

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 20, 2025

SAN FRANCISCO BAY OLYMPIA OYSTER PUBLIC EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Project No. 25-032-01
Project Manager: Evyan Borgnis Sloane

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$445,000 to The Nature Conservancy to undertake the San Francisco Bay Olympia Oyster Public Education Initiative, consisting of targeted public education and outreach on the history and benefits of the native Olympia oyster to build public support for increasing the pace and scale of implementing nature-based approaches to shoreline protection while recovering Olympia oysters in San Francisco Bay.

LOCATION: All nine counties of the San Francisco Bay Area

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Project Support Letters](#)
- Exhibit 3: [September 14, 2023 Staff Recommendation: Building Capacity for Coastal Climate Resiliency in San Francisco Bay](#)
- Exhibit 4: [December 2, 2022 Staff Recommendation: Regionally Advancing Living Shorelines in San Francisco Bay](#)
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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 four hundred forty-five thousand dollars (\$445,000) to The Nature Conservancy (the “grantee”) to undertake the San Francisco Bay Olympia Oyster Public Education Initiative, consisting of targeted public education and outreach on the history and benefits of the native Olympia oyster to build public support for increasing the pace and scale of implementing nature-based approaches to shoreline protection while recovering Olympia oysters in San Francisco Bay (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, Section 31113, of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Climate Ready Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Nature Conservancy is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the State Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy) authorize a \$445,000 grant to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to undertake the San Francisco Bay Olympia Oyster Public Education Initiative, consisting of targeted public education and outreach on the history and benefits of the native Olympia oyster to build public support for increasing the pace and scale of implementing nature-based approaches to shoreline protection while recovering Olympia oysters in San Francisco Bay (the project).

As California braces for accelerating sea level rise, the urgency to implement effective, nature-based solutions has never been greater. Living shorelines, including those incorporating Olympia oysters, offer a great opportunity to align climate resilience with ecological restoration. Restoring Olympia oyster populations not only buffers communities from storm and sea level rise induced wave energy, but also supports local fisheries, improves water quality, and enhances recreational and educational opportunities along the coast. While the incorporation of Olympia oysters in living shorelines has been underway in San Francisco Bay for more than a decade, there have been many recent roadblocks slowing down these projects, including funding and regulatory barriers. For example, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has expressed concerns during the permitting process for native oyster restoration due to the lack of a finalized, statewide California Artificial Reef Plan (CARP). To unlock the full potential of living shorelines, the restoration community needs to elevate public awareness and engagement in Olympia oyster restoration. This project is starting that process and will inform CDFW's development of the CARP, which is slated for completion at the end of 2026.

The project will implement a public education and outreach campaign centered on the Olympia oyster in San Francisco Bay (Exhibit 1) to build awareness and engagement in the

implementation of nature-based coastal resilience projects. Inspired by successful efforts such as the Los Angeles’s mountain lion campaign and New York City’s Billion Oyster Project, the project’s aim is to pair a clear goal—restoring Olympia oysters—with fostering a strong sense of place. In Los Angeles, the mountain lion campaign built local pride in having wild mountain lions surviving in urban areas with help from human partners who are constructing a wildlife overcrossing of Highway 101. The Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing has become a symbol of human coexistence with the wild and the resilience of wild creatures in cities. In the San Francisco Bay Area, the project will enhance the community’s sense of connection to the Bay by deepening the public’s understanding of the native oyster as a creature that can help us by cleaning our water and protecting our shorelines. This approach can spark inclusive, community-driven media momentum and broaden public engagement for living shoreline solutions. In a future project, TNC will build upon the resources and content developed during this initiative to support its work on living shorelines approaches and Olympia oyster restoration across California.

This project will be led by TNC in coordination with the Olympia Oyster Outreach Initiative (“Team Oly”), which is a group of entities coordinating with each other that includes non-profits, state agencies, scientists, community organizations, and storytellers. This coalition is still growing but, to date, includes the Conservancy, the San Francisco Estuary Partnership (SFEP), Above/Below, the Estuary and Ocean Science Center at San Francisco State University (EOS), the Native Olympia Oyster Collaborative, and the California Wildlife Federation (Exhibit 2).

The project will conduct public outreach and provide public education through social media, digital advertising, earned media, outreach events, and a webstory called “The Alluring World of Olympia Oysters.” Social media and digital advertising are the most cost-efficient means of reaching key audiences, providing valuable data in real-time, and keeping costs low. Through public engagement, knowledge of and perception of a species can dramatically shift, and in some cases, can accelerate conservation. In this case, greater appreciation of the native oyster could spur faster and more widespread restoration through an increase in restoration practitioners and researchers, increased community engagement, improved permitting, and increased funding.

