

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
September 5, 2024

**GREYHOUND ROCK LOW-COST OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS**

Project No. 24-031-01  
Project Manager: Lexi Caruthers

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Consideration and authorization to disburse up to \$865,000 to the County of Santa Cruz to conduct technical and feasibility studies and community and tribal engagement, and prepare plans, designs, environmental review documents, and permit applications for a new cabin campground and associated amenities at Greyhound Rock County Park in Santa Cruz County.

**LOCATION:** Greyhound Rock County Park, North Coast of Santa Cruz County

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)  
Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)  
Exhibit 3: [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 hundred sixty five thousand dollars (\$865,000) to County of Santa Cruz (“the grantee”) to conduct technical and feasibility studies and community and tribal engagement, and prepare plans, designs, environmental review documents, and permit applications for a new cabin campground and associated amenities at Greyhound Rock County Park in Santa Cruz 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 10 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding Lower-Cost Coastal Accommodations.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$865,000 grant to Santa Cruz County for its Department of Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services (“County Parks”) to plan a new cabin campground at Greyhound Rock County Park on the north coast of Santa Cruz County for the purpose of increasing lower-cost coastal accommodations in California. The proposed project will conduct planning for approximately 8-15 camping cabins and associated amenities such as a communal bathroom facility, pedestrian pathways, environmental educational facilities, restoration of coastal bluff habitat, and interpretive signage. Proposed planning tasks include conducting technical and feasibility studies, preparing design plans, conducting community and tribal engagement, and preparing a business plan, environmental review, and permit applications.

A barrier for low and middle-income Californians to access coastal parks and beaches in Central California is a lack of affordable overnight options. Nearly 60% of Californians never spend the night when they visit the coast, and for those earning less than \$25,000 per year, this figure rises to 75% (“Explore the Coast Overnight – An Assessment of Lower-Cost Coastal Accommodations,” State Coastal Conservancy, 2019). The Explore the Coast Overnight Assessment identified Santa Cruz as an area with high and unmet demand for lower-cost accommodations. The proposed project will address this by developing a new cabin campground to increase the availability of lower-cost accommodations on the Central Coast.

Greyhound Rock County Park is located on a stunning coastal blufftop on the north coast of Santa Cruz County and provides sweeping views of Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Currently, the site is open for daytime coastal access and is developed on the southern end of the property with two parking lots, restroom, overlook/vista point, and pathway down to the beach. With Conservancy funding, County Parks will conduct planning to develop a new cabin campground on the northern end of the property, on an 8-acre section of the property that is mostly undeveloped and underutilized. The new cabin campground will include approximately 8-15 camping cabins. Camping cabins are rustic (no kitchen or bathroom), unfurnished cabins for campers that typically provide more comfort and appeal to a wider range of users than tent-camping. The project will plan for associated amenities to the cabins, including a communal restroom, a half mile of pedestrian pathways, repurposing of two existing abandoned structures for environmental education activities, restoration of coastal bluff habitat, and interpretive signage.

The County plans to primarily offer the cabins to underserved youth and others through programming developed with County Parks Friends (a non-profit organization), as well as through partnerships with Santa Cruz County School Districts and other non-profit organizations. County Parks Friends provides several programs for underserved populations in the County such as Parks Rx and Youth Outdoor Leaders, and is excited to expand its offerings with overnight programs once the cabins are constructed. The cabins will be available to the general public when the youth and community programming is not scheduled, ensuring broader access to affordable coastal accommodations.

With the proposed project, County Parks will complete tasks to advance planning of the campground, including feasibility and technical studies, conceptual design alternatives, preferred alternative designs, environmental review, and permit applications. County Parks will engage with local community groups, nonprofits, and tribal representatives throughout the planning process to incorporate their input and ensure that the campground meets the needs of underserved and indigenous populations. This engagement will include focus groups, stakeholder interviews, attendance at community events, and bilingual public workshops, ensuring the project is inclusive and representative of community needs. With Conservancy funds, County Parks will also develop a business plan to ensure the campground is fiscally sustainable to operate and maintain, while also remaining lower-cost for target populations. With its own funds, County Parks will develop an Educational Program tailored to underserved youth visiting the site on day trips and/or on overnight programs, which will utilize environmental education facilities planned for in the proposed project.

Once constructed, the cabin campground at Greyhound Rock will provide lower-cost overnight coastal accommodations in Santa Cruz County, an area of high and unmet demand, making this spectacular section of coast more accessible, particularly for underserved communities.

