

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 5, 2024

NOYO CENTER MARINE ECOSYSTEM RESILIENCE INITIATIVE

Project No. 23-097-02
Project Manager: Fanny Yang

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$498,000 to the Noyo Center for Marine Science to undertake the Noyo Center Marine Ecosystem Resilience Initiative, consisting of constructing an approximately 1,500 square feet multi-purpose work facility for large-scale marine mammal exhibition displays, community education, and storage, and for use as a future marine research and blue economy projects workspace, located at its Fort Bragg Headlands property in Mendocino County.

LOCATION: Fort Bragg, Mendocino County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Photos](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Design Plans](#)
- Exhibit 4: [Project Support 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 four hundred ninety-eight thousand dollars (\$498,000) to the Noyo Center for Marine Science (“the grantee”) to undertake the Noyo Center Marine Ecosystem Resilience Initiative, consisting of constructing an approximately 1,500 square feet multi-purpose work facility for large-scale marine mammal exhibition displays, community education, and storage, and for use as a future marine research and blue economy projects workspace (the “project”), located at grantee’s Fort Bragg Headlands property in Mendocino 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.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.

Prior to commencing the project, the grantee shall enter into and record an agreement pursuant to Public Resources Code 31116(d) sufficient to protect the public interest in the improvements.

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.
3. The Noyo Center for Marine Science 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 \$498,000 grant to the Noyo Center for Marine Science (Noyo Center) for the construction of an approximately 1,500 square feet multi-purpose work facility for large-scale marine mammal exhibition displays, community education, and marine research equipment repair and storage, and for future use as a marine research and blue economy projects workspace (the “project”). The constructed warehouse will be located on the Noyo Center’s Fort Bragg headlands property located in the city of Fort Bragg, Mendocino County (see Exhibit 1).

The Noyo Center has been at the forefront of efforts to address the ecological collapse of the Mendocino Coast nearshore ecosystem, where in the span of just five years, the region’s iconic kelp forests have decreased by over 93%. At the same time, coastal communities, especially the economically and culturally vibrant Noyo Harbor, are facing existential threats from rising sea levels and increasing extreme weather events. The Noyo Center plays a key role in raising awareness of these issues while developing solutions through multilateral partnerships and conservation and restoration initiatives. The Noyo Center serves a significant role in stimulating regional economic development, and the project, referred to as the Marine Ecosystem Resilience Initiative, will help the Noyo Center with its ongoing efforts to revitalize Noyo Harbor, promote sustainable economic development, and improve coastal habitats by gradually

shifting the community's economic relationship with the ocean from over-extraction to sustainable balance.

The Noyo Center has significant funding allocated for design, permitting, and construction of the project on its Fort Bragg headlands property, but a funding gap remains due to significantly increased costs from inflation and special considerations needed to ensure structure durability and sustainability in the coastal climate. 100% designs have been completed, along with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) environmental review and permitting process. The City of Fort Bragg has submitted a Notice of Exemption under CEQA for new small commercial structures. The proposed building is affectionately referred to as the La-BONE-atory because it will be used for large-scale marine mammal skeleton articulation projects, including the 73-foot long blue whale skeleton that is the centerpiece of the Noyo Center's marine mammal collection. The La-BONE-atory will also be used for community education associated with marine mammal specimens. Lastly, the La-BONE-atory will be used as a workspace and storage facility to construct and service sensitive equipment like underwater ROVs and autonomous vehicles; to house dive gear and boats; and as an adaptable space for future marine science research, educational initiatives, and blue economy projects.

The proposed project will build upon the Noyo Center's ongoing efforts to increase Fort Bragg's and the Mendocino region's standing as an upcoming leader in blue economy initiatives, coastal adaptation and resilience coordination, and coastal resources stewardship. Earlier this year, the Conservancy funded the Noyo Center's Marine Ecosystem Resiliency Project, which consisted of adaptation initiatives at the organization's Marine Field Station located at Noyo Harbor, such as completing planning and design to strengthen the building's sea level rise and starting blue economy, conservation aquaculture-based restoration programs, one focused on developing abalone broodstock, and the other focused on developing purple sea urchin as a restorative seafood product.

Through a broad-based community visioning process following the closure of Fort Bragg's last timber mill, the Fort Bragg community identified a marine science and education center as a high priority for the former mill site. The proposed project is consistent with the community vision. The project will enhance the Noyo Center's community education programs and help build scientific literacy for a rural, disadvantaged community significantly impacted by sea level rise and climate change.

