

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
November 21, 2024

**SAN ONOFRE SHORELINE RESILIENCY PROJECT**

Project No. 24-056-01  
Project Manager: Kara Kemmler

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$1,000,000 to Surfrider Foundation to undertake the San Onofre Shoreline Resiliency Project, a sea level rise adaptation project consisting of conducting technical studies, alternatives design and analysis, and community engagement, and preparing preliminary designs for a nature-based solution to protect public access along the San Onofre Surf Beach shoreline in San Diego County.

**LOCATION:** San Onofre Surf Beach, San Diego County

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Site Map and 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 million dollars (\$1,000,000) to Surfrider Foundation (“the grantee”) to undertake the San Onofre Shoreline Resiliency Project, a sea level rise adaptation project consisting of conducting technical studies, alternatives design and analysis, and community engagement, and preparing preliminary designs for a nature-based solution to protect public access along the San Onofre Surf Beach shoreline in San Diego 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 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding addressing impacts and potential impacts of climate change.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Surfrider Foundation is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$1,000,000 grant to Surfrider Foundation (Surfrider) to undertake the San Onofre Shoreline Resiliency Project, a sea level rise adaptation project consisting of conducting technical studies, alternatives design and analysis, and community engagement, and preparing preliminary designs for a nature-based solution to protect public access along the San Onofre Surf Beach (Surf Beach) shoreline, which is located within San Onofre State Beach in San Diego County (Exhibits 1 and 2). The United States Marine Corps (USMC) owns and leases San Onofre State Beach to California State Parks (State Parks). Surfrider is coordinating with State Parks and USMC on the planning effort.

In 2017, severe El Niño storm erosion threatened the only access road to Surf Beach, prompting the issuance of an emergency permit for the temporary installation of a revetment to maintain short-term shoreline stabilization and continued access. As anticipated, the years following the installation saw accelerated shoreline erosion and extreme degradation of the beach, resulting in frequent high tide overtopping of the parking area and multiple closures of the only parking lot for the beach. By December 2023, 185 of the original 388 parking spaces had been lost to erosion, significantly reducing access for beachgoers. In the fall of 2023, flanking erosion around the end of the revetment exposed a K Rail and dislodged three segments of a large concrete pipe once buried under the road. By January 2024, this road segment was completely washed out due to an overwhelmed storm drain outflow during heavy rains, halting all vehicle access for two months. After the winter storms of 2024, only 135 parking spaces of the original 388 remain. The revetment, temporarily permitted for five years, is now out of compliance with the original permit and is pending removal. However, removing the revetment alone will further damage the San Onofre shoreline and compromise access and parking.

The proposed project will develop a plan to ensure the long-term sustainability and resilience of coastal resources at Surf Beach through nature-based shoreline stabilization measures. The eventual implementation of the shoreline design, utilizing shoreline reengineering to restore the beach slope and wave runup, is essential to combat erosion and adapt to sea level rise. These measures are dynamic and can evolve with the changing landscape, providing long term protection of coastal access resources. Coastal access is being threatened along the length of the California coast by sea level rise and coastal erosion. This project will help inform other

nature-based resilience planning efforts and future sea level rise adaptation projects across Southern California and beyond.

The project site is a popular state park located within a disadvantaged community, surrounded by a USMC base, on culturally historic land. Surfrider considers community engagement integral to the project's success and has already engaged with core stakeholders, including local California Native American tribes, the San Onofre Parks Foundation, and Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, who all support the project. The project will involve a robust community engagement strategy including a series of community workshops and educational presentations for various local organizations and community groups to engage with the community about coastal dynamics, the impacts of hard armoring, the benefits of nature-based resilience planning, and opportunities to engage in monitoring and stewardship. Feedback will be gathered from workshops and on-site pop-ups, which will provide opportunities for community members and user groups to identify important cultural and ecological sites, user habits, areas of concern, and preferential shoreline outcomes. Meaningful tribal engagement is an important part of the project, as described further in the Project Selection Criteria section below. The project aims to develop a comprehensive and sustainable plan for shoreline restoration that preserves access and cultural heritage while enhancing coastal resilience by integrating community input and California Native American tribal knowledge.

