

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 21, 2024

KASHIA COASTAL RESERVE AND STEWARTS POINT RANCH COASTAL TRAIL CONSTRUCTION

Project No. 16-026-02
Project Manager: Peter Jaraus

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$950,000 to the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department to obtain final permits and construct two separate segments of the California Coastal Trail totaling 2 miles and related public access amenities, including parking, a restroom, fencing, and signage at the Kashia Coastal Reserve and Stewarts Point Ranch in Sonoma County; and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

LOCATION: 29001 and 32025 Highway 1, Stewarts Point, Sonoma County Coast.

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
- Exhibit 4: [Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the North Coast Trails Plan](#)

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 nine hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$950,000) to the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department (“the grantee”) to obtain final permits and construct two separate segments of the California Coastal Trail totaling 2 miles and related public access amenities, including parking, a restroom, fencing, and signage at the Kashia Coastal Reserve and the Stewarts Point Ranch in Sonoma 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.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
5. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement, operate, and maintain the project.

In addition, to the extent appropriate, the grantee shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's 'Coastal Access Project Standards'.

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 a system of public accessways.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for the North Coast Trails Plan adopted by Sonoma County Regional Parks on March 1, 2022 pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 4. The Conservancy finds that the proposed project as designed and mitigated avoids, reduces, or mitigates the potentially significant environmental effects to a less-than-significant level, and that there is no substantial evidence based on the record as a whole that the project will have a significant effect on the environment.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to \$950,000 to Sonoma County Regional Parks Department (SCRPD) to obtain final permits and construct two separate segments of the California Coastal Trail totaling 2 miles and related public access amenities, including parking, a restroom, fencing, and signage at the Kashia Coastal Reserve and Stewarts Point Ranch in Sonoma County ("the project"). The proposed project will provide new public access to a stretch of the Sonoma Coast that is currently inaccessible.

Situated only 2.5 miles apart, the Kashia Coastal Reserve and the Stewarts Point Ranch share similar coastal terrace geology, open grassland habitats, culturally significant resources, and agricultural use of the land for grazing.

The Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of Stewarts Point Rancheria (Kashia) acquired the Kashia Coastal Reserve in 2015, in part with Conservancy funding, anticipating the construction of a portion of the coastal trail. With assistance from the Conservancy and the Sonoma County Agricultural and Open Space District, SCRPD accepted a public access easement over the 52-acre portion of the Reserve west of Highway 1 to facilitate development of this segment of the California Coastal Trail.

In 2017, the County of Sonoma acquired a trail easement over the 105-acre Stewarts Point Ranch. The easement allows for construction, operation, and maintenance of a public access trail over this coastal terrace. Because the Kashia Coastal Reserve and Stewarts Point Ranch share common geography, habitats, and cultural resources, it represents a cost savings to construct the new trail on both properties at the same time.

The project will enable public access on the two trail easements while protecting grasslands, wetland, and sensitive biological resources. The trail segments have been designed and located to protect culturally significant resources, tribal gathering areas, and other tribal cultural resources associated with the Kashia. Trail construction is especially important at these locations because it provides new access to a rugged and scenic portion of the coastline in Mendocino. Visitors can often be seen stopping along the side of the road to admire the scenic views, but they are unable to directly experience the area by walking through the landscape. This project is in the middle of an approximately eight mile stretch of the coast from Sea Ranch in the north to Fisk Mill Cove in the south that is currently inaccessible to the public. The proposed project will provide for new, safe, responsible access while protecting the natural and cultural resources and preserving agricultural use.

The two proposed trail segments, a 1.1-mile trail on the Kashia Coastal Reserve and a 0.9-mile trail on the Stewarts Point Ranch, will each be a 4- to 5-foot-wide natural surface hiking trail with a firm and stable surface. The trail segments will cross numerous drainages and require one pre-engineered clear span bridge on the Kashia Reserve and one on the Stewarts Point trail segment. The project includes constructing a trailhead staging area at each trail segment that provides parking and educational signage. At the Kashia Coastal Reserve, the staging area will include a vault restroom and a trailhead picnic area. The Stewarts Point Ranch is currently grazed; the project includes installation of appropriate fencing and new gates at the staging area and along the trail to control the livestock grazing. Fencing will also be provided to prohibit hikers from accessing sensitive bluff areas along both trails.