The project will produce content for the public outreach and education, ranging from photography and videography to branded templates, that will be produced by TNC, the design and science communication team Above/Below, and other TNC vendors. Content will be informed through direct collaboration with the EOS, SFEP, and the other members of Team Oly. Additionally, SFEP will manage social media and support strategy development. With funding from TNC, Above/Below is already developing “The Alluring World of Olympia Oysters” webstory, grounded in expert and community interviews and informed by a comparative analysis of successful public education campaigns. The project’s digital storytelling effort, with a planned launch in March 2026, will serve as a central tool for outreach, helping to connect a wide audience to the ecological and cultural significance of Olympia oysters in the San Francisco Bay.

The project will raise awareness of Conservancy-funded projects, including the Building Capacity for Coastal Climate Resiliency in San Francisco Bay Project, led by EOS and funded by the Conservancy on September 14, 2023 (Exhibit 3). Specifically, Team Oly will coordinate with the EOS project team to develop branded outreach and educational materials for their pilot oyster shell recycling program and workforce development program; and join and expand EOS's existing outreach events to maximize the initiative's audience and include young community members and community college students. EOS will utilize its existing Conservancy grant to support its outreach events, while this project will contribute new materials with the new, Team Oly branding, such as a poster, stickers, and other materials. The project will also raise awareness of the Regionally Advancing Living Shorelines in San Francisco Bay (RALS) Project, funded by the Conservancy on December 1, 2022 (Exhibit 4). Team Oly will coordinate with the RALS team to highlight its work and provide educational materials for its Living Shorelines Collaborative and future project webpage. The RALS team will utilize its existing Conservancy grant to support its outreach efforts, while this project will contribute new content with the new, Team Oly branding, such as logos and links to the webstory for the RALS webpage, as well as develop social media posts highlighting RALS progress.

Site Description: This project will conduct public education and outreach across the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. The San Francisco Bay Area is an ideal case study given its progress in living shoreline demonstrations over the past 10 years, the presence of small but dense Olympia oyster populations, and its future restoration potential. In the San Francisco Bay, numerous Olympia oysters are found in the intertidal zones on hard substrates in the Central Bay and to a lesser extent in the San Pablo and South Bays. Oysters settle on mud/shell mix, rock outcrops, and some artificial structures depending on location and tidal elevation. Olympia oysters were once abundant, forming dense oyster beds in the Bay with evidence from historic shell middens and its presence in the oyster fishery in the 1800s. While the Olympia oyster population has dramatically declined due to sedimentation, pollution, and habitat destruction, there are many restoration opportunities in the Bay. In the past 10 years, the Conservancy and partner organizations implemented pilot living shoreline projects along the San Rafael, Hayward, Richmond, and Point Pinole shorelines. These projects demonstrate several significant benefits with some sites recruiting over 4 million oysters, decreasing wave energy by 30%, and increasing food and reproductive hot spots for fish and wildlife. Additionally, the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority aims to restore 500 acres of native shellfish habitat, primarily via Olympia oyster restoration.

The Bay Area is an ideal location for the project because of its long history supporting ecological restoration, ranging back to grassroots efforts to create Save the Bay and the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, and its ongoing commitment to advancing environmental and climate justice. The San Francisco Bay Area offers a unique opportunity to build inclusive, community-driven support for estuarine habitat restoration in a place where communities will directly benefit from increased access to estuarine habitats.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: TNC, founded in 1951, is a global leader in conservation, operating in all 50 states and across 81 countries with a workforce of over 3,700 staff, including more than 1,000 scientists dedicated to protecting the lands and waters on which all life depends. TNC's Land, Oceans, Water, and Climate Program has worked together with partners

to protect over 1.4 million acres of land and 3.8 million acres of sea floor. Further, in fiscal year 2024, TNC secured more than \$756 million in public funding, with a portion directed toward Ocean Recovery initiatives, underscoring the organization's proven capacity to deliver measurable impact in marine conservation. Recent successful applications reflect this momentum, including an ~\$18 million dollar grant from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for the Pacific Coast Ocean Restoration Project and a \$1.7 million dollar grant from California Sea Grant for Accelerating Kelp Research & Restoration in California Project.

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 it will build public engagement in nature-based adaptation projects that include Olympia oyster restoration. The native Olympia oyster provides many benefits to humans and wildlife as they buffer wave energy along the shoreline, filter and clean estuarine waters, and create biological hotspots for fish and wildlife. The project is feasible with an experienced grantee, TNC, capable of achieving the goal of increasing public awareness about the history and importance of the native oyster. The project leverages funding TNC is currently contributing to developing the webstory with Above/Below that will be used in marketing and social media activities.

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.

TNC, in coordination with Team Oly, will conduct outreach to tribes and tribal organizations early in the project, to gauge their interest and resources they would need to participate in this effort. Tribal participation could include, but is not limited to, the co-development of education materials, content, and outreach events. Members of Team Oly have experience working with tribes across the state on ocean conservation and restoration efforts, including on Olympia oyster conservation. For example, EOS is engaging local tribes in its workforce development program with 10 Bay Area community colleges providing stipends to tribal youth to participate in the program (Exhibit 3).