The proposed project aims to develop a nature-based solution to create a sustainable living shoreline that will adapt to rising sea levels and protect access to the coast over the long term. State Parks previously studied sea level rise vulnerability and shoreline adaptation measures for Surf Beach including rock revetment, seawall, cobble berm, beach nourishment and managed/phased retreat (San Onofre State Beach Shoreline Projection Project, Moffat & Nichol 2018). This project builds upon the prior work to advance a living shoreline design for Surf Beach that addresses the identified need for shoreline stabilization and reliable access to this important public resource in the face of sea level rise. Exhibit 2, Figure 2 indicates where cobble and sand materials, possibly dunes, might restore the beach in a living shoreline concept. The project includes conducting site specific studies including a topographic survey and base map, geomorphic, hydrologic and hydraulic assessments; conceptual alternatives design and analysis; community engagement; and development of preliminary design plans. The design alternatives will be evaluated to determine their effectiveness in withstanding various levels of sea level rise over the long term, with alternatives ranging from a "do nothing" plan, at least one nature-based approach, and a fully armored plan. The design process will provide an opportunity for the Marine Corps base to support extending the project area to encompass the military's recreation beach, contiguous to the north, to expand the living shoreline.

**Site Description:** San Onofre State Beach and adjacent Camp Pendleton are owned by USMC. USMC leases San Onofre State Beach to State Parks. State Parks recently secured an additional 25-year term on the lease. San Onofre State Beach is one of California's most popular beaches and hosts surfers, swimmers, sunbathers, campers, kayakers, birders, fishermen and bicyclists. It has almost 2.5 million visitors per year and it is one of the top five most-visited state parks in California. Whales, dolphins, and sea lions can be seen offshore from time to time. The state beach has three distinct areas: the San Onofre Bluffs, the San Mateo Campground, and the San Onofre Surf Beach. Surf Beach is well known for "The Point" and "Old Man's" surf breaks, two of

the most popular surfing destinations along the coast. A narrow dirt road between the bluff and the ocean provides the only access to the low-lying beach parking lot, with no other day parking available inside or outside the state beach boundaries. The area is cherished for its gentle waves and the enduring spirit of classic surfing culture.

The project site is located within a disadvantaged community and is a vital community resource. In addition, adjacent to Surf Beach is the military's recreation beach (Exhibit 2), one of only two beaches on Camp Pendleton where active-duty military personnel, veterans, and their families can camp and recreate year-round. This beach provides a vital recreational space for the military community, offering campsites and facilities for service members and their families to enjoy the coastal environment.

Surfrider is working closely with State Parks on the planning effort at the state beach. It has also engaged in discussions with the Marine Corps about potentially expanding the planning to include the military's recreation beach which is contiguous with the project site.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The applicant has extensive experience in administering grant funds and participating in coastal restoration and conservation projects. Surfrider has successfully managed numerous grants from state and federal agencies, including the Conservancy, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and U.S. Environmental Protection Administration, as well as private foundations. Surfrider spearheaded and played a key role in the Surfers Point Managed Retreat Project in Ventura, which implemented a nature-based solution for coastal resiliency and enhanced public access. Surfrider has a passionate team that is skilled in coordinating diverse stakeholders and conducting comprehensive community engagement, including engaging with local California Native American tribes to ensure culturally sensitive project planning. Surfrider has been coordinating with the landowner for the project and has long term plans for regular monitoring, adaptive management practices, and stewardship to ensure the resiliency of the site and public access into the future.

**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 the project advances statewide sea level rise adaptation and climate resilience goals and advances the state's 30 x 30 access priorities. The project goal is to preserve critical public access and recreation resources at Surf Beach which is one of California's most popular beaches. It is enjoyed by nearly 2.5

million visitors per year and it is one of the top five most-visited state parks in California. In addition, the community led planning effort and resulting nature-based adaptation plan could serve as a model for nature-based adaptation and coastal resilience in other areas along the California coast where public access is threatened by sea level rise and erosion.

**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.**

Surfrider has taken steps to prioritize tribal engagement and ensure that the project appropriately involves the Acjachemen Tribe and other California Native American tribes and incorporates their perspectives into the project. Surfrider has hired a contractor to guide tribal engagement, identify key groups and tribal leaders, and facilitate communication and support between the project team and the tribes. This engagement will inform the project design and help establish best practices for involving tribes in nature-based coastal resilience projects beyond this project. By integrating indigenous knowledge into the planning process, the project aims to develop a comprehensive and sustainable plan for shoreline restoration that preserves access and cultural heritage while enhancing coastal resilience.