The Kashia Coastal Reserve and Stewarts Point are remote, beautiful open space areas north of Salt Point State Park and south of The Sea Ranch. These properties have coastal grasslands with blue water beyond that are highly visible from Highway 1. In northern Sonoma County, there are occasional pull-outs along the narrow highway for travelers to pause and take in the ocean view, but few places to pull off the highway. The proposed staging areas will help make the Kashia Coastal Reserve Trail and the Stewarts Point Trail into attractive destinations, accommodating parking for groups with multiple vehicles, a meeting area for a hike, a gathering point for a picnic, and an easy to access restroom.

Site Description:

The 688-acre Kashia Coastal Reserve straddles Highway 1, immediately north of Salt Point State Park in Sonoma County. Fifty-two acres are on the coastal side of the Highway and 636 acres are on the inland side of the highway. The 873-acre Stewarts Point Ranch, located approximately 2.5 miles north of the Kashia Coastal Reserve and nestled in the small hamlet of Stewarts Point, extends from the Pacific Coast approximately two miles inland to the South Fork of the Gualala River. Similar to the Kashia Coastal Reserve, the 105-acre coastal side of Stewarts Point Ranch contains nearly a mile of linear ocean front. (See Exhibit 1)

Both properties include uplifted coastal terrace land west of Highway 1 that gently slopes to steep bluffs adjacent to the Pacific Ocean. (See Exhibit 2 for photos of the properties.) The terrace is currently used for sheep grazing and is mostly comprised of annual and perennial coastal grassland with seasonal and ephemeral drainages and wetlands. The special status plant species that may occur on the sites include harlequin lotus (*Hosackia gracilis*), coastal bluff morning glory (*Calystegia purpurata* spp. *saxicola*), fringed corn lily (*Veratrum fimbriatum*), coast lily (*Lilium maritimum*), and swamp harebell (*Campanula californica*). Special status animal species that may occur include grasshopper sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*), Bryant's savannah sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*), American badger (*Taxidea taxus*), and osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*).

A trail along the coastal terrace of the properties will provide expansive views of the ocean, Sonoma County's rocky coast and intertidal zones, and of the forested ridges inland. The area also provides prime whale-watching and wildlife-viewing opportunities.

Highway 1 is designated a scenic corridor in the Sonoma County General Plan as it represents the variety and beauty of Sonoma County's landscapes. In addition to the natural resources and scenic values found on the Kashia Coastal Reserve and Stewarts Point Ranch, both properties are very culturally significant to the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of Stewarts Point Rancheria.

Grant Applicant Qualifications:

SCRPD successfully operates a network of parks and public access trails throughout Sonoma County, and the County hosts over 2 million visitors each year who come to recreate along its spectacular coast. SCRPD has completed several coastal planning and implementation projects with public input and Conservancy support, and it currently manages Gualala Point Regional Park, Black Point Sea Ranch Access Trail, Stillwater Cove Regional Park, Doran Regional Park, and the Coastal Prairie Trail, a segment of the California Coastal Trail north of Bodega Bay. In addition, SCRPD has a history of successfully working with coastal tribes to accommodate cross-cultural and historic complexities associated with public access on tribal 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 helps the State of California with several important policy goals. First, the project helps implement the State’s goal of completing the California Coastal Trail by constructing approximately two miles of new California Coastal Trail with new trailheads. Second, the project helps further the State’s goal of providing access to the California coast by opening up new coastal access in an area that has been inaccessible. Third, the project meets the State’s goal of working in partnership with tribes. The project was carefully developed to protect culturally significant resources, tribal gathering areas, and other tribal cultural resources associated with the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria.

It also leverages significant local match funding (see Project Financing).

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.

SCRPD has been working with the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria since March of 2015 when the Tribe provided a letter agreeing to the conservation of and trail easement on the Kashia Reserve. The recorded easement states the importance of these lands of the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria as they are part of the ancestral lands of the Tribe and will continue to provide a location for the Tribe’s cultural, traditional, spiritual, and ceremonial activities.

