

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 20, 2025

HUMBOLDT COASTAL NATURE CENTER: EXPANSION

Project No. 06-060-04
Project Manager: Michael Bowen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$431,500 to Friends of the Dunes to acquire 6.52 acres of property adjacent to the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center at 150 Stamps Lane for public access, including potential low-cost overnight accommodations, and for habitat protection, restoration and enhancement; and to develop a habitat restoration and public access plan for the property in Manila, Humboldt County.

LOCATION: 150 Stamps Lane, Humboldt Coastal Nature Center, Manila, Humboldt County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)
Exhibit 3: [June 29, 2006 Staff Recommendation](#)
Exhibit 4: [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 (the “Conservancy”) hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed four hundred thirty-one thousand and five hundred dollars (\$431,500) to Friends of the Dunes (the “grantee”) to acquire 6.52 acres of property adjacent to the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center at 150 Stamps Lane for public access, including potential low-cost overnight accommodations, and for habitat protection, restoration and enhancement; and to develop a habitat restoration and public access plan for the property; in Manila, Humboldt County.

Prior to commencement of the planning portion 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, if required by the funding source, the source of that funding.
4. Evidence that the acquisition is complete.

The acquisition portion of the project is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds for the acquisition, the grantee shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer:
 - a. All relevant acquisition documents for the acquisition including, without limitation, the appraisal, purchase and sale agreement, deed, escrow instructions, environmental or hazardous materials assessment, and title report;
 - b. A baseline conditions report; and
 - c. Evidence that sufficient funds are available to complete the acquisition.
2. The grantee shall pay no more than fair market value for the property as established in an appraisal approved by the Executive Officer.
3. The property acquired under this authorization shall be managed and operated for public access, including potential low-cost overnight accommodations, and for habitat protection, restoration and enhancement. The property shall be permanently dedicated to those purposes by an appropriate instrument approved by the Executive Officer. In addition, to the extent appropriate, the grantee shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's Coastal Access Project Standards.
4. Conservancy funding shall be acknowledged by erecting and maintaining a sign on the property or in a nearby publicly viewable area, the design and location of which are to be approved by the Executive Officer.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. Friends of the Dunes 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 a grant of up to \$431,500 to Friends of the Dunes ("FOD") to acquire 6.52 acres of property adjacent to the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center ("Nature Center") at 150 Stamps Lane (the "property") for public access, including potential low-cost overnight accommodations, and for habitat protection, restoration and enhancement; and to develop a habitat restoration and public access plan for the property, which is located in Manila, Humboldt County. See Exhibit 1 for project location. Collectively, the acquisition of the property and the development of the habit restoration and public access plan for the property are referred to as the "project." The project will expand and enhance the Nature Center property, advance goals of acquiring and restoring property on the Samoa Peninsula, and expand public access opportunities.

Incrementally and methodically, frequently with the support of the Conservancy, FOD has protected and restored hundreds of acres of rare and accessible dune habitat on the Samoa Peninsula. The Conservancy has supported FOD in many of its acquisitions, restoration efforts, and resilience studies, including the purchase of what is now the Nature Center from the Stamps Family in 2006, Samoa Dunes and Wetlands acquisition, and various public access projects. As a result of FOD's foresight and activity, a significant portion of the peninsula is protected and available to the public, within a short drive from the cities of Eureka and Arcata.

The property consists primarily of open space adjacent to the Nature Center. The open space historically was, and with property restoration could be, wetlands and dune forest. Now, however, there are several structures on the property: a former single-family residence, a detached garage, and a shed, the latter two of which FOD expects to remove. There are also multiple slab foundations which formerly supported barns, sheds, and chicken coop.

In recent years, the property was purchased, abandoned, foreclosed upon and subsequently became blighted, littered with trash, and tagged with graffiti. Even though the debris at the property has been cleaned up, the tagged and boarded-up structures remain an eyesore to those visiting the Nature Center and negatively impact the visual landscape. Upon acquisition of the property, the garage and shed may be demolished and removed based on the planning component of the project. While the feasibility of renovating the existing house has yet to be determined, the proximity of the property to the Nature Center and its trails presents an appealing opportunity to both restore habitat and explore the potential to develop the house into low-cost overnight accommodations for visitors seeking access to the coast.

