

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 18, 2025

DEHAVEN ACCESS IMPROVEMENT CONSTRUCTION

Project No. 22-15-02
Project Manager: Louisa Morris

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Consideration and authorization to disburse up to \$270,000 to the Westport Village Society to undertake the DeHaven Access Improvement Construction Project, consisting of construction of public access improvements, including a parking lot, a segment of the California Coastal Trail, signage, and stairway to DeHaven Beach in Mendocino County; and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

LOCATION: Westport, Mendocino County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)
Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
Exhibit 4: [CEQA Initial Study/Negative Declaration](#)
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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 two hundred seventy thousand dollars (\$270,000) to the Westport Village Society ("the grantee") for the DeHaven Access Improvement Construction Project, consisting of construction of public access improvements, including a parking lot, a segment of the California Coastal Trail, signage, and stairway to DeHaven Beach in Mendocino County ("the project").

This authorization is subject to the following condition:

1. To the extent appropriate, the grantee shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's 'Coastal Access Project Standards.'

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 and the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68) as the source of that funding by erecting and maintaining a sign on the property or in a nearby publicly viewable area, the design and location of which must be approved by the Executive Officer.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.

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 Westport Village Society is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.
4. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the Initial Study and Negative Declaration for Westport Village Society, Inc. Coastal Development Use Permit at 39000 N. Highway 1 (APN: 013-890-01) adopted by the County of Mendocino on May 1, 2025, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 4. The Conservancy finds 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 a grant up to \$270,00 to the Westport Village Society for the DeHaven Access Improvement Construction Project, which consists of constructing public access improvements, including a parking lot, a segment of the California Coastal Trail, signage, and stairway to DeHaven Beach in Mendocino County ("the project").

This project will enhance public access to DeHaven Beach through construction of new facilities including an unpaved 0.4-0.6 mile segment of the California Coastal Trail. The public has

informally used the area for many years and currently must park along the side of Highway 1 and scramble down a short bluff to the beach. The project will make it safer for the public by providing off-street parking, trail access from the parking lot, and a stairway to the beach from the trail.

The DeHaven property was acquired by the Westport Village Society (WVS) on December 15, 2022, through a Conservancy grant. Shortly after the acquisition, the WVS prepared a management plan for the property. The plan mapped sensitive resources, assessed bluff erosion speed, guided stairway design, and addressed opening the southern portion of the property to the public. The project is a direct result of the public access effort, and the management plan will be implemented in connection with this project.

The project elements include:

Parking: The paved driveway and dirt/paved parking lot will be located near Highway 1 on the south headland. It will have five parking spaces, and one of the five spaces will be designated for people with disabilities.

Stairs: A stairway consisting of a short flight of steps will rise nine vertical feet from the beach to the landing at the top of the stairs. The stairs have been designed to withstand significant winter storms and remain in place. They will have deep footings in the bluff edge and be constructed of a material that can withstand both salt water and the frequent winter rain. The stairs were designed to be constructed at a location already informally used to access the beach and will, therefore, have less of an impact on the surroundings.

Mowed Foot Trails: The project will construct a 300-foot trail that is accessible for people with disabilities on the west side of the parking lot, connecting the parking lot to what will be the newly developed 0.4-0.6 mile segment of the California Coastal Trail. The 300-foot accessible trail, running east and west, will intersect with the 0.4-0.6 mile segment of the California Coastal Trail, which will run north and south along the coastal terrace. This three-way intersection will be located near the bluff edge. The trails were designed to avoid sensitive resources, and the trails will help protect the area by guiding the public away from sensitive habitats and resources. Traveling north on the new segment of the California Coastal Trail, the trail will lead to the new stairway, run seasonally across DeHaven Creek, and eventually connect to the California Coastal Trail in Westport-Union Landing State Beach, which is located north of DeHaven Creek. To the extent feasible and outside of the bloom period for native species, the new segment of the California Coastal Trail will be mowed, but will otherwise be unimproved, to provide a path for visitors to enjoy the spectacular blufftop views and diverse habitats on the property. It is common to establish coastal bluff top trails through gently sloping terrain by mowing instead of excavation.

Signage: WVS will install management signs at public points of entry to the property, warning signs in hazard areas, habitat protection signs, and California Coastal Trail signs, acknowledging Conservancy funding, through Proposition 68, for the project.

Site Description: The DeHaven property, owned and managed by WVS, is an approximately 26-acre oceanfront property intersected on its north end by DeHaven Creek. It contains headlands, a popular beach, a perennial stream, and a variety of plant communities and habitats, including

wetlands, riparian, and beach strand areas. It is located approximately one mile north of Westport in Mendocino County. The north end of the property abuts Westport-Union Landing State Beach while the south end borders the privately owned Wages Creek Campground.

The property has never been developed and retains relatively pristine natural habitats, supporting diverse wildlife. Broad views are available north toward Abalone Point and Cape Vizcaino and south toward Westport and Fort Bragg. Public visitors currently park outside a closed gate at the south end of the adjacent Westport-Union Landing State Beach to access the property.

The property contains 4 acres of wetlands, 10 acres of bluffs and beach strand, and 12 acres of upland marine terrace plant communities. The property contains sensitive archaeological resources. DeHaven Creek, a perennial stream supporting salmonids and other wildlife, intersects the property at its north end. Extensive tide pools border this property to the west, a key attraction for human use over many thousands of years.

Grant Applicant Qualifications:

Established in 1992, WVS is the local nonprofit organization dedicated to land conservation and community service in the community of Westport. WVS accomplishes its mission with a cadre of dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers, who serve on its Board and support the mission as members. Members include a professional archaeologist and retired State Senior Environmental Planner and others with significant fiscal and project management experience and capabilities.