**Site Description:** Greyhound Rock County Park is located on the north coast of Santa Cruz County, approximately 15 miles north of the City of Santa Cruz and is adjacent to the Año Nuevo State Marine Reserve to the north and the Greyhound Rock State Marine Conservation Area to the south. This scenic park encompasses around 70 acres of largely undeveloped land, featuring stunning panoramic coastal views and beach access. Key amenities include two paved parking lots, a permanent public restroom, several scenic viewpoints, picnic tables, and an accessible pathway from the parking area to the beach.

The park is named after its iconic feature, Greyhound Rock, a prominent sea stack composed of Santa Cruz Mudstone, and is situated along State Highway 1, surrounded by miles of similar coastal bluffs. The park's diverse landscape includes native coastal strand, coastal scrub, and groves of Monterey Pine and Monterey Cypress. However, these areas are also impacted by invasive species such as Pampas Grass, Ice Plant, Himalayan Blackberry, Calla Lily, and Mustard. The steep slopes of the park lead down to rocky shorelines with tide pools and sandy beaches. This coastal habitat supports nesting snowy plovers and serves as a haul-out site for Stellar sea lions and elephant seals. Visitors often stop to enjoy the park as a roadside rest and vista point, engaging in activities like swimming, surfing, and exploring the natural surroundings.

Despite its natural beauty, much of Greyhound Rock County Park is currently underutilized, with low annual visitation. The proposed project will occur on approximately 8 acres of the park

north of the existing public access facilities. This area is currently largely unused and inaccessible to the public. This project aims to revitalize this underutilized area, enhancing its natural and recreational value while promoting environmental conservation and sustainable use. The northern area can be accessed by a separate gate from Highway 1. There are two unused buildings in the northern area that will be repurposed to be used either for environmental education activities or other related management and operations of the property.

Greyhound Rock County Park is currently owned by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) but is planned to be transferred to the County pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding between CDFW and the County dated 6/25/2024. This transfer will enable County Parks to construct and manage low-cost overnight accommodations that will increase visitor access and enjoyment of Greyhound Rock County Park, while also ensuring the protection of the park's natural resources. County Parks has a long history of operating and managing the property on behalf of CDFW, from 1962-2023.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The proposed project will be carried out by County Parks, which manages over 1,500 acres of parkland, including 38 neighborhood, community, regional, or rural parks; 27 coastal access points; 23 playgrounds; 19 parks with athletic facilities; 5 parks with community rooms; and one regional swim center. County Parks has a strong track record in managing grant funded projects, collaborating with state agencies, and completing projects on time and within budget. Recent accomplishments include the successful completion of the North Coast Facilities Management Plan, partially funded by a \$100,000 Coastal Conservancy grant, and the upcoming completion of the Moran Lake Restoration and Public Access Planning project, funded by a \$360,000 Conservancy grant. County Park's team is comprised of financial analysts, planners, and park operations and maintenance staff who collectively ensure effective grant administration, public engagement, planning, and park management.

#### **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 is a good investment of state resources because of its alignment with critical statewide goals to meet the needs of underserved and minority communities who currently face barriers to accessing coastal areas. The project directly supports the Outdoors for All strategy by the California Natural Resources Agency and furthers the goals outlined in the Conservancy's "Explore the Coast Overnight: An Assessment of Lower-Cost Coastal Accommodations" by expanding affordable coastal accommodations within close proximity to

the California coast. It addresses the significant demand identified in the assessment, particularly in regions like Santa Cruz where there is high unmet need. The cabin campground will not only promote equitable recreation opportunities but will also support educational, recreational, and environmental programs that benefit the broader community, making it a valuable investment of state resources.

**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.**

As part of the proposed project, County Parks will engage tribes in the planning and design of the cabin campground. So far, one tribe has expressed interest in using the space for tribal gatherings and/or ceremonies. Tribal engagement will include understanding the site's indigenous history and cultural significance, identifying and protecting sensitive cultural resources, and integrating indigenous land stewardship practices into project planning and management. Educational programming developed by County Parks for Greyhound Rock County Park will highlight tribal history, and interpretive signage will inform visitors about the tribes' historical and ongoing connections with the site.

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

The Greyhound Rock County Park cabin campground will be designed to deliver sustainable and resilient benefits over its lifespan. The proposed project will plan for the campground facilities to be sited in a resilient location to accommodate changes in the coastline, and may incorporate use of timber from the CZU fire. The proposed project includes creating a business plan to ensure the campground, once developed, is sustainable financially for County Parks while keeping facilities lower-cost. Additionally, the project's goal of integrating interpretive signage and environmental education materials will foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of coastal ecosystems among visitors, promoting ongoing community engagement and stewardship. Through these measures, the project will provide ecological, educational, and economic benefits well into the future.

