

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 5, 2024

**ALDERPOINT GREAT REDWOOD TRAIL
PLANNING PROJECT, PHASE 1**

Project No. 24-028-01
Project Manager: Hannah Bartee

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$207,600 to Community Initiatives to undertake the Alderpoint Great Redwood Trail Planning Project, Phase 1, consisting of tribal and community engagement, resource studies and surveys, trash removal, vegetation management, and conceptual designs for tribal/local interpretive features along a 4.5-mile segment of the Great Redwood Trail and potential trailhead area in unincorporated Humboldt County.

LOCATION: Alderpoint, unincorporated Humboldt County, California.

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Site Photos](#)

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 two hundred seven thousand six hundred dollars (\$207,600) to Community Initiatives to undertake the Alderpoint Great Redwood Trail Planning Project, Phase 1, consisting of tribal and community engagement, resource studies and surveys, trash removal, vegetation management, and conceptual designs for tribal/local interpretive features along a 4.5-mile segment of the Great Redwood Trail and potential trailhead in unincorporated Humboldt County (“the project”).

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 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public accessways.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. Community Initiatives 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 grant to Community Initiatives to Community Initiatives to undertake the Alderpoint Great Redwood Trail Planning Project, Phase 1, consisting of conducting tribal and community engagement, resource studies and surveys, trash removal, and vegetation management, and preparing conceptual designs for tribal/local interpretive features along a 4.5-mile segment of the Great Redwood Trail (GRT) and potential trailhead area in unincorporated Humboldt County. Community Initiatives will act as the fiscal sponsor for the community-based organization Revitalizing Opportunities for the Alderpoint Region (ROAR). ROAR will lead this project to conduct resource studies and surveys to support planning of a future 4.5-mile GRT segment and potential trailhead in the Alderpoint community. The project includes trash removal and vegetation management along the trail segment and preparation of conceptual design of interpretive elements by tribal and local artists. Opportunities for tribal engagement in the project include stipends for participation or potential employment.

The project area includes the Great Redwood Trail Agency (GRTA)-owned former Alderpoint Depot and a 4.5-mile segment of the GRT that extends from the community of Alderpoint to the northern boundary of The Wildlands Conservancy's Emerald Waters Reserve (Exhibit 1). This GRT segment is identified as a priority in the draft GRT Master Plan, because it connects to public roads, offers river access, is of interest to Alderpoint community members, and has adjacent publicly owned property that could eventually be developed into a trailhead or campground.

The GRTA's right-of-way passes through many tribal ancestral lands, and the former railroad on which GRTA's right-of-way is located was part of California's history of tribal genocide, forced relocation, and cultural erasure. The Eel River Canyon is significant to California Native American tribes and is expected to have cultural resources which may include sacred sites. The project area is in the Eel River Canyon. ROAR will engage in coordination efforts with interested California Native American tribal community members on all stages of the project. The

proposed project will also create opportunities for tribal community members to serve as cultural resource experts and for tribal youth to participate in a mentorship program and learn from their elders and resource experts. The studies and surveys completed under this project will inform future planning of this trail segment and protection of cultural and other resources in the project area.

The project area (GRTA right-of-way) is currently overgrown with vegetation as well as some trash, making many project areas inaccessible. ROAR will obtain an encroachment permit from GRTA so they can access the project area. The project will also focus on collaboration with interested tribal community members and community leaders to hire a vegetation management/clean-up crew to remove trash and clear vegetation along the proposed trail corridor, facilitating access for resource studies and surveys.

The final element of the project will support tribal and local artists to create and prepare conceptual design and interpretive opportunities for the future trail, consistent with overall GRT Master Plan design guidance.

Site Description:

The 4.5-mile Alderpoint GRT project site is located entirely within the GRTA-owned right-of-way, between the northern boundary of Emerald Waters Reserve (near Ticknor Creek) and the community of Alderpoint. The site of the former Alderpoint Depot, adjacent railyard, and a portion of the established nearby path along the railroad track for Eel River recreational watercraft and swimming access are all part of the project area. This 4.5-mile rail corridor is adjacent to the mainstem of the Eel River, which is classified as recreational within the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The GRTA right-of-way in the Eel River Canyon passes through tribal ancestral lands, and the former railroad was part of California's history of tribal genocide, forced relocation, and cultural erasure. The Eel River Canyon is important to local tribal communities that continue to live in the area and those who have been displaced from their ancestral lands. The historic Cain Rock Bridge is part of the project area, located just south of the small town of Alderpoint. Alderpoint is accessed by the Alderpoint Road, a paved county road. Land adjacent to the GRTA right-of-way is typically owned by private ranchers and rural residential inhabitants.

The GRT is proposed within the 307-mile length of the former North Coast Railroad Authority right-of-way, from San Francisco Bay north to the Humboldt Bay. The GRT, once complete, will be the longest rail-trail in the nation. The portions of the rail right-of-way in Mendocino, Trinity, and Humboldt counties are owned by the GRTA. The Marin and Sonoma portions of the rail right-of-way are owned by the Sonoma-Marine Area Rail Transit (SMART), and SMART will be responsible for planning and developing the GRT in those counties.

