

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 21, 2024

LETTER PROPERTY SHORELINE RESTORATION PLANNING

Project No. 24-025-01
Project Manager: Su Corbaley

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$245,000 to Marin County Parks to prepare designs, permit applications, and environmental compliance documents for the Letter Property Shoreline Restoration Project, which consists of the restoration of 0.8 acres of intertidal habitat by removing a dilapidated residence and barn built over tidal wetlands, removing retaining walls, revegetating to stabilize the wetlands and uplands, and installing a trail and parking along the Bolinas Lagoon shoreline in Marin County.

LOCATION: Bolinas Lagoon, Bolinas, Marin County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Photos](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Conceptual Design](#)
- Exhibit 4: [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 forty five thousand dollars (\$245,000) to Marin County Parks (“the grantee”) to prepare designs, permit applications and environmental compliance documents for the Letter Property Shoreline Restoration Project, which consists of the restoration of 0.8 acres of intertidal habitat by removing a dilapidated residence and barn built over tidal wetlands, removing retaining walls, revegetating to stabilize the wetlands and uplands, and installing a trail and parking along the Bolinas Lagoon shoreline in Marin 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 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding enhancement of coastal resources.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$245,000 grant to Marin County Parks (“County Parks” or “the grantee”) to implement the Letter Property Restoration Planning Project (“the project”). The project consists of the preparation of designs, permit applications and environmental compliance documents for the Letter Property Shoreline Restoration Project, which is being planned to restore 0.8 acres of intertidal habitat by removing a dilapidated residence and barn built over tidal wetlands, removing retaining walls, revegetating to stabilize the wetlands and uplands, and installing a trail and parking along the Bolinas Lagoon shoreline in Marin County. The Letter Property (“the property”) is an approximately 6-acre parcel along the western edge of Bolinas Lagoon, on Olema-Bolinas Road, near the north end of the lagoon (Exhibit 1) and consists of subtidal and tidal wetland, and upland habitats. In the 1960s, 0.6 acre of the property was graded and developed with a single-family residence, barn, and driveway. The residence is partially constructed on piers over emergent tidal wetlands. A portion of the driveway and the buildings are built on fill at the upper extent of mean high tide and there are retaining walls, rock riprap and non-native invasive species that prevent the tidal wetlands from migrating (Exhibit 2).

The site is immediately adjacent to Olema Bolinas Road, a major ingress and egress route to the community of Bolinas, which is at risk from future sea level rise. The property transitions from subtidal to tidal wetlands to upland elevations but because of the long-term presence of riprap, retaining walls, and residential infrastructure built on fill in the tidal zone, the wetland function has been impaired and its ability to accrete and expand has been significantly hindered over time. The project involves planning for the removal of the infrastructure and regrading of the property to more natural transitional zones like what existed prior to being graded in the 1960s.

Climate change and associated sea level rise pose imminent challenges for the road infrastructure around Bolinas Lagoon, and for the tidal marsh and the wildlife that it supports. In particular, the tidal marsh is constrained by roads and infrastructure that surround most of the lagoon. With less than 3 feet of sea level rise, tidal wetlands along this shoreline will be

regularly inundated and subject to drowning due to the lack of migration space, and the road infrastructure will be regularly overtopped compromising structural integrity.

Prior to development, the Letter Property was a fully intact tidal wetland/brackish wetland that supported several special status species that reside within Bolinas Lagoon. The remaining subtidal and tidal wetlands still support habitat for many pelagic and aquatic species, including leopard sharks, Central California Coast steelhead, Coastal three-spine stickleback, and coastrange sculpin. The watersheds of Bolinas Lagoon also support steelhead, Coho salmon, red legged frog, and California black rail, and the lagoon is designated habitat for tidewater goby. By removing all structures and re-grading the site to support tidal wetlands, the parcel can serve as valuable habitat now and into the future.

Marin County Parks acquired the property in the 1960s soon after the residence was constructed and allowed the owners to continue in residence until the death of the last owner in 2016. At that time, Marin County Parks fully acquired the buildings and began exploring options for restoring the property.

Marin County Parks has developed conceptual designs and conducted a feasibility study to evaluate potential restoration alternatives to restore the shoreline and remove all structures (Exhibit 3). Conceptual designs call for the removal of non-native invasive species and planting of native upland, transitional, and emergent wetland species. The designs call for the shoreline to be restored by regrading the slope. The project will advance the restoration designs and in the design process will explore the use of log groins and a gravel berm, which may be necessary to prevent erosion of the salt marsh shoreline.