In addition to the acquisition, the project also includes development of a habitat restoration and public access plan that will include a feasibility study for Lower Cost Overnight Accommodation (LCOA). The plan will investigate the next steps for the property, including the potential for LCOA and educational facilities, such as outdoor classrooms. It will develop recommendations for future use of the house, assess associated costs, identify potential areas for restoration, and propose trail connections to link the existing Nature Center and California Coastal Trail system with Ma-le'l Dunes South. Additionally, the plan will evaluate the possibility

of relocating the driveway/turn-off from Highway 255 to provide direct access to the Nature Center parking lot.

The Nature Center is a hub of community activity for the greater Eureka area. Native plant restoration projects, coastal cleanups, nature hikes and other activities originate from this popular facility. The trail network provides a convenient connector to the California Coastal Trail on the North Spit. The California Coastal Trail extends along the beach in nearby Manila. There are also plans for a spur of the Great Redwood Trail, locally part of the Humboldt Bay Trail, to be developed along the existing rail corridor directly across Highway 255 from the property. The property is an ideal location for long-distance bikers or hikers to stop for overnight accommodation, as there are few options on the Samoa Peninsula. Acquisition of the property will increase capacity to provide such services activities to tourists and the local community.

Site Description: The property is located at 150 Stamps Lane, in the unincorporated community of Manila, and is adjacent to the Nature Center. In order to access the Nature Center, many visitors must drive past the property along the Nature Center access road. A portion of the property is zoned for natural resources and includes rare hooker willow wetlands. Historically, photographs show that the property was once a forested area with coastal maritime forest and wetlands. The property now contains a house that is not currently habitable and two small outbuildings (the garage and shed). While there are no existing public access amenities, the property is bordered on three sides by FOD lands and will provide connections to the current trail system. Slabs and footings of former outbuildings (chicken coop, barns, and sheds) remain on the property (Exhibit 2). The property is also near the recently acquired Digawututklh property (formerly Samoa Dunes and Wetlands), acquired by FOD with the support of the Conservancy and Wildlife Conservation Board and transferred to the Wiyot Tribe in early 2025.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: FOD has either received or been directly involved in nearly a dozen Conservancy grants, including acquisition, planning, and restoration grants, and has demonstrated the capability of administering public funds efficiently and effectively. The cooperation between FOD and the Conservancy extends back to the original acquisition of the Stamps Property in 2006 (Exhibit 3).

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 acquisition of the property will significantly improve public access to the coast through enhancement of the Nature Center, as the currently abandoned and blighted property is located on the Nature Center access road leading to the Nature Center. Adding this property to

the Nature Center will improve visitor access, dramatically improve the coastal viewshed in the immediate area, add additional trailheads, and eventually restore coastal habitats. The cost for acquisition and planning is reasonable.

FOD has a proven record of securing state and local grants to support projects and generating funds from private donors. It has also demonstrated a remarkable ability to galvanize the local community for volunteer service on invasive species control, native plant revegetation and coastal cleanup events. Its ability to leverage local philanthropy and volunteer service makes this authorization a good investment of state resources.

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.

FOD has a strong relationship with the Wiyot Tribe. FOD recently worked with the Wiyot Tribe to transfer Diagwatutklh, the former Samoa Dunes and Wetlands Conservation Area, to the Tribe and is working on a memorandum of understanding to guide future collaboration. FOD is currently working collaboratively with the Wiyot Tribe to develop an interpretive exhibit at the Nature Center focused on the Wiyot People's ongoing reciprocal relationship with the land. The Wiyot Tribe tribal administrator recently expressed support for acquisition of the property. FOD will continue to be in dialogue with the Wiyot Tribe throughout the development of the plan for habitat restoration and public access on the property.

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

Restoring wetland and dune habitats has been proven to aid in coastal resiliency by providing ecosystem services such as wave attenuation and flood protection. While the property will not provide those services directly due to its distance from the bay and ocean shores, it is part of the significant complex of dunes and wetlands on the North Spit of Humboldt Bay and will add to the resiliency of that habitat complex. While the property is at a relatively low elevation and is located within the tsunami zone, habitats restored on the property will be resilient to future sea level rise and will be able to migrate upslope. Any future overnight accommodation developed on the property will be designed to be resilient over their lifespan, which will be included in the plan's feasibility study.