The Conservancy is assisting the GRTA with a Master Plan for the approximately 231-mile portion of the GRT from the Sonoma County/Mendocino County border, near Hopland, northward through the Cities of Ukiah, Willits, Rio Dell, Fortuna, Eureka, Arcata, and Blue Lake, to its terminus near the Humboldt Bay. Along the way, the trail will pass through redwood forests, grasslands, agricultural lands, and the currently largely inaccessible scenic Eel River Canyon, before skirting the edge of Humboldt Bay. As the right-of-way was formerly used for

rail purposes, it consists of a gentle grade, passes over several rail bridges, trestles, and through tunnels, some of which have collapsed. Much of the rail line is in good condition for conversion to trail, but in some areas, erosive geology and deferred maintenance create challenges that will need to be addressed through careful and systematic planning.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Community Initiatives (CI) will be the Conservancy's grantee, acting as a fiscal agent for the community-based organization Revitalizing Opportunities for the Alderpoint Region (ROAR). CI, a 501(c)(3), acts as fiscal agent and has administered grant funds for many organizations. CI acts as a thought-partner and provides professional services to nonprofit startups, established initiatives, networks, and collaborations. CI has decades of experience developing projects and programs that positively affect individuals and communities. ROAR was created to benefit the economic, social, and ecological well-being of Alderpoint by pursuing projects to revitalize the community. ROAR's core team includes local and tribal members, and ROAR will reach out to California Native American tribes and tribal community members to connect them with opportunities to participate in the project, including potential employment.

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.

This authorization will initiate important resource studies and surveys that are needed for future planning of this 4.5-mile segment of the GRT. The project will also provide community engagement and employment opportunities.

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 includes sustained and focused efforts to engage with California Native American tribes. Tribal community input has informed this project, and the project budget includes funding to support tribal participation in resource studies and surveys, planning meetings, and conceptual design of GRT-related art and interpretive elements. ROAR's core team includes members of Kinest'e/Wailaki descent, along with other core ROAR members who will reach out to tribal community members to connect them with project-related employment and engagement opportunities. ROAR members have attended Kinest'e Community Coalition and Wailaki Tribe community and public events over the past year, engaged in conversations, and integrated tribal concerns into the proposed project, including:

- California Native American participation in resource studies and surveys of the 4.5-mile GRT segment;
- A youth mentorship project component, so that California Native American youth can learn from their elders and resource experts and develop conservation job skills; and
- Developing interpretive concepts by local community and California Native American artists.

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The project will collect important resources and survey information and develop conceptual designs for trail and interpretive elements that will inform future planning and design for Alderpoint’s GRT segment. Understanding resources along this trail segment is critical to ensuring that future trail planning provides protection for and avoids or mitigates impacts to these resources.

Eventually the new trail will be a community asset, offering urgently needed revitalization opportunities for this depressed local economy and providing a safe route for non-motorized transportation to destinations within the disadvantaged Alderpoint community.

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

The GRT Master Plan team held an in-person workshop with 70 attendees at the Alderpoint Volunteer Fire Hall on July 26, 2023. The workshop had an in-depth focus on listening to the community’s interests and concerns regarding the GRT and featured six hosted stations with opportunities to ask questions and record feedback. This community feedback has been incorporated into the draft GRT Master Plan, which recommends the Alderpoint GRT segment as a Tier 1 priority for development. ROAR members also attended a subsequent public outreach event hosted by Friends of the Eel River, KEET-TV, Humboldt Trails Council as well as public meetings to discuss the GRT, hosted by the Kinst’e/Wailaki tribal community. These meetings provided the foundation for this project.

Future tribal and other local community engagement will take diverse forms to maximize engagement of a broad spectrum of interests, providing opportunities to further develop relationships. Engagement will take place via phone calls, emails, social media outreach, and in-person and online meetings. A major focus of this project is to support California Native American tribal and youth participation.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$207,600
Project Total	\$227,600

The anticipated source of funding for the project is an allocation of General Fund to the Conservancy for community outreach, pre-trail development activities, and trail construction for the Great Redwood Trail (Budget Act 2022, SB 154 as amended by the Budget Act of 2023, SB 101). Consistent with the funding source, the proposed project will carry out tribal and

community outreach and conduct pre-trail development studies and surveys to support planning for a future segment of the Great Redwood Trail, as further described above. ROAR will provide in-kind contributions of \$20,000 toward the project to meet the Project Total listed above.

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 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400 et seq.) related to public accessways. Section 31409 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants and provide assistance to public agencies to establish and expand inland trail systems that may be linked to the California Coastal Trail. The GRT will connect to and include segments of the California Coastal Trail.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.1 Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will improve recreational conditions within the disadvantaged community of Alderpoint and the surrounding severely disadvantaged community, including improved active transportation options.

Consistent with **Goal 1.4 Incorporate Workforce Development in Our Projects**, the proposed project incorporates workforce development in the project with opportunities for California Native American tribal and community members to obtain job training and work on the project.

Consistent with **Goal 2.4 Build Trails**, the proposed project will complete some of the initial planning work to support eventual construction of a new 4.5-mile-long segment of the GRT, which is one of five flagship trails identified in the Conservancy’s 2023-2027 Strategic Plan.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project involves feasibility and planning studies and is therefore statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under Title 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15262. The project is also categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15306, because it involves data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to any environmental resource. Finally, the remainder of the project, namely trash removal and vegetation management to facilitate access to conduct studies, consists solely of minor alterations to land which are categorically exempt under 14 CCR Section 15304.

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