management on behalf of the public. The Lost Coast Redwood property's current appraised value is \$53,940,000. However, SRL intends to donate \$9,814,500 of the property's value in a bargain sale. BLM has committed to pay SRL \$27,125,500 million for the property. The remaining \$17,000,000 will be provided to SRL through this recommended grant (which is specifically for the DeVilbiss property) and a grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board, which authorized a \$8.5 million grant to SRL on August 22, 2024. The Lost Coast Redwood property appraisal has undergone independent review and was approved by the Department of General Services on July 12, 2024. The Conservancy posted the independent review of the appraisal on its website for public review on August 4, 2024. Once transferred to BLM, SRL will continue to advise and provide expertise it has gained from the restoration forestry techniques successfully practiced through its Redwoods Rising Initiative.

**Site Description:** The 3,187-acre Devilbiss Ranch is the middle property of the three tracts comprising the 4,566-acre Lost Coast Redwoods property; with Cape Vizcaino to the south and Shady Dell to the north. Devilbiss Ranch is 19 miles north of Fort Bragg and accessed from the south via Laytonville on Branscomb Road, west to Highway 1. Considered the southern end of California's undeveloped Lost Coast, the Lost Coast Redwoods property is immediately adjacent to the Sinkyone Wilderness State Park and Redwood Forest Foundation Inc's Usal Redwood Forest. Ten miles north and east are the Intertribal Sinkyone Wilderness and the BLM's King Range National Conservation Area. The Lost Coast Redwoods property is adjacent to the recently designated Double Cone Rock State Marine Conservation Area and 5 miles west of three BLM designated Wilderness areas. (Exhibit 1)

Devilbiss Ranch contains approximately 5 miles of undeveloped rugged coastline and a well-developed internal road system. The terrain of the property varies from sea level along the western ocean facing boundary to approximately 1,120 feet in elevation at the ridgelines. The property is located along Cottaneva Creek, a Class I watercourse, and contains the tributary Dunn Creek. Cottaneva and Dunn Creeks have been identified by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife as containing critical habitat for spawning and rearing juvenile fish. Most of the property is dominated by conifer and mixed hardwood forest stands. Tree species include Douglas-fir, coast redwood, grand fir, tanoak, chinquapin, Pacific madrone, and riparian species, including red alder and California bay. The property has been managed as a working forest/timberland for many decades. Both even aged and uneven aged silvicultural methods have been utilized on the forest stands. Second and third-growth redwood stands are present with a significant component of Douglas-fir and grand fir. Scattered old growth does exist, however there are no significantly sized contiguous stands of old growth present on the DeVilbiss Ranch property.

The entire Lost Coast Redwood property provides habitat for endangered species including northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, pacific fisher, coho salmon, and steelhead trout. The streams also support other plant and animal species of special concern including Seaside bittercress, Whitney’s farewell to spring, Point Reyes horkelia, Foothill yellow-legged frog, pacific tailed frog and southern torrent salamander. The property is also home to larger charismatic mammals such as Roosevelt elk, bear, bobcats, and mountain lions.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:**

SRL is a 501(c)(3) organization established to preserve portions of the redwood forests for scenic, recreational and wildlife preservation purposes. SRL has a proven record that demonstrates it has the fiscal capacity and expertise to conduct the proposed project.

The Conservancy and SRL have collaborated on numerous north coast projects for more than 20 years, including acquisitions of the 25,000-acre Mill Creek property in Del Norte County, Humboldt Lagoons State Park in northern Humboldt County, Montgomery Woods State Park in the upper Big River watershed, the Shady Dell property in Mendocino, and the 8,532-acre Cemex property and Cascade Creek in Santa Cruz County. In 2009, SRL stepped in to provide interim funding for the Jenner Headlands acquisition in Sonoma County when State funding was frozen. SRL and the Conservancy completed the development of a segment of the coastal trail on the Shady Dell property and are collaborating on the Redwood National and State Park Visitor Center and Prairie Creek Restoration project in Humboldt County. In addition, the Conservancy has helped fund SRL’s Redwood Rising Initiative in the greater Mill Creek watershed in Del Norte County and in the greater Prairie Creek Watershed in Humboldt County.

