

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
February 19, 2026

TOLAY CREEK BAYLANDS RESTORATION PLANNING PROJECT

Project No. 23-086-01
Project Manager: Sara Haugen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$121,000 to Sonoma Land Trust to augment the grant of \$1,241,000 authorized by the Conservancy on February 15, 2024 and subsequently augmented by \$170,500 to plan for ecological restoration of 280 acres of baylands and alluvial fan in the Tolay Creek Baylands in Sonoma County by conducting community engagement, preparing preliminary designs and environmental compliance documents, and developing a permitting strategy. This augmentation is needed to allow for payment of indirect costs.

LOCATION: Tolay Creek Baylands, Sonoma County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Tolay Creek Baylands Restoration Planning Project](#) (February 15, 2024 Staff Recommendation)

Exhibit 2: [Revised Project Location Map](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

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

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred twenty one thousand dollars (\$121,000) to Sonoma Land Trust to augment the Conservancy grant that was authorized on February 15, 2024 of \$1,241,000 for planning the ecological restoration of 337 acres of baylands and alluvial fan in the Tolay Creek Baylands in Sonoma County by conducting community engagement, preparing preliminary designs and environmental compliance documents, and developing a permitting strategy. The Executive Officer subsequently authorized a reduction in project area to 280 acres and increase of the grant amount by \$170,500 due to increased scope of the environmental compliance work. With this augmentation, the total grant amount for the project is \$1,532,500. This authorization is

subject to the same conditions as set forth in the Conservancy's February 15, 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 the Climate Ready Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. Sonoma Land Trust 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 an augmentation of up to \$121,000 of the Conservancy grant to Sonoma Land Trust (SLT) that was authorized by the Conservancy on February 15, 2024 as \$1,241,000 and subsequently augmented by the Executive Officer by \$170,500 to plan for ecological restoration of 280 acres (originally 337 acres) of baylands and alluvial fan in the Tolay Creek Baylands in Sonoma County by conducting community engagement, preparing preliminary designs and environmental compliance documents, and developing a permitting strategy (Exhibit 1). This augmentation is needed to pay for SLT's indirect costs.

The Tolay Creek Baylands Restoration Planning Project (the "project") consists of planning restoration of a 280-acre project area that is expected to benefit a larger planning area that includes downstream lands and waters that will potentially be positively impacted by increased tidal flows associated with the restoration of the project area. The project area comprises the 196-acre Tolay Creek Unit North of the Napa-Sonoma Marshes Wildlife Area, owned by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and roughly 82 acres of creek channel owned by the California State Lands Commission (SLC) (Exhibit 2). As described in Exhibit 1, the scope of the project area when originally authorized for a grant included 59 acres of private land held by a single landowner. The landowner has since declined to participate in this phase of the project pending results of the environmental review. The Executive Officer authorized the reduction in project area because the 59 acres were not critical to restoration of the remaining 280 acres and the goals of improving habitat could still be achieved. SLT has secured the right to access CDFW lands for restoration planning and is applying for a lease to access SLC lands.

The project consists of conducting outreach and preliminary plan development, preparing engineering designs and environmental compliance documentation for restoration of tidal wetland, alluvial fan, and associated habitats, and examining opportunities for public access and improved flood protection. The project includes mapping and assessing existing access

points, trails, and recreational opportunities, including Bay Trail integration, relevant to restoration planning. As of the initial authorization in 2024, SLT negotiated with the private landowner for access to their property to conduct studies, which caused a delay to the start of the project, and as noted above the landowner declined to participate in the project at this phase. Otherwise, SLT has been preparing scopes of work and budgets for subcontractors, as well as communicating with surrounding landowners and stakeholders including CDFW, Sonoma County Regional Parks, Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, Metropolitan Transportation Commission, Caltrans, and Sonoma Raceway.

In June of 2025, the Executive Officer used her delegated authority to authorize an augmentation of \$170,500 to expand the environmental review tasks to include groundwater studies. Now, SLT has requested additional funds to correct its miscalculation of indirect costs. This augmentation will bring the indirect cost percentage up from less than 1% to 9%.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, as described in the February 15, 2024 staff recommendation (Exhibit 1).

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$121,000
Coastal Conservancy (February 15, 2024 authorization)	\$1,241,200
Coastal Conservancy (Executive Officer authorization)	\$170,500
Project Total	\$1,532,700

It is anticipated that the Conservancy's funding will come from a FY23/24 appropriation of General Funds to the Conservancy for "urgent sea-level level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies." (Budget Act of 2023 (SB 101).) The proposed project qualifies for use of these funds because it will advance coastal resilience by planning for restoration of tidal wetlands and connecting them with an adjacent alluvial fan and upland transition zone, which will address sea level rise by providing sediment for marsh accretion and space for marsh migration.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation as described in the February 15, 2024 staff recommendation (Exhibit 1).

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

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan as described in the February 15, 2024 staff recommendation (Exhibit 1).

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project remains exempt from CEQA as described in the February 15, 2024 staff recommendation (Exhibit 1).