WVS previously managed four Conservancy grants. This included acquisition of the Westport Headlands and the planning for and construction of public access improvements on the headlands. The improvements included a stairway down to the beach, a footbridge over an intermittent stream, an overlook platform, trails, signage, and parking, including one space for persons with disabilities. These projects were accomplished with significant in-kind contributions by WVS volunteers, who managed the grants, contractors, and volunteers that donated thousands of hours of work to build the improvements. WVS continues to maintain the improvements.

WVS also most recently successfully acquired the DeHaven property and developed the management plan with a grant from the Conservancy.

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:

Strategic Plan.

See the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Strategic Plan” section below.

1. Project is a good investment of state resources.

The project is a good investment of state resources because it increases access to the California coast and constructs a new section of California Coastal Trail. It, therefore, implements important elements of the Coastal Act, provides a new recreational opportunity for all Californians by opening the southern portion of the property to the public, and improves current uses of the property. Mendocino County is a popular tourist destination and is within reach of the San Francisco Bay Area for weekend adventures.

2. 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 WVS has two professional anthropologists on its team who are coordinating contact with local tribes. Robust engagement with those tribes began in early 2022 and will be an ongoing aspect of the future management of the property. Tribes have described DeHaven Beach as an important location for traditional resource collection and fishing.

Traditional uses will be supported by WVS on the DeHaven property, consistent with conservation and broader public access objectives. Local tribes camping at Westport-Union Landing State Beach visit the DeHaven property for fishing and gathering and other resources. Access at the north end of the property will continue, while this project will expand access to the headland south of DeHaven Creek to traditional uses.

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

The project improvements are designed to last well into the future. Both impacts from climate change, such as increasing storm intensity and frequency, and the regular erosion from waves were considered in the project design. The stairway to the beach is engineered to withstand the significant wave action that comes from winter storms and is anchored in such a way that it is unlikely to erode. The parking area is well setback from the edge of the bluff and the trail to the bluff can be easily relocated with little expense.

The WVS currently manages the property with volunteer labor and will continue to keep an eye on the property and perform any needed maintenance.

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The project provides multiple benefits. It provides new and improved opportunities for recreation that will be used by locals as well as visitors from many parts of California. This part of the coast is particularly popular in the summer when many folks from interior California seek relief from the heat by visiting the coast. The new trail and beach access will also provide a new opportunity for locals to easily access the beach.

During the planning portion of the project, many locals also mentioned that they traditionally rely on fishing and wild harvesting at DeHaven Beach to supplement purchased food. The

proposed access improvements will ensure these economically disadvantaged local residents, as well as local tribes, will benefit from improved access.

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

In addition to engaging tribes, WVS reached out to the local community in a robust manner from 2022 up to the present time, with dozens of in-person and on-site meetings. This outreach included many articles in WVS's monthly newsletter to keep interested parties up to date on planning. WVS's outreach resulted in more community and public response than any other local meetings held during the past decade, generating dozens of written responses and abundant oral testimony. Local people also contributed over \$25,000 in funds over that period, an indication of their strong support for this project.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$270,000
Project Total	\$270,000

Conservancy funds for this project are expected to come from an appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68), codified at Public Resources Code Sections 80000-80173 of the Public Resources Code. Chapter 9 allocates funds to the Conservancy for the protection of beaches, bays, wetlands, and coastal watershed resources pursuant to Division 21 (Section 80120(c)) and specifically for projects to complete the California Coastal Trail, pursuant to Section 31408 of Division 21 (Section 80120(c)). The definition of "protection" includes actions to improve access to public open-space areas and to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural resources (Section 80002(l)).

Consistent with the purposes of this funding source, the proposed project consists of improving access to and continuing use of the coast and adding 0.4-0.6 mile of trail that will become part of the California Coastal Trail. This project will be carried out in accordance with Chapter 9 of Division 21 regarding public accessways (see "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section). The project is consistent with the funding guidelines for expenditure of Proposition 68 adopted by the Conservancy on December 6, 2018 as described in various sections of the staff recommendation.

WVS is expected to provide in-kind services and anticipates the value of these services to be \$25,000. 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 would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 (Sections 31400-31410) of the Public Resources Code, as follows:

It is the intent of the Legislature for the Conservancy to have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public coastal accessways (Section 31400). To carry out this mandate, the Conservancy is authorized to provide grants to nonprofit organizations to develop, operate, or manage lands for public access to and along the coast; and to provide up to the total cost of initial development of public accessways by any nonprofit organization, as provided in Section 31400.1 (Sections 31400.1 and 31400.2). Pursuant to Section 31400.2, the amount of funding shall be determined by the total amount of funding available for related projects, the applicant's fiscal resources, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible projects, and project eligibility and priority factors.

Consistent with Section 31400.1, the proposed project provides funds to the WVS, a nonprofit, to construct a public accessway at DeHaven Beach. The proposed stairway, trail, and parking lot would improve beach access for the residents and tourists who come to this region for its scenic beauty.

Consistent with Section 31400.2, the Conservancy's proposed contribution was determined based on application of project selection criteria, as discussed above, and on consideration of contributions to the project by the WVS.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2.3, Expand Accessibility**, the proposed project includes a 300-foot trail accessible to people with disabilities and a designated parking spot for people with disabilities.

Consistent with **Goal 2.4 Build Trails**, the proposed project will develop 0.4-0.6 mile of new California Coastal Trail at the DeHaven property in Mendocino County.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5 Recreation Facilities & Amenities**, the proposed project will construct one new parking lot for access to the coast.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The County of Mendocino prepared an Initial Study and Negative Declaration (See Exhibit 4) that was adopted by the County of Mendocino on May 1, 2025. No significant or potentially significant impacts were identified in the Initial Study and Negative Declaration. Staff recommends that the Conservancy find that all potential effects are 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.