In a separate transaction with a different property owner, the Grant of Public Trail Easement on the Stewarts Point property was recorded on January 13, 2017. On May 9, 2018, a Grant of Cultural and Subsistence Access Easement, also known as the Tribal Access Easement, was completed and recorded shortly thereafter. This agreement ensures Tribal access and allows for trail closure during certain Tribal ceremonial activities.

Since the establishment of both easements, SCRPD has been coordinating with the Tribe on biological and cultural resource studies, development of the trail plan, and preparation and processing of the environmental document for the trail project. SCRPD is now working out a specific agreement for construction. This includes scheduling a tribal monitor and establishing notification protocols for unanticipated activities.

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

This project will be both sustainable and resilient over the long term. The layout of the trail as well as the construction methods have been selected to create a trail that effectively resists erosion, the primary cause of failure to trails. The route has also been designed to provide

visitors with a pathway that they are likely to stay on, protecting significant cultural and biological resources.

SCRPD actively manages an extensive network of trails and preserves throughout Sonoma County. SCRPD has crews that monitor and maintain the trails and staging areas, and SCRPD will steward these trails to prevent premature failure.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The project provides multiple benefits to communities and visitors to this section of California’s coastline. It opens up a previously inaccessible area to hiking and nature enjoyment. Visitors are more likely to spend the night if there are more trails to hike and areas to explore. This supports the local economy by increasing spending on local goods and services. The project also helps implement long term protection of significant cultural resources and balances public access with cultural use of both properties.

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

In addition to direct communication with the Kashia, the project design effort and environmental review process included outreach to the public. SCRPD held a local community meeting in Fort Ross to introduce the project and gather community input. This was prior to the pandemic and was attended by local residents. Subsequent meetings were shifted online. The draft environmental document was posted online and direct notice was sent to stakeholders to allow them to comment. The final opportunity to comment was during the Board of Supervisors hearing at which the environmental document was adopted.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$950,000
Sonoma County Ag Preservation and Open Space District	\$604,000
Sonoma County Regional Parks Department	\$606,000
Project Total	\$2,160,000

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/23 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 2022, SB 154 as amended by Budget Act of 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 nonmotorized trails of statewide significance. The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it will construct a section of the California Coastal Trail and associated facilities that will close a significance gap in the trail, which is a nonmotorized trail of statewide significance.

Additional funding will come from the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and Sonoma County Regional Parks Department. Funding has been secured from both agencies for this project.

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 is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31410), regarding public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 31400 states that the Conservancy shall have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. Through the proposed project, the Conservancy will help enhance a coastal accessway and thereby further access to and enjoyment of coastal resources along the Sonoma County shoreline.

Section 31400.2 requires the Conservancy to consider a number of factors in determining the amount of funds to provide for the initial development of a public accessway. Consistent with this section, the proposed level of funding was evaluated relative to the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal access projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible projects, and the Conservancy's project selection criteria (see Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines).

Section 31408 authorizes the Conservancy to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail in consultation with State Parks, the California Coastal Commission, and Caltrans. The project is consistent with this section, as it involves construction of a section of the Coastal Trail in coordination with the Coastal Commission. State Parks and Caltrans are not directly involved as this section is a pedestrian trail located on easements owned by the County of Sonoma.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2.4 Build Trails**, the proposed project will construct 2 miles of the California Coastal Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5 Recreation Facilities and Amenities**, the proposed project will construct 2 new facilities to help visitors access the coast.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

On March 1, 2022, the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department adopted an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the North Coast Trail Plan and approved the North Coast Trails Project. The project is within the scope of the North Coast Trail Plan. The MND includes a mitigation monitoring and reporting program.

The MND identified potential impacts of the project on air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology/soils, hydrology, and noise and transportation. These potential impacts were reduced to less than significant by the incorporation of mitigation measures. The

measures were incorporated into the project design to reduce and avoid impacts, and measures will guide how construction takes place.

