COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
February 19, 2026

TUNITAS CREEK BEACH PUBLIC ACCESS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT – AUGMENTATION

Project No. 17-010-01
Project Manager: Erin Gravley/Hilary Hill

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to $950,000 to San Mateo County to augment the Conservancy grant previously authorized on March 24, 2022 for construction of public access improvements and visitor-serving amenities at the Don Horsley Park at Tunitas Creek Beach in San Mateo County, expansion of the project to include stabilization of two hillslopes above Tunitas Creek to protect the public access improvements, and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

LOCATION: Don Horsley Park at Tunitas Creek Beach, Half Moon Bay, San Mateo County (Exhibit 1)

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location Map

Exhibit 2: March 24, 2022 Staff Recommendation

Exhibit 3: Project Photos

Exhibit 4: County of San Mateo Routine Maintenance Program Final Environmental Impact Report

Exhibit 5: County of San Mateo Routine Maintenance Program Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program

Exhibit 6: County of San Mateo Routine Maintenance Program Manual Best Management Practices

Exhibit 7: Project Letters

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 nine hundred fifty thousand dollars ($950,000) to San Mateo County (the "grantee") to augment the grant previously authorized on March 24, 2022 for construction of public access improvements and visitor-serving amenities at the Don Horsley Park at Tunitas Creek Beach in San Mateo County, for a total authorized amount of three million eight hundred eighty four thousand eight hundred ninety two dollars ($3,884,892), and expansion of the project to include stabilization of two hillslopes above Tunitas Creek to protect the public access improvements.

Findings:

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

1. The proposed authorization remains consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
2. The proposed project remains consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the County of San Mateo Routine Maintenance Program (EIR) certified by the County of San Mateo on September 16, 2020 pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 4. The Conservancy has also reviewed the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program adopted by the County of San Mateo on September 16, 2020 and attached to the accompanying recommendation as Exhibit 5. The Conservancy finds, as described further in the accompanying staff recommendation, that:
    a. The landslide stabilization measures will have potentially significant environmental effects in the areas of biological resources and hazardous materials. The Conservancy finds that the mitigation measures identified in the EIR will avoid, reduce, or mitigate these possible significant environmental effects of the landslide stabilization to less-than-significant levels and that these mitigation measures have been required or incorporated into the project.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize disbursement of $950,000 to San Mateo County (County) to augment the $2,934,892 Conservancy grant previously authorized on March 24, 2022 to construct public access facilities and visitor-serving amenities at the Don Horsley Park at Tunitas Creek Beach in San Mateo County (the project), and to expand the project to include stabilization of two hillslopes above Tunitas Creek to protect the public access improvements.

The project will allow County Parks to open Tunitas Creek Beach to the public for the first time. Construction began in Fall 2023 and concluded in January of 2026. The project constructed a parking lot offering unobstructed coastal views and electric vehicle charging stations; a loop

trail with rest stops and an overlook; a tiered seating area; an on-site ranger station; restrooms; a beach access pathway doubling as an emergency vehicle roadway (the beach access road); and restored landscapes and habitat.

However, two landslides located near each other on the hillslope above Tunitas Creek occurred at the project site during heavy winter rainfall in early 2025. While the landslides were not related to construction, the resulting slide impacted the project footprint area. The slope failure caused loss of soil and vegetation on the upper slope to be deposited over the downslope section near the beach and Tunitas Creek (Exhibit 3). The hillslope at the site is currently covered in plastic tarps, and without stabilization is at risk of further slope failure. County Public Works engineers found that as creek levels rise in Tunitas Creek, the creek will undercut the toe of the hillslope, exacerbating slide conditions. Without conducting stabilization measures, the beach access road cannot be used safely. Additionally, the bottom of the slide will continue to erode, causing the top of the slide to continue to retreat and further jeopardizing the beach access road. As this roadway is necessary to provide emergency vehicle access to the beach, the newly constructed Don Horsley Park at Tunitas Creek Beach cannot be opened to the public until the hillslopes are stabilized.

The project is expanded to include the following hillslope stabilization measures. At the eastern landslide, the County will install a soil nail pinned mesh system from the top of the slope and through the landslide area. The lower portion of the slope will be covered with an erosion control fabric for vegetation to reestablish. At the western slide, the County will install a soil nail supported structural shotcrete wall system across the landslide area and up to the toe of the slope below the access road. Both stabilization solutions are considered long-term slope stabilization systems, designed to restrict future slide movement. The western landslide solution will support the upper portion of the beach access road.

The hillslope stabilization component of the project includes construction, construction management, and surveying and inspections during construction.

Site Description: The two landslides are located on a hillslope below the beach access road and above Tunitas Creek. More information on the Don Horsley County Park at Tunitas Creek Beach location can be found in Exhibit 2.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: See Exhibit 2.