The Bolinas Lagoon shoreline is rich with aquatic marine life, waterfowl, and shorebirds, but there are few locations at the north end of the lagoon to view wildlife at a safe distance from road traffic. Therefore, the project presents an ancillary opportunity to provide the public with wildlife viewing opportunities by installing a 0.15-mile path on the property and constructing an accessible two-car 'pullout' for those stopping to view wildlife. Due to the potential for most of the parcel being submerged daily with 3.5 feet of sea level rise, the conceptual design calls for a walking path made of permeable material that can be submerged overtime, and site amenities will be designed for future removal.

The project includes preparation of environmental documents for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act. In preparing these documents, the project will conduct a wildlife habitat assessment, archaeological, cultural, and historical studies, vegetation mapping, and wetland delineation. The project also includes preparation of the following permit applications: California Department of Fish and Wildlife Habitat Restoration Management Permit, US Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide Permits 27 (Aquatic Habitat Restoration) and 33 (Temporary Construction, Access, and Dewatering), Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultations with the NOAA Fisheries and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board Clean Water Act Section 401 permit under the Statewide Restoration General Order, and California Coastal Act compliance through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Restoration Center's Consistency Determination for habitat restoration on the Northern and Central California coast.

This project and other efforts by the county address recommendations included in the “Bollinas Lagoon Ecosystem Restoration Project and Recommendations for Restoration and Management” plan, also known as the Locally Preferred Plan, to “[a]ctively plan and manage for sea level rise at Bollinas Lagoon.” The project is also a recommended priority of the Bollinas Lagoon Advisory Committee, which is composed of twelve representatives from local recreational interests, homeowner groups, environmental nonprofits, county and federal agencies, and appointees of the county Board of Supervisors. Once implemented, the project would increase sea level rise resilience by removing structures within future flood inundation areas, restoring the shoreline to tidal wetlands, and providing space for the wetlands to migrate upslope.

Site Description: The project area is an approximately 6-acre parcel owned by Marin County Parks located on the western edge of Bollinas Lagoon, along Olema Bollinas Road near the community of Bollinas. The property habitat transitions from subtidal to tidal wetlands to upland elevations that have been significantly impacted by development as a residence and related structures (Exhibit 2).

The property was graded, and a portion leveled and developed with a single-family residence, barn, and driveway. The residence is built over the tidal wetlands on piers. There is a concrete retaining wall that surrounds the western perimeter of the residence that ends near a wood retaining wall that runs along the edge of the graded pad. The residence extends up to the edge of the mean higher high water line and the wood retaining walls are frequently over washed during high tide events and storm surge. The wood retaining wall is failing and rock-riprap has been placed along the edge of the graded pad to stabilize the site, which is now beginning to destabilize. There are several invasive species, most notably ice plant and cape ivy along the shoreline and eucalyptus along the upland edge, along with a robust tidal wetland that includes cordgrass and alkali-bulrush that transitions upslope to alkali-heath, gumplant, and salt rush.

The site has exposure to full tidal action, and to freshwater along the west side of the parcel where there is a freshwater seep and small intermittent drainage channel that supports several native species, including giant horsetail, slough sedge and willows. Other natives throughout the site include red elderberry, California bee-plant, coast live oak, and redwood.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Marin County Parks has worked with partner agencies for more than 25 years to address resource conservation in the lagoon, analyze restoration opportunities, and engage public participation to prioritize opportunities that will result in the greatest public benefit. It has recently successfully completed two Conservancy grants for planning, outreach, final designs, and environmental analysis for a nearby restoration project, and is currently managing and preparing to implement the Bollinas Lagoon Wye Wetlands Resiliency Project (Bollinas Wye), which is partially funded by the Conservancy. The Bollinas Wye project has received over \$8 million dollars in outside funding and will restore, enhance, and improve approximately 25 acres of wetlands at the north end of Bollinas Lagoon. Marin County Parks has also implemented the Kent Island Restoration Project to remove non-native invasive species from Kent Island within Bollinas Lagoon. Marin County Parks has also implemented many habitat improvement projects on other County Parks lands and is planning sea level rise adaptation projects at McInnis Marsh and Bothin Marsh. The proposed Letter Property

Shoreline Restoration Project would be managed in perpetuity as open space and part of the Bolinas Lagoon Open Space Preserve. Site maintenance will be supported by property tax revenues earmarked for Open Space lands.

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 is a good investment of state resources because it facilitates the restoration and enhancement of habitats in Bolinas Lagoon, one of four areas on the West Coast that have been designated as Wetlands of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention. The property is part of a larger protected natural habitat complex that includes Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, Point Reyes National Seashore, and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and provides critical wildlife benefits for thousands of wintering and migrating birds. Restoring wetland habitat would enhance critical habitat that supports endangered salmonids and several terrestrial threatened and endangered and special status species.