Potentially significant impacts of the project that are reduced to less than significant levels with mitigation are as follows.

Air Quality: Construction of the project could result in dust that might contribute to a cumulative impact on air quality. This impact will be mitigated through use of standard dust control measures (Mitigation Measure AQ-1) that include watering, covering, and sweeping. In addition, all construction vehicles and equipment will be those with emission levels that meet current air quality standards and idling time for all heavy equipment will be minimized to reduce on-site emissions during construction.

Biological Resources: There are several special status wildlife and plant species that have the potential to occur at the project site. Special status wildlife species includes the Western Bumble Bee, Lotus blue butterfly, Behren's silverspot butterfly, California Red-legged Frog, Burrowing owl, American badger, roosting bats- including Townsend's big-eared bat and pallid bat, Nesting Raptors- white-tailed kite, red-shouldered, and American kestrel, and Nesting Passerines- including grasshopper sparrow and song sparrow. Special status plants include coastal bluff morning-glory, purple-stemmed checkerbloom, and fringed corn lily. The project will have temporary and permanent impacts to several habitat types including coastal terrace prairie grassland, seasonal herbaceous wetlands and coastal scrub riparian. Potential impacts to these species and habitats will be avoided with Mitigation Measures BIO-1 through 11. These mitigation measures include contractor training, construction timing restrictions, pre-construction surveys, fencing, and replanting at 1:1 or 3:1. The project will have temporary and permanent impacts on wetlands that will be mitigated by Mitigation Measure BIO-12, which requires compensatory mitigation, at 2:1 for permanent impacts and 1:1 for temporary impacts, the amount and type of which will be determined during the permitting process.

Cultural Resources: A cultural resources survey was conducted and there are no known resources on the site. Mitigation Measures CR-1.1 and CR-1.2 will mitigate any impact to currently unknown resources to a less-than-significant level.

Geology and Soils: The project could directly or indirectly cause potentially substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving rupture of known earthquake fault; strong seismic ground shaking; and/or landslides. Implementation of Mitigation Measures GS-1 (e.g., complying with code regulations, applying for relevant permits, permitting inspections) and GS-2 (e.g., complying with the geotechnical recommendations and designs plans) will reduce or minimize potential impacts to geologic resources to less than significant with mitigation incorporated. Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction, was deemed a less than significant impact.

The project could result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil. Areas to be graded and altered during trail construction and restoration activities could be subjected to soil erosion by wind and water. Implementation of Mitigation Measures

GS-3 (e.g., finalizing the Draft SWPPP) and GS-4 (e.g., completing an erosion control plan and submitting the plan with the relevant permit) will reduce or minimize potential impacts to geologic resources to less than significant with mitigation incorporated.

The project could be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable because of the project, and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction, or collapse. Potential instability-related impacts on trail and bridge construction would be reduced to a less-than-significant level by implementing the conditions set forth in the preliminary geotechnical report and in Mitigation Measures GS-1 and GS-2. These mitigation measures would reduce impacts related to geologic or soil instability to a less-than-significant level.

The project could be located on expansive soil. The impact of expansive soils would be addressed, as necessary, during construction in accordance with recommendations set forth in the Mitigation Measures GS-1 and GS-2.

The project could directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature. There are no records of paleontological finds on the site. However, marine terraces are uplifted sea bottoms that may contain marine fossils, and destruction of such fossil would be a potentially significant impact. Implementation of Mitigation Measures GS-5 (e.g., if vertebrate fossils are discovered, stopping work, notifying relevant agencies, and having a qualified professional paleontologist assess the find and recommend treatment) will reduce or minimize potential impacts to less than significant with mitigation incorporated.

Hydrology and Water Quality: Project construction would cause potential erosion. However, erosion impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level by implementing previously required mitigation measures as well as Mitigation Measures G-3 and G-4.

With implementation of the project's mitigation measures, environmental effects to air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology/soils, hydrology, and noise and transportation with the incorporation of mitigation measures will be less than significant. Staff recommends that the Conservancy find that the project as mitigated avoids, reduces or mitigates the potentially significant environmental effects to a level of less-than-significant and that there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment.

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