As noted above, the project will provide public access and habitat benefits. These benefits and improvements will be resilient throughout the lifespan of this project and beyond.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

A short distance from both Eureka and Arcata, and proximate to Manila, all of which host disadvantaged communities, the Nature Center and nearby trail network is an extremely accessible and highly popular destination for hikers, birders, horseback riders and, since transfer of Diagwututklh, a cultural resource site.

This project provides multiple benefits and a significant positive impact. These benefits include a plan for the restoration of a rare coastal forest and freshwater wetlands habitats, improved public access to the coast at the Nature Center, and a completed feasibility study for additional public access improvements, such as trail connectivity and overnight accommodations.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$431,500
Project Total	\$431,500

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/2023 appropriation 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. Chapter 9 of Proposition 68 allows funds for “protection of beaches, bays, wetlands, and coastal watershed resources” in accordance with Division 21 and for “protection, restoration, and improvement of coastal forest watersheds” (Section 80120(c), (e)). “Protection” includes acquisitions and actions necessary to improve access to public open-space areas (Section 80002(l)). This project is consistent with Chapter 9 because it will protect open space for potential habitat restoration, will protect open space for public access, and will plan for restoration and enhancement of natural resources and fish and wildlife habitat. Additionally, the project creates the potential for future public, lower-cost overnight accommodation in support of Section 30213 of the Coastal Act. 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. FOD has contributed \$4,000 in pre-acquisition costs, including appraisal and legal costs associated with the transaction.

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 (Section 31400 *et seq.*) of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state’s coastline.

Under Section 31400, the Legislature has charged the Conservancy with a principal role in the implementation of a system of accessways to and along the state’s coastline. Consistent with this section, the proposed project will support expansion and improvement of an important gateway to a network of beach and dune forest trails previously acquired in part with Conservancy funding.

Pursuant to Section 31400.1, the Conservancy may award grants to a nonprofit organization to develop, operate, and manage land for public access purposes to and along the coast. The proposed project will enable FOD, a nonprofit organization, to acquire and then plan for the expansion, management and improvement of an existing public access site and adjacent

parking area and ensure appropriate use of the site. Thus, the proposed project will enable FOD to develop, operate and manage lands for public access to and along the coast.

Pursuant to Section 31400.3, the Conservancy may provide such assistance as is required to aid nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways and related functions. The proposed authorization will enable FOD to acquire, expand and maintain and improve existing trails and parking at Samoa Dunes and Wetlands to ensure safe access to the beach, while also exploring the feasibility of providing lower cost overnight accommodation along the coast consistent with Section 30213 of the Coastal Act.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2.5, Enhance Recreational Amenities**, the proposed project will acquire, expand and improve the entrance to Nature Center.

Consistent with **Goal 2.7, Explore the Coast Overnight** –the project will provide both site control and one feasibility plan to increase strategically the variety and amount of lower-cost coastal accommodations and programs to connect lower-income Californians with those accommodations in order to reduce barriers to accessing and enjoying the coast. Humboldt Bay does not currently offer indoor lower cost overnight accommodation or non-RV camping at a site near the coast, and this property may be able to provide those opportunities.

Consistent with **Goal 3.1, Conserve Land**, the proposed project will acquire and facilitate restoration of 6.52 acres of land to protect resource lands and enhance a popular public access area.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed acquisition is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations Section 15325 because the project involves the transfer of ownership interests in land to preserve land for park purposes and to preserve and restore natural conditions, including plant or animal habitats. The property will be acquired to protect existing habitats, restore habitat and plan for public access improvements. The property will be considered for lower cost overnight accommodation, but feasibility of that use has not yet been determined. CEQA will be complied with prior to any development of the property

The planning component of the project is statutorily exempt from CEQA, pursuant to Section 15262 of Title 14 of the CCR, which exempts planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted, or funded; and categorically exempt under CEQA, pursuant to Section 15306 of Title 14 of the CCR, which exempts basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities. The project includes preparing a habitat restoration and public access plan; thus, the project involves planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded and basic data collection, research, and/or resource evaluation activities. Consistent with Sections 15262 and 15306, the project will consider environmental factors and not include activities that will result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

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