The BLM is a federal agency with a large presence in Northern California, where it manages about 3.5 million acres of public lands, including the King Range National Conservation Area, Lost Coast Headlands, Waluphl-Lighthouse Ranch, and the Point Arena-Stornetta Unit, all of which are managed to protect valuable natural resources and provide public access. The Conservancy has worked directly with BLM on several successful acquisition and public access projects, including an acquisition project at Point Arena Ranch, and public access and coastal trail projects at Mattole Beach, the Ma-le’l Dunes, and the Lost Coast Headlands.

**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 to repay the private loans SRL carried as an interim measure to acquire the DeVilbiss Ranch property and transfer to BLM is a good investment of state resources

because 1) it will contribute to meeting the state’s natural land conservation goals to protect and restore biodiversity, expand access to nature, and mitigate and build resilience to climate change as required by the Governor’s 30 x 30 Executive Order; 2) it will advance state and regional water quality, salmon recovery, and wildfire resiliency goals included in the California Water Action Plan, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Strategy for California Coho, and California’s Wildfire and Forest Action Resilience Plan; and 3) it will protect and enhance the biodiversity of coastal old growth redwood habitats, a significant and imperiled California natural resource.

**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 adjacent to the Sinkyone Wilderness State Park and InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness. SRL has been in regular contact with the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council (Council) about the project, including regarding requests for Council and Tribal member input, public funding updates, and plans to convey the properties to the federal government. The Council has discussed with SRL the cultural importance of this area to its ten member Tribes, and they are jointly developing a framework for Tribal engagement in planning and future management of the property. SRL has also consulted with Council representatives in developing the scope of work and protocols for a future archaeological/cultural resources survey of the project area. In addition, SRL has donated two Mendocino County coastal properties in the area to the InterTribal Sinkyone Council to conserve: in 2012, the 164-acre Four Corners property and in 2021, the 523-acre Tc’ih-Léh-Dûñ (which means “Fish Run Place” in the Sinkyone language) property.

On September 13, 2022, the national office of BLM issued an instruction memorandum mandating and directing the Bureau to "identify opportunities for co-stewardship as part of Tribal consultation and engagement during land use planning and implementation decisions." It is expected that this will further open opportunities for partnership with tribal communities, and BLM’s Arcata Field Office recently sent formal invitations to each of the ten member Tribes of the Council, as well as the nearby Bear River Band of Rohnerville Rancheria, to engage in government-to-government consultation on Lost Coast Redwoods.

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

The acquisition project will protect in perpetuity habitat connectivity, habitat values, water quality, and carbon sequestration potential. Future management that includes wildfire fuel reduction and restoration forestry will promote acceleration to more biodiverse habitats and will improve resilience to climate change.

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

The proposed project will 1) permanently protect 3,587 acres of a 4,566 acre coastal landscape (the 978.5 acre Shady Dell property is protected pursuant to the former Conservancy grant) that includes 2,600 acres of old-growth and mature second-growth California redwood, Douglas-fir forest, and 30 miles of Class I, II, and III salmonid and fish bearing streams; 2) prevent habitat fragmentation and preserve connectivity to over 117,000 acres of contiguous

protected lands to facilitate plant and wildlife species climate adaptation; 3) enhance climate resilience by managing for wildfire fuel reduction and protecting the carbon sequestration potential of the forest; and 4) provide opportunities to expand public access to the southern extent of California’s renowned Lost Coast.