Site Description: The proposed project is located on the eastern side of the Noyo Center's Fort Bragg Headlands property. The Fort Bragg Headlands property is a portion of the former Georgia-Pacific Mill Site that was acquired by the City of Fort Bragg (City) for a marine science and education facility with a grant from the Conservancy in 2011. The City transferred title to the 11.6 acre property to the Noyo Center in 2020. The property is currently vacant land, which is bordered on the west by the coastal trail and the ocean, the north by the City's wastewater treatment plant, and on the south by the Noyo Headlands Park. To the east is private property owned by California Western Railway.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The Noyo Center was founded in 2015 in response to the community’s desire to bring more scientific insight, marine science education and research, and economic revitalization to the Mendocino coastline. Currently, 11 staff members administer six active grants from federal, state, and private foundation sources, and are experienced in collaborating in multi-institutional grants administered with other organizations. There are two staff members dedicated to grant management, and the organization goes through an annual audit of financial statements prepared each year. Its 2024 budget estimates over \$1.7 million of incoming grant funding. The Noyo Center is committed to the long-term care and maintenance of its property and infrastructure, including the future constructed warehouse facility. The organization conducts routine inspections, maintenance, repairs, and performance of any necessary upgrades to maintain the long-term efficacy of the facilities.

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; the project is feasible with a reasonable cost. The constructed multi-purpose facility will contribute to protecting and enhancing coastal resources as a community center promoting marine science research and educational initiatives related to stewardship of nearby marine ecosystems. The building will also provide a space to showcase Noyo Center pilot projects focused on marine habitat restoration through their abalone broodstock program and harvesting of purple sea urchin as a potential food source to help kelp forest population.

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 proposed project is a result of a previous engagement effort with local tribes on their perspectives of community need and the oncoming blue economy transition, resulting in identifying the need for a marine science and education center. The Noyo Center is collaborating with the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians on abalone restoration efforts and acknowledges and supports the profound cultural significance of abalone, integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern conservation practices. Furthermore, Noyo Center’s participation in the Noyo Ocean Collective has been instrumental in facilitating regular discussions about Noyo Center programs and projects with the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians, who are also members of the collective. The project is committed to deepening engagement with tribal communities, ensuring that tribal voices are not only heard but are

influential in shaping conservation aquaculture and broader marine restoration efforts that will take place at the future facility. Representatives from the Kashia and Sherwood Valley tribes will be invited to join the Marine Ecosystem Resiliency Initiative Science Advisory Board, which will aid in providing oversight and expertise for charting the direction of future blue economy and conservation projects at the constructed facility

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

The proposed project will provide benefits to both the marine environment and the community of Fort Bragg. The construction of the multi-purpose facility will drive locally-led conservation efforts and civic engagement because the facility will serve as a local focal point for marine science conservation, restoration programs, and environmental education. In addition, the project will bolster the economic resilience of the community because a local focal point for conservation, science, and education will attract investment and drive innovation.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The proposed project will deliver multiple benefits and significant positive impact to the local marine ecosystem and to the community of Fort Bragg. The proposed project will help build economic and environmental resilience for Fort Bragg as the construction of a centralized facility focused on marine ecosystem stewardship, education, and blue economy projects will build economic resiliency by revitalizing the community, creating jobs, and restoring near-shore ecosystems and habitats. The proposed project will benefit disadvantaged communities in Fort Bragg; the median household income is less than 60% of the statewide average, with most employment opportunities in service, hospitality, and fishing.

The proposed project will provide expanded space for educational initiatives and exhibit design, helping enrich the Noyo Centers’ community education programs and help build scientific literacy for a rural, underserved population.

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

The proposed project was planned with meaningful community engagement and community support; the idea for construction of a warehouse facility on the Noyo Headlands is a direct result of a broad-based community co-visioning process following the closure of Fort Bragg’s last timber mill. The community was engaged in structured, long-term discussions to identify possibilities for the reuse of the mill site and long-term economic revitalization.