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

The proposed project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impacts. Targeting youth from disadvantaged communities and youth who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), the project will help increase equitable coastal access, particularly for overnight stays. By planning for habitat restoration as part of the campground, the project will facilitate enhancement of stewardship and natural resource management of the sensitive habitats on-site. By planning for improvement of existing trails, limited new trails, interpretive signage, and environmental education materials, the project will enable increased coastal access and public understanding. When not used for nonprofit/educational programming, the cabins will be available for public rental, providing a much-needed low-cost overnight accommodation option on the Central Coast.

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

As part of the proposed project, County Parks will work closely with disadvantaged communities and youth to involve them in the planning, design, and programming of the

campground. Focus groups, stakeholder interviews, community events, and public workshops will be conducted to ensure the campground meets community needs and provides relevant and engaging programming. Efforts will include bilingual (English and Spanish) materials and outreach to ensure accessibility and inclusivity. This collaborative approach ensures that the campground will be designed with the input and support of those it aims to serve, fostering a sense of ownership and community connection to the site. During the project’s scoping and visioning phases, the cabin campground concept was reviewed by County Parks Friends, a local nonprofit group dedicated to expanding outdoor access for underserved residents in Santa Cruz County. The cabin campground concept also received widespread support by local land-managing agencies and stakeholders as part of the North Coast Access and Facilities Management Plan, including by farmworkers, many who were monolingual Spanish-speaking, who attended a community engagement event for that project in nearby Davenport and expressed a strong desire for more low-cost coastal overnight options such as at Greyhound Rock.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$865,000</b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$865,000</b>

The expected source of funds for this project is an appropriation from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68, Public Resources Code (PRC) Sections 80000- 80173). Chapter 9 of Proposition 68 (Section 80120-80121) allocates funds to the Conservancy to enhance and protect coastal and ocean resources, and, in particular, to grant funds to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to develop lower-cost coastal accommodations (PRC Section 80120 (b)).

Consistent with the purposes of this funding source, the proposed project consists of developing plans to create 8-15 camping cabins to serve as lower cost overnight accommodations at coastal Greyhound Rock County Park. The project will be carried out in accordance with Chapter 10 of Division 21 regarding lower cost coastal accommodations (see “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section below).

County Parks will be providing in-kind staff time to develop the environmental education program for Greyhound Rock County Park. The Conservancy’s Coastal Trust Fund includes \$465,803 of in-lieu fees from coastal development permits that is expected to be available for the construction of the cabin campground, pending planning and environmental review.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The proposed project is also consistent with Chapter 10 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31411-31414. Pursuant to PRC Section 31412(a), the Conservancy may award grants and undertake projects as part of its Lower Cost Coastal Accommodations Program (Explore the Coast Overnight) to facilitate improvement of lower-cost overnight accommodations within 1.5 miles of the coast.

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Explore the Coast Overnight program because it will plan the implementation of 8-15 lower-cost overnight accommodations. The proposed cabins will be designed to be located on the coastal bluff-tops a short walk from Greyhound Rock Beach and to feature sweeping views of the California coastline and Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

Consistent with Section 31412(a), the Conservancy's implementation of the Explore the Coast Overnight Program is guided by the "Explore the Coast Overnight – An Assessment of Lower-Cost Coastal Accommodations" (Assessment) which the Conservancy completed on March 14, 2019. The Assessment identifies Santa Cruz as having a low concentration of lower-cost coastal accommodations in a county with a high demand for coastal accommodations. The proposed project will facilitate increasing the supply of lower-cost coastal accommodations in Santa Cruz County.

Consistent with Section 31412(b), the cabins will be affordable and available to low-income and middle-income families and to nonprofit organizations and public entities that serve young or at-risk populations.

Consistent with Section 31412(c)(1), the proposed project was selected through a collaborative effort with California State Parks and the California Coastal Commission.

Consistent with Section 31412(c)(2), the proposed project includes community engagement. See "Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria #6 Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support".

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

Consistent with **Goal 2.5 Recreation Facilities & Amenities**, the proposed project will include design of an environmental education center to provide youth programming at Greyhound Rock County Park.

Consistent with **Goal 2.7 Explore the Coast Overnight**, the proposed project will result in plans for 8-15 cabins for a new campground at Greyhound Rock County Park which once constructed will provide lower cost overnight accommodations.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Section 15262, because it involves only planning studies and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded. The project is also categorically exempt under Section 15306, which exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities. Environmental factors will be considered in the studies undertaken pursuant to this authorization.

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