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

TNC is committed to scaling living shorelines that incorporate Olympia oyster restoration across the state to provide resilience to the impacts of storms and sea level rise, while providing many other ecosystem benefits of Olympia oysters. The proposed project will help advance current and future Olympia oyster restoration and climate resilience projects across the San Francisco

Bay Area. In a future project, messaging and content developed may be adapted to reach communities across California to support the recovery of Olympia oysters and provide education on nature-based approaches.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

Incorporating Olympia oyster restoration in living shoreline projects not only buffers wave energy along the shoreline from storms and sea level rise, but also supports local fisheries, improves water quality, and enhances recreational and educational opportunities along the coast. Pilot living shoreline projects in San Francisco Bay Area demonstrate several, significant benefits with sites providing shoreline protection and habitat for seaweed, invertebrates, fish, and other wildlife. To maximize these benefits, living shoreline projects need to be scaled up, and the project will help increase public awareness and support Olympia oyster restoration.

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

Activities in this proposed project have been developed over a year of collaboration with Team Oly. As part of Team Oly’s activities, the design and science communication team at Above/Below have conducted interviews with academics, government agencies, and non-profits involved in living shoreline planning and implementation in the San Francisco Bay Area to inform project direction, messaging, and design.

Team Oly’s goal is to develop meaningful community engagement through public education and outreach. The project will join Team Oly coalition member events as a co-sponsor to share information on the history and benefits and native oyster restoration. The project will promote and feature events on social media and through digital advertising. The content developed through the project will be freely accessible, including “The Alluring World of Olympia Oysters” webstory and content on social media. The project webstory will have a sign-up page for community members and organizations to join the Team Oly coalition if they are inspired by the outreach and events.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$445,000
The Nature Conservancy	\$125,000
Project Total	\$570,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for the project is a fiscal year 25-26 appropriation of the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 also known as the 2024 Climate Bond or Proposition 4 (codified at Public Resources Code (PRC), Sections 90000 to 95015). The 2024 Climate Bond makes funds available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to increase coastal and ocean resiliency and to protect coastal lands, waters, communities, natural resources, and urban waterfronts from sea level rise and other climate impacts (PRC Section 92000). The Conservancy may grant funding for coastal resilience projects, including grants to protect, restore, and increase the resilience of bays and explicitly including projects under Division 21’s Climate Ready Program (PRC Section

92010(a)(1)). The project is consistent with this funding source because it will advance a project under the Climate Ready Program. In addition, the Budget Act of 2025 appropriated \$3,000,000 of Proposition 4 funds to the Conservancy specifically for “projects that support the restoration and enhancement of native oyster beds” (Budget Act of 2025, Chapter 4, Statutes of 2025 (SB 101), as amended by Chapter 104, Statutes of 2025 (SB 105)). The project is consistent with this specific appropriation in the Budget Act because it will implement an education and outreach program that will promote native Olympia oyster restoration and enhancement.

For the initial phase of the project, TNC funded Above/Below for public education and design work, primarily focused on webstory development, for \$125,000 running from March 2025 to March 2026. Above/Below completed a discovery phase, design concepts, the webstory outline, and they purchased a website domain. Beyond creating a resource for public education, the webstory design process facilitated the development of Team Oly.

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 project is consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Climate Ready Program (PRC, Sections 31100 to 31127). Pursuant to Section 31113(a), the Conservancy will administer the Climate Ready Program to address impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy’s jurisdiction; and, pursuant to Section 31113(b), the Conservancy may undertake projects within its jurisdiction that address extreme weather events, sea level rise, storm surge, water intrusion, flooding, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources. Section 31113(d) requires the Conservancy to prioritize projects that use natural infrastructure to help coastal communities adapt to climate change. The project is consistent with Section 31113 because by educating the public about the benefits of native oysters in Bay, the project will promote ecological restoration of San Francisco Bay as a nature-based solution to storm and sea level rise-induced wave energy.

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

Consistent with **Goal 3.2, Restore or Enhance Habitats**, the proposed project will encourage regulatory and public support for oyster habitat restoration.

Consistent with **Goal 4.1, Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects**, the proposed project supports oyster reef projects, which can provide important shoreline defense against sea level rise.

Consistent with **Goal 4.3, Multi-benefit Nature-Based Climate Adaptation**, the proposed project supports native oyster reef restoration projects, which use nature-based elements to provide shoreline defense and habitat.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR), Section 15322 (Educational or Training Programs Involving No Physical Changes), which exempts projects that adopt or alter educational or training programs that involve no physical alteration in the area affected or which involve physical changes only in the interior of existing school or training structures, such as development of or changes in curriculum or training methods. The project involves public education and outreach on the history and benefits of the native Olympia oyster with the hopes of fostering public support for nature-based approaches to shoreline protection and recovering Olympia oysters; thus, the project is consistent with Section 15322.

The project is also exempt from review under the CEQA, pursuant to Title 14 of the CCR, Section 15061(b)(3) (Common Sense), which exempts projects that that can be seen with certainty as having no possibility of having a significant effect on the environment. The project consists of education and outreach; thus, the project can be seen with certainty as having no possibility of having a significant effect on the environment.

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