PROJECT FINANCING

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| Coastal Conservancy | \$498,000 |
| California Natural Resources Agency | <u>\$360,000</u> |
| Project Total | \$858,000 |

Conservancy funding for the proposed project is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2023/24 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for “urgent sea level rise adaptation

and coastal resilience” (Budget Act of 2023, SB 101). These coastal resilience funds are available as described in Section 52 of Chapter 258 of the Statutes of 2021, which sets forth a detailed description of the purposes of the coastal resilience funds, including for coastal resilience projects that build resilience for coastal communities, public access, and critical infrastructure. The proposed project is a coastal resilience project consistent with this funding source because the construction of a building for use in marine mammal education, marine research equipment storage, and for future use in marine research and blue economy projects will contribute to marine ecosystem literacy for the coastal community and their ability to remain resilient to coastal environmental changes. Educating the community, whose marine-based economy is changing due to the impacts of climate change, and in particular sea level rise, builds resilience for that community to effectively navigate those impacts and protect their resources and infrastructure. The storage of equipment for marine research and the building’s future use as a site for marine research will facilitate research on the impacts of urgent sea level rise to the coastal community, thereby further increasing coastal resilience. In addition, the proposed project will benefit disadvantaged communities in Fort Bragg; the median household income is less than 60% of the statewide average, with most employment opportunities in service, hospitality, and fishing.

The proposed project will leverage \$360,000 from California Natural Resources Agency’s Museum Grant Program.

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 project is consistent with Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which establishes the Climate Ready Program and authorizes the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy’s jurisdiction (Section 31113(a)).

Sections 31113(b) and 31113(c) authorize the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, 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 projects that maximize public benefits and either reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce hazards to harbors and ports, preserve and enhance coastal wetlands and natural lands, conserve biodiversity, and provide recreational opportunities, or reduce flood risk and enhance fish and wildlife habitat. Consistent with Sections 31113(b) and (c), the project will help address extreme weather events, such as sea level rise, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, because the building will be used as storage for marine research equipment and will be used as a site for marine

research and blue economy projects to further understand and address the impacts of sea level rise on marine resources in coastal communities. In addition, because the building will be used as a marine learning center in a coastal community the project will help educate members of the coastal community to effectively navigate impacts from climate change and sea level rise. The proposed project will also provide recreational opportunities on the coast because it will result in the construction of a museum and learning center at a coastal location with views of the ocean, which is adjacent to the coastal trail.

Pursuant to section 31113(d), the Conservancy shall prioritize projects that provide multiple public benefits, including, but not limited to protection of communities, natural resources, and recreational opportunities. Consistent with this section, the proposed project provides multiple public benefits. First, the proposed project will contribute to marine ecosystem literacy for a coastal community, which will better prepare the community to deal with local impacts from climate change and sea level rise. For example, the Noyo Center has blue economy initiatives such as pilot programs on growing abalone broodstock and creating a market for purple sea urchin as a food source, which will help protect the economic resilience of the community in light of climate change impacts. Second, the storage of equipment for marine research and the building's future use as a site for marine research and blue economy projects will facilitate research on the impacts of urgent sea level rise to the coastal community, which will allow the community to better protect natural resources. Lastly, the proposed project will provide recreational opportunities because it involves construction of a museum and learning center.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.1 Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will invest in community economic resiliency and marine ecosystem restoration and education for disadvantaged communities in Fort Bragg and the Mendocino Coast.

Consistent with **Goal 1.3 Support Meaningful Engagement by Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will include meaningful community engagement with local and regional communities to ensure that the constructed multi-purpose work facility maintains the goals of providing a community space dedicated to building coastal resilience.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5 Recreation Facilities & Amenities**, the proposed project will construct an approximately 1,500 square feet multi-purpose work facility used for exhibiting large-scale marine mammal articulation projects; for community education associated with these specimens, as a workspace and storage facility to construct and service sensitive equipment like underwater ROVs and autonomous vehicles; to house dive gear and boats; and as an adaptable space for future marine science research and educational initiatives.

Consistent with **Goal 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects**, the proposed project promotes public education about sea level rise as the future multi-purpose work facility will provide a community space to learn about coastal resilience and climate change impacts.

Consistent with **Goal 4.3 Multi-benefit Nature-Based Climate Adaptation**, the proposed project will house pilot projects for nature-based climate adaptation, such as abalone

restoration and purple sea urchin aquaculture, and will build capacity for the Noyo Center and its partners to implement climate adaptation and blue economy projects.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations Section 15303, which exempts projects that consist of construction and location of limited numbers of new, small facilities or structures. The proposed project is the construction of an approximately 1,500 square feet multi-purpose work facility. The size of the constructed building meets the example of an exempt structure in Section 15303(c) which includes a “store, motel, office, restaurant or similar structure not involving the use of significant amounts of hazardous substances, and not exceeding 2,500 square feet in floor area.” Utilities construction as part of the proposed project is also categorically exempt under Section 15303(d), which exempts construction of “water main, sewage, electrical gas, and other utility extensions” that would serve the project.

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