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

SRL, in partnership with BLM and DPR, is launching a vision plan for the project area and the neighboring landscape to assist with management planning after the transfer to BLM. The visioning plan will help inform future BLM planning for the property, as well as prepare a recommendation for a co-management model. The visioning work is expected to include working with key partners and interested parties, including but not limited to the BLM, DPR, the InterTribal Sinkiyone Wilderness Council and its member Tribes, the Mendocino Departments of Transportation and Public Works, and the Mendocino Land Trust.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

DeVilbiss Acquisition Loan Repayment

**Coastal Conservancy** **\$8,500,000**

Lost Coast Redwoods Acquisition Loan Repayment and Land Transfer

Wildlife Conservation Board \$8,500,000

Bureau of Land Management \$27,125,500

Save the Redwoods League (land donation) \$9,814,500

Project Total \$53,940,000

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of “urgent sea level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies” (Budget Act of 2022, SB 154 as amended by the Budget Act of 2023, SB 101). The coastal resilience funds are available for the purposes described in Section 52 of Chapter 258 of the Statutes of 2021, including the protection and restoration of coastal forest habitat. The proposed project is consistent with this funding as it will enable SRL to transfer the Lost Coast Redwoods property to BLM for long term protection and management of the property’s coastal forests and the endangered species they support.

SRL has received an \$8,500,000 grant from WCB for the project approved at its August 22, 2024 meeting.

BLM has committed \$27,125,500 of federal funding designated for the Lost Coast Redwoods property.

SRL will make a land value donation of \$9,814,500 to the Lost Coast Redwoods property transfer to BLM.

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 project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 8 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Public Resource Code Sections 31350-31356.

Under Section 31350, the Conservancy may acquire and protect interests in key coastal resource lands that otherwise would be lost to public use. The proposed project will protect the valuable habitat, habitat linkages, and public access opportunities on the Lost Coast Redwoods that would potentially be lost to public use if the property were kept in private ownership.

Under Section 31351, the Conservancy shall cooperate with other public agencies and with nonprofit organizations in ensuring the reservation of interests in real property for purposes of this division, as well as for park, recreation, and fish and wildlife habitat required to meet the policies and objectives of the California Coastal Act of 1976. The proposed project is in cooperation with WCB, SRL, and BLM and will meet Coastal Act objectives to 1) protect, maintain and, where feasible, enhance and restore the overall quality of the coastal zone environment and its natural and artificial resources, and 2) maximize public access to and along the coast and maximize public recreational opportunities in the coastal zone consistent with sound resources conservation principles.

Under Section 31352(a)(1), the Conservancy may award a grant to a nonprofit organization to ensure the reservation of significant coastal resource sites for public enjoyment and fish and wildlife habitat provided that the nonprofit organization or public agency is unable to acquire the property without the grant. The proposed project will grant funds to SRL, a nonprofit organization, to repay loans used to acquire the DeVilbiss Ranch and transfer it to BLM, protecting it from commercial timber harvesting and thereby preventing the degradation of fish and wildlife habitat and allowing for future public access. BLM has committed \$27,125,500 towards the project, SRL has committed a \$9,814,500 land donation and a grant from WCB of \$8,500,000 is pending, but without a grant from the Conservancy for the remaining amount, SRL will not be able to transfer to property to BLM.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.3, Support Meaningful Engagement by Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will include close coordination with the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council (comprised of ten member tribes) in the planning and future management of the property.



Consistent with **Goal 3.1, Conserve Land**, the proposed project will protect 3,587.5 acres of high-quality resource lands with public access opportunities. The project will increase habitat connectivity and carbon sequestration and support inland migration of habitat with sea level rise.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed funding authorization is categorically exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations Section 15313 because this project is an acquisition of land to preserve fish and wildlife habitat; Section 15316, because this project is an acquisition for the purpose of establishing a park where no management plan has been prepared yet; and Section 15325 because the project involves the transfer of ownership interests in land to preserve open space or enhance natural conditions, including plant or animal habitats. The proposed project will preserve the existing natural conditions and habitats of the property, and a management plan for the Property has not yet been prepared.

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