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

The project facilitates enhanced sea level rise resilience by planning for the removal of structures within future flood inundation areas up to approximately six feet of sea level rise. By removing the structures and restoring the shoreline to tidal wetlands, there would be space for the wetlands to migrate upslope. Currently there are retaining walls, rock riprap, and non-native invasive species (e.g. iceplant) that prevent the tidal wetlands from migrating. To allow for tidal wetland migration, the existing structures need to be removed, and the site regraded to a slope that allows for tidal and transitional wetlands to establish. The conceptual designs call for walking trails constructed from permeable material that can be submerged over time, and site amenities will be designed for future removal.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The greatest benefit of the project is the facilitation of tidal wetlands restoration, which would benefit a plethora of species. If implemented, the project would also benefit the community, which currently is unable to access the property. After implementation, community members would be able to park nearby and walk along the edge of the wetlands and observe wildlife and commune in nature. The wetlands would also attenuate wave energy with long-term sea level rise, which would reduce potential erosional impacts to Olema Bolinas Road, the main access road to the town of Bolinas. In addition, the wetlands would sequester carbon, which is a benefit to climate change mitigation efforts.

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

The Letter Property Shoreline Restoration Project has had meaningful community engagement by and through several public meetings. It addresses recommendations in the “Bolinás Lagoon Ecosystem Restoration Project: Recommendations for Restoration and Management”, also known as the Locally Preferred Plan, which was developed through a working group of scientists, local stakeholders, environmental groups, and state and federal agencies to guide efforts to restore Bolinás Lagoon. The project is also a recommended priority of the Bolinás Lagoon Advisory Committee (BLAC), which is composed of twelve representatives from local recreational interests, homeowner groups, environmental nonprofits, county and federal agencies, and appointees of the county Board of Supervisors. Additionally, in 2017, Dr. Peter Baye presented to the BLAC a summary of his completed report on Environmental Enhancement and Climate Change Adaptation Alternatives for the “Letter Parcel” at Northwest Bolinás Lagoon, and the BLAC recommended that County Parks proceed with advancing conceptual designs that would remove all structures and adapt the shoreline to accommodate sea level rise and low intensity park use using a managed retreat approach and nature based shoreline stabilization. In 2020, County Parks presented to the BLAC conceptual designs and alternatives for adapting the Letter Property with removal of structures, and the BLAC approved a passive trail approach and requested limited parking. County Parks has since held off on advancing designs due to limited funding and will return to the BLAC once designs are advanced and seek support for limited parking that will be restricted to daytime hours.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$245,000
Marin County Parks (Measure A and in-kind)	\$100,000
Project Total	\$345,000

Conservancy funding for the proposed project is expected to come from a FY 2022/23 appropriation to the Conservancy from the General Fund for the purposes 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 SB 155 (Chapter 258, Statutes of 2021). The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it is a coastal resilience project that will restore coastal wetlands, increasing resilience to sea level rise for a coastal community, a segment of critical road infrastructure, and endangered species.

County Parks will contribute \$100,000 in funding, as well as \$25,000 in staff time, to support the project. County Parks financial contribution will come from Marin County Measure A funds. Marin County Measure A was approved in 2022 and consists of a quarter-cent sales tax to support parks and open space, sustainable agriculture, and recreation.

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 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)).

Pursuant to Section 31113(b), the Conservancy is authorized to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects, including those that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or 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 grants for projects that maximize public benefits and have several listed purposes, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing coastal wetlands. Pursuant to Section 31113(d), the Conservancy must prioritize projects that use natural infrastructure in coastal communities to help adapt to climate change; prioritize projects that provide multiple public benefits, including protection of communities and natural resources; and the Conservancy must consider a variety of ecosystems along the state's coastline, including protection and expansion of coastal estuaries and lagoons that provide critical feeding and nursery habitat for juvenile fish species and foraging habitat for migratory waterfowl and other waterbirds.

Consistent with these provisions, the proposed project is located in the coastal zone and facilitates the restoration of tidal wetlands adjacent on Bolinas Lagoon which would improve habitat, provide a buffer against the impacts of sea level rise, help sequester carbon pollution, and provide for upslope/landward migration of the wetlands, thus ensuring that the restored wetlands are themselves resilient to sea level rise over the coming decades. Likewise, the project facilitates the use of natural infrastructure to adapt to climate change because, if implemented, it would restore the natural functioning wetland, allowing for migration of habitat that will be more resilient to sea level rise.

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

Consistent with **Goal 3.2 Habitat Restoration or Enhancement**, the proposed project will complete one plan for restoration of 0.8 acres of tidal wetlands habitat that supports both aquatic and terrestrial species.

Consistent with **Goal 3.2 Anadromous Fish Habitat or Watershed Projects**, the proposed project will complete one plan for restoration of 0.8 acres of wetland that will provide nursery habitat for anadromous salmonids.

Consistent with **Goal 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation**, the proposed project will plan a sea level rise project to restore wetland function and provide sea level rise resilience for critical habitat and community infrastructure.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project consists of 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 consists of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to any environmental resource.

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