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

The proposed project will result in design(s) for a nature-based solution to create a resilient coastline that can adapt to expected sea level rise and protect public access to the coast over the project lifespan.

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

Severe erosion at the project site has significantly impaired access to the coast. The planning project will create a solution for restoring the integrity of the beach and preserving critical recreation resources. Further, the project will protect public access to the coast in a disadvantaged community delivering public health benefits that will be essential as climate change impacts escalate. In addition, the tribal engagement effort will seek to elevate the voices of the local tribes and integrate concerns and interests into the project.

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

Surfrider has already begun the work of relationship building with project partners, community groups and local tribes. The project will involve a series of community workshops and educational presentations for various local organizations and community groups to engage with the community about coastal dynamics, the impacts of hard armoring, and the benefits of nature-based resilience planning. Feedback will be gathered from on-site pop-ups and workshops, where community members and user groups can identify important cultural and ecological sites, user habits, areas of concern, and preferential shoreline outcomes. This input will inform the project design process. Surfrider is a community-based organization. They envision this planning effort as a community driven process and view community engagement as integral to the project's success, strengthening community ties and fostering a sense of shared stewardship.

The proposed project is supported broadly by public agencies, local California Native American tribes, and the community including Congressman Mike Levin, Assemblymember Laurie Davies; the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation; the Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton; State Parks; the San Onofre Parks Foundation; and others. Project letters are attached as Exhibit 3.

As the project moves from planning to implementation in the next phase, continued engagement with the community will ensure ongoing support and participation, maintaining a transparent and inclusive process throughout.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>
Builder’s Initiative	\$345,000
Endangered Habitats League	\$25,000
Rivian Foundation	\$75,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$1,445,000</b>

The anticipated source of funding for this project is 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” (Budget Act 2023, Chapter 12, Statutes of 2023 (SB 101) as amended by Chapter 38, Statutes of 2023 (AB 102)). Consistent with this funding source the proposed project is a planning effort to seek a nature-based solution that will address sea level rise adaptation along a stretch of coast where public access is threatened by coastal erosion.

Surfrider is providing in-kind support in the form of volunteer time at an estimated value of \$44,500 in addition to staff time at an estimated value of \$20,000 to support the planning effort.

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:**

Chapter 3 Public Resources Code Section 31100 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. To this end, Section 31113(b) authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies to undertake projects within the Conservancy’s jurisdiction, “including, but not limited to, those that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, address extreme weather events, sea level rise, storm surge, beach and bluff erosion, saltwater

intrusion, flooding, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources.” Pursuant to Section 31113(c), the Conservancy must, to the extent allowed, prioritize projects that maximize public benefits and accomplish certain purposes, including reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, preserving and enhancing coastal wetlands and natural lands, and providing recreational opportunities.

Section 31113(d)(1) requires the Conservancy to prioritize projects that use natural infrastructure to help coastal communities adapt to climate change and projects that provide multiple public benefits, including, but not limited to, protection of communities, natural resources, and recreational opportunities. The purpose of the project is to develop a nature-based, sea level rise adaptation solution that will restore the beach and protect public access to and along the coast. The project will address chronic erosion and sea level rise at a heavily used public beach that serves visitors from all parts of Orange and San Diego counties and beyond to Surf Beach.

**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 recreation conditions within a disadvantaged community and increase coastal resiliency. The grantee is engaging with the local community and tribes in an effort to integrate their interests and concerns into the design.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5 Recreation Facilities and Amenities**, the proposed project will seek a nature-based solution to restore and protect the beach and recreational facilities to support long term public access to and along the coast.

Consistent with **Goal 4.1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects**, the proposed project is a sea level rise adaptation project designed to preserve coastal access and recreation resources using a nature-based approach.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 14, Section 15262, which exempts planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions which have not been approved, adopted or funded, and categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CCR Title 14, Section 15306, which exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. The project involves only data collection, resource evaluation, planning, and the development of conceptual site design(s) for possible future actions that the Conservancy has not approved, adopted, or funded. The project will not result in disturbance to environmental resources.

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