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 March 24, 2022 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	**$950,000**

Coastal Conservancy (SCC Board 2022 authorization)	$2,934,892
Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST)	$2,245,000
San Mateo County	$2,500,000
California State Parks Prop 68 Per Capita	$828,430
Project Total	**$11,700,000**

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2023/24 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy to address "urgent sea-level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies" (The Budget Act of 2023, Chapter 38, Statutes of 2023 (AB 102)). The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it will stabilize a hillslope that is vulnerable to landslides from gullying, bluff erosion, and other effects of climate change driven increases in rainfall intensities and sea-level rise. Without near-term stabilization, the hillside is vulnerable to further erosion. The hillslope is below a roadway that is necessary for emergency vehicle access at Tunitas Creek Beach. Stabilization of this hillslope is essential to opening the 58-acre park, which features public access amenities and conserved coastal habitat. San Mateo County will contribute an additional $500,000 to pay for hillslope stabilization, for a total County contribution of $2,500,000 for construction. In-kind services were provided to develop the landslide stabilization solution and designs.

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 remains consistent with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation as described in the March 24, 2022 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN:

Consistent with **Goal 2.5 Recreational Facilities & Amenities**, the proposed project will complete construction of a brand new park facility with associated recreational amenities.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

On September 16, 2020, the County of San Mateo certified the County of San Mateo Routine Maintenance Program (RMP) Environmental Impact Report (Final EIR) (Exhibit 4) and adopted a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (Exhibit 5). The EIR evaluated the potential environmental impacts associated with conducting the routine maintenance activities

described in the RMP. The proposed hillslope stabilization falls under the activities in the RMP under the category of roadway slip-out and slide repair. The environmental effects of the hillslope stabilization are therefore analyzed in the Final EIR. For purposes of this discussion, the hillslope stabilization is referred to as the project.

The Final EIR indicated that the RMP will have potentially significant environmental effects in the areas of air quality, biological resources, hazardous materials, and noise. The Final EIR identified mitigation measures that will reduce to less than significant each of the potentially significant effects. The RMP Final EIR found that the RMP activities will not have any significant unavoidable environmental effects. For the project, the County determined that the potential effects of the project, as identified in the Final EIR, are in the areas of biological resources and hazardous materials.

Biological Resources

The project site is in a coastal area that supports sensitive habitats and provides potential habitat for special-status species such as burrowing owl, western snowy plover, California red-legged frog, San Francisco garter snake, and steelhead trout. Potential impacts associated with construction of the project include temporary disturbance to habitats due to ground disturbing work and vegetation removal, and increased erosion and sedimentation risk. The project will follow Mitigation Measure BIO-6 (Burrowing Owl Pre-Activity Survey and Avoidance) to protect burrowing owls by conducting pre-activity surveys in suitable habitat within 14 days of ground-disturbing work, avoiding impacts through construction-free buffers or, if necessary, using passive relocation outside the breeding season under qualified biologist supervision.

Hazardous Materials

The project involves ground disturbing work and vegetation removal. The project will follow Mitigation Measure HAZ-1 (Proper Handling and Disposal of Contaminated Soil, Sediment, and Groundwater) to prevent worker exposure and environmental risks by inspecting for contamination before ground-disturbing activities, testing if indicators are present, and properly handling and disposing of contaminated soil, sediment, or groundwater.

The RMP identified a number of Best Management Practices (BMPs) (Exhibit 6). These BMPs identify general construction avoidance and minimization measures as well as measures to protect cultural and biological resources, sensitive habitat, and water quality and prevent erosion and sedimentation impacts. All maintenance activities under the RMP are required to implement BMPs to reduce potential environmental impacts associated with the activity. The project incorporates the following BMPs:

- BMP GEN-2 (Minimize Area of Disturbance and Site Maintenance) limits the area of disturbance to the smallest footprint.
- BMP GEN- 22 (Site Stabilization) requires bare soil surfaces to be covered with suitable erosion control.
- BMP EC-9 (Vegetative Buffer) requires the presence of a vegetative soil buffer.

- BMP EC-10 (Erosion Control Blankets and Mats) requires use of erosion control blankets and mats to provide stabilization and protection on steep slopes.
- BMP EC-13 calls for use of biotechnical methods, but allows for hardened engineering solutions where biotechnical methods are deemed unsuitable, such as in the case of the project, to prevent additional failure, and requires incorporating vegetated rock slopes to the extent feasible.
- BMP SC-2 (Silt Fence) requires installation of a temporary sediment barrier.
- BMPs BIO-3 through BIO-6, BIO-8 through BIO-10, BIO-12 through BIO-15, and BIO-22 requires implementation of species protection measures for California Red-legged frog, California Tiger Salamander, San Francisco Garter Snake, Foothill Yellow-legged Frog, California Giant Salamander, Western Pond Turtle, Dusky-footed Woodrats, nesting migratory birds, nesting Marbled Murrelet, special-status butterflies, California Ridgway's Rail, bat colonies, nesting Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle, and Western Snowy Plover.
- BMP BIO-7 (Check for Wildlife in Pipes/Construction Materials) requires that construction equipment and materials are checked for the presence of wildlife prior to being moved.
- BMP BIO-11 (Non-native Aquatic Plant Removal) requires that non-native plants found during construction are properly disposed of; BIO-18 (Invasive Plant Control) requires several protection measures, such as cleaning equipment, to minimize the spread of invasive plants; and BIO-24 (Pathogen Control) requires several protection measures, such as cleaning equipment, to minimize the spread of plant and animal pathogens.

With implementation of these BMPs and the project's mitigation measures, environmental effects to biological resources and hazardous materials will be less than significant. