

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 21, 2024

PACIFICA COASTAL RESILIENCE OPPORTUNITY STUDY

Project No. 24-034-01
Project Manager: Erin Gravley

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$120,000 to the Pacifica Land Trust to undertake the Pacifica Coastal Resilience Opportunity Study, consisting of preparing studies, surveys and other reports, and conducting community engagement to identify opportunities for nature-based sea level rise resiliency projects in the City of Pacifica, and potentially conducting additional planning tasks to move one to two of the priority projects towards implementation.

LOCATION: City of Pacifica, San Mateo County

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 one hundred twenty thousand dollars (\$120,000) to the Pacifica Land Trust (“the grantee”) to undertake the Pacifica Coastal Resilience Opportunity Study (“the project”), consisting of preparing studies, surveys and other reports, and conducting community engagement to identify opportunities for nature-based sea level rise resiliency projects in the City of Pacifica, and potentially conducting additional planning tasks to move one to two of the priority projects towards implementation.

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.
3. The Pacifica Land Trust 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 \$120,000 grant to the Pacifica Land Trust to undertake the Pacifica Coastal Resilience Opportunity Study (“project”), consisting of preparing studies, surveys, and other reports, and conducting community engagement to identify opportunities for nature-based sea level rise resiliency projects in the City of Pacifica, and potentially conducting additional planning tasks to move one to two of the priority projects towards implementation.

Pacifica is nationally recognized as an example of a coastal community impacted by climate change. Much of the infrastructure and residential areas on the coastline lie in hazard zones, such as former wetlands and estuaries vulnerable to flooding or steep bluff areas vulnerable to erosion. Sea level rise, intense precipitation events, and storm surges, all associated with climate change, will exacerbate these hazards in coming years.

Nature-based solutions to sea level rise, such as restored dunes, wetlands, and floodplains, can help provide resiliency to the effects of climate change. These types of projects serve as an alternative to more infrastructure-heavy solutions such as seawalls, which disrupt natural processes and intensify erosion. The Conservancy funded such a project in 2001 at the mouth of San Pedro Creek, in which the City of Pacifica and Pacifica Land Trust purchased and removed two homes at the mouth of the Creek and restored the area’s wetlands and dunes for increased resilience at the beach and nearby estuary. In areas where sea level rise is already having deleterious effects, there are opportunities to improve resilience through these types of nature-based projects. Nature-based projects can provide multiple benefits including: mitigation of sea level rise hazards such as flooding of homes, roads, and other infrastructure; allowing landowners to realize economic value from property that may no longer be suitable for development as the effects of climate change intensify; and increasing coastal habitats and ecosystem resiliency.

With the proposed project, Pacifica Land Trust will complete an opportunity study to identify locations in Pacifica that may be suitable for implementation of nature-based solutions. Project activities will include engaging with the City of Pacifica, landowners, and the community;

commissioning technical analyses, surveys such as biologic surveys and other reports as appropriate, such as property appraisals, resource studies, and concept designs; and developing a report identifying one or two priority projects. Depending on the information generated during the study, the project might include preparation to move one or more priority projects towards implementation of future nature-based climate resiliency. The goal is for the opportunity study to identify priority projects that will demonstrate to the community the benefits of nature-based solutions and their value as an approach to building climate resiliency in their community.

Site Description: Pacifica is nationally recognized as an example of a coastal community impacted by climate change. The infrastructure and residential areas within the city have been subject to loss and damage, most notably in the Esplanade Drive area, where the bluff erosion during the El Niño storms of 1997-1998 caused a number of homes to be lost, despite the presence of a seawall beneath Esplanade Drive. In addition, sea level rise, flooding, and bluff erosion pose a threat to Pacifica's beaches, which serve not only the residents of Pacifica but Californians at large. Pacifica State Beach alone draws over 1 million visitors annually from across the region. In the 2018 County of San Mateo Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment, the Beach Boulevard, Sharp Park, Rockaway Cove, and Linda Mar areas of Pacifica were all identified as being critical erosion hotspots. In that same assessment, it was determined that between 38 and 297 acres of land in Pacifica are at risk of inundation during a flood, depending on the extent of sea level rise—with all two miles of beaches being vulnerable under all scenarios. Adaptation solutions in Pacifica thus far have largely centered around seawalls and rip-rap. Nature-based solutions could be an important addition to the community's resiliency toolkit.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Pacifica Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) whose mission is to “preserve, protect and enhance the natural, scenic, recreational, cultural, historic and open space environment including waterways and wildlife corridors of Pacifica and the surrounding community for present and future generations.” Pacifica Land Trust has experience managing state grant awards, including over a million dollars in funding from California State Parks for a 250-acre restoration project in the Pedro Point Headlands to transform a previous motorcycle park into a thriving wildlife ecosystem with recreational hiking trails. Pacifica Land Trust currently has an active Conservancy grant to maintain the stewardship and access at Pedro Point Headlands (on lands owned in part by the Conservancy), where it has served as a partner for over fifteen years. Pacifica Land Trust previously collaborated with the City of Pacifica and the Conservancy to remove vulnerable structures at Linda Mar Beach at the San Pedro Creek estuary by acquiring two privately-owned properties that led to the restoration and enhancement of the tidally-influenced wetland and achieved 100-year flood protection for the nearby community. Pacifica Land Trust also facilitated the sale of private property to the Golden Gate National Recreational Area in Mori Point in Pacifica, which added protection to the San Francisco Garter Snake and the California Red-Legged Frog.

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 project will identify opportunities to provide increased coastal resiliency to the City of Pacifica, such as mitigating flooding, erosion, and other effects of sea level rise. The project will help to advance nature-based solutions to sea level rise in Pacifica, aligning with the State Agency Sea-Level Rise Action Plan for California and the California Natural Resources Agency’s initiative to expand and accelerate nature-based solutions.

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

The project’s goal is to identify projects that will improve the resiliency of Pacifica’s shoreline utilizing nature-based solutions that can buffer the impacts of coastal hazards such as sea level rise, flooding, and erosion.

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The project will deliver multiple benefits including increasing resilience of communities to future climate change impacts and enhancing coastal habitats through nature-based coastal adaptation. Additional benefits, depending on the identified location for a nature-based solution, may include protection of critical infrastructure or recreational facilities along the coast.

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

Pacifica Land Trust has previously reached out to local community groups about implementing nature-based solutions for coastal resiliency in Pacifica and has garnered the support of several, including The San Mateo County Chapter of Surfrider Foundation, The Pacifica Beach Coalition, Pacifica Environmental Family, Pacifica Climate Committee, the Pedro Point Community Association, and The Coalition of Pacificans for an Updated Plan. Additionally, the project work will involve continued community engagement, both with residents and landowners in Pacifica.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$120,000
Project Total	\$120,000

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 the purpose of “urgent sea level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies”

(Budget Act 2023, SB 101). The 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. This project will plan for increased coastal resilience by identifying opportunities to implement nature-based solutions to mitigate the hazards of climate change.

The grantee will contribute in-kind staff hours. 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 pursuant to Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy’s jurisdiction (Section 31113(a)). Section 31113(b) and (c) authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects that address extreme weather events, sea level rise, storm surge, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources. The Conservancy must, to the extent allowed, prioritize projects that maximize public benefits and accomplish one of several purposes, including preserving and enhancing coastal wetlands and natural lands and conserving biodiversity. The proposed project will complete studies necessary for acquisition and/or restoration of properties to mitigate sea level rise hazards and preserve coastal habitat. The project will identify opportunities in Pacifica for nature-based solutions for the purposes of climate resiliency.

Section 31113(d)(1)(B) requires the Conservancy to prioritize projects that provide multiple public benefits, including, but not limited to, protection of communities, natural resources, and recreational opportunities. The project will identify properties in Pacifica that are suitable to be acquired for implementation of nature-based solutions, particularly in areas where residences or infrastructure are vulnerable to sea level rise or flooding and natural habitat may serve as a buffer to mitigate impacts.

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

Consistent with **Goal 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects** the proposed project will identify opportunities for nature-based solutions to sea level rise in the City of Pacifica.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations, Section 15262 because it involves planning studies and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded, and it will include consideration of environmental factors. The project is also categorically exempt under Section 15306, because it also involves basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that will not result in disturbance to an environmental resource.

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