

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 18, 2025

NOYO CENTER MARINE LABONEATORY PROJECT: AUGMENT & AMENDMENT

Project No. 23-097-02
Project Manager: Amanda Townsel

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Consideration and possible authorization to disburse up to \$233,000 to the Noyo Center for Marine Science to augment the Conservancy grant authorized on September 5, 2024 to construct the Noyo Center Marine LaBONEatory Project (formerly the Noyo Center Ecosystem Resilience Initiative Project) and to modify the project to expand the 1,500 square foot multi-purpose work facility to 2,240 square feet to allow for greater coastal stewardship programming, marine science education, and community engagement, and to complete designs and permitting for the expanded facility.

LOCATION: Fort Bragg, Mendocino County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location](#)

Exhibit 2: [September 5, 2024 Staff Recommendation](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to two hundred thirty three thousand dollars (\$233,000) to the Noyo Center for Marine Science to augment the Conservancy grant authorized on September 5, 2024 to construct the Noyo Center Marine LaBONEatory Project (formerly the Noyo Center Ecosystem Resilience Initiative Project) and to modify the project to expand the 1,500 square foot multi-purpose work facility to 2,240 square feet to allow for greater coastal stewardship programming, marine science education, and community engagement and to complete designs and permitting for the expanded facility; subject to the conditions of the September 5, 2024 authorization.

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 Urban Waterfront Restoration.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Noyo Center for Marine Science 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 disbursement of up to \$233,000 to the Noyo Center for Marine Science (“Noyo Center”) to augment the grant authorized on September 5, 2024 to construct the Noyo Center Marine LaBONEatory Project (the “project,” formerly known as the Noyo Center Ecosystem Resilience Initiative Project) and to modify the project to expand the 1,500 square foot multi-purpose work facility to 2,240 square feet to allow for greater coastal stewardship programming, marine science education, and community engagement, and to complete designs and permitting for the expanded facility at Noyo Center’s Fort Bragg Headlands property in Mendocino County (Exhibit 1). This authorization will augment and amend the \$498,000 grant that the Conservancy authorized on September 5, 2024, and enable Noyo Center to expand and enhance their proposed facility, known as the LaBONEatory.

The project as initially authorized for a Conservancy grant is described in the attached September 5, 2024 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2). At that time, the project consisted of construction of a 1,500 square foot building to be used for large-scale marine mammal articulation projects; community education associated with marine mammal specimens; workspace and storage to construct and service sensitive equipment like underwater Remote Operated Vehicles and autonomous vehicles; storage of dive gear and boats; and an adaptable space for future marine science research, educational initiatives, and blue economy projects.

While completing the required environmental documents, permitting, and design work for the project, the Noyo Center learned that the Timber Resources Industrial zoning of the site wouldn’t accommodate the proposed facility. Therefore, a Local Coastal Program (LCP) amendment was needed to change the zoning of the site to a “Public Facilities” designation. This change in zoning, in combination with requirements of the project’s Coastal Development Permit, as well as other design changes by the Noyo Center, resulted in multiple changes to the project design that required additional planning and permitting work and increased the project costs, including the following:

Updated Design, Permitting, and Inspections: While 100% designs were previously completed with other funding, the expanded building requires the completion of an updated design package and includes additional permits and inspections such as the Certified Access Specialist

Inspection to confirm American with Disabilities Act compliance. The Noyo Center will also have tribal monitors on the site during building construction.

Additional Site Work to Address Regulatory Requirements: The project is required to include enhanced stormwater retention features to protect onsite seasonal wetlands. These Low Impact Development stormwater features, established through consultation with the Regional Water Quality Control Board and the California Department of Fish & Wildlife, will ensure long-term environmental protection, but necessitated added design, site grading, and construction elements that were not part of the original budget.

Geotechnical Site Constraints: The geotechnical study of the building site recommends a significant amount of subgrade preparation to ensure structural stability. These subsurface improvements are critical for the integrity of the building's foundation and represent an additional unanticipated cost.

Design Modifications for Coastal Blufftop Microclimate: The engineer's cost estimate also addresses revisions to the design and exterior cladding of the LaBONEatory that are intended to improve the facility's durability in the harsh coastal environment. The final building design includes Hardiplank siding and a composition shingle roof instead of metal siding and roofing, a change that was recommended by City of Fort Bragg wastewater treatment plant staff. The change in building materials will improve the resilience of the LaBONEatory to the harsh microclimate of its blufftop site, while increasing its lifespan and reducing on-going maintenance costs.

Improved Resiliency with Self-Contained Solar System: The Noyo Center determined that connecting Pacific Gas & Electric's (PG&E's) electric utilities would be cost-prohibitive, requiring over 300 linear feet of underground conduit, a step-down transformer, and specialized interconnection hardware. The project was revised to include an off-grid, roof-mounted photovoltaic system with battery storage and a backup generator. This change will improve climate resilience and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while ensuring the building can continue operating during frequent power outages, typical in this remote coastal area. Although the solar system adds cost beyond initial projections for the connection to electric utilities, it remains approximately \$200,000 less expensive than a PG&E interconnection—and offers greater long-term reliability and operational independence.

With the LCP amendment and new zoning designation in place, the 11.6-acre project site can now accommodate a larger facility. By expanding the building from 1,500 square feet to 2,240 square feet, the Noyo Center will be able to offer more community education, engagement and stewardship programming than originally planned. With this project, the Noyo Center will be able to increase public access and educational opportunities for the community of Fort Bragg and visitors to the area.

The project's goal remains to construct the LaBONEatory as a multi-purpose warehouse building that will house and support the articulation of a 73-foot blue whale skeleton and will provide a permanent, public space for marine science education, community engagement, and coastal stewardship programming. The project will offer equitable access to coastal learning experiences, particularly for students and residents in the underserved coastal community of

Fort Bragg. The LaBONEatory will continue to provide essential workspace for marine research and blue economy projects, specimen preparation, and long-term storage, enabling ongoing scientific and restoration activities, as in the original project. The original project was envisioned as installation of a simple prefabricated building. The expanded project involves a more complex constructed building that improves and enhances public use of the facility by including: 1) features that make the entire building accessible by people with disabilities, 2) a public bathroom, 3) an improved and formalized parking area with an electric charging station, 4) an off-grid power system with battery storage, and 4) an improved access road with habitat enhancements.

Site Description: See Exhibit 1.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: See Exhibit 1.

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.

See Exhibit 1.

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.

See Exhibit 1.

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

See Exhibit 1.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The expanded project will deliver multiple benefits and significant positive impact to the community of Fort Bragg. In addition to building economic and environmental resilience through blue economy projects and the revitalization of the community and nearshore ecosystems and habitats, the project will cultivate public enjoyment through interpretive marine panels, exhibition displays, programming, and will lead to continued use of the Noyo Headlands open space areas and trails, like the nearby California Coastal Trail and the Noyo Headlands Park.

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

See Exhibit 1.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy (this authorization)	\$233,000
Coastal Conservancy (previous authorization)	\$498,000
California Natural Resources Agency	\$360,000
Project Total	\$1,091,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this recommended augmentation is a Fiscal Year 2020 appropriation from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68, Public Resources Code Sections 80000-80173). Chapter 9 of Proposition 68 allows funding for the “protection of beaches, bays, wetlands, and coastal watershed resources” in accordance with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Section 80120(c)). The Proposition 68 definition of “protection” includes actions to improve access to public open-space areas and to allow use and enjoyment of property, and includes development and interpretation (Section 80002(l)). The project will meet these objectives by enhancing public access at the Fort Bragg Headlands. The project will develop a facility on the headlands that will provide public access and recreational opportunities for the public, including disadvantaged communities, and interpretive exhibits related to marine resources.

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. With this augment, the Noyo Center will have a shortfall of \$135,000, for which they intend to fundraise and look for other means of funding.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The project remains consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31113(a-d) as described in Exhibit 1.

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

See Exhibit 1.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The modified project remains categorically exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations Section 15303, which exempts projects that consist of construction and location of limited numbers of new, small facilities or structures. The size of the expanded building meets the example of an exempt structure in Section 15303(c) which includes a “store, motel, office, restaurant or similar structure not involving the use of significant amounts of hazardous substances and not exceeding 2,500 square feet in floor area.” Utilities construction as part of the proposed project is also categorically exempt under Section 15303(d), which exempts construction of “water main, sewage, electrical gas, and other utility extensions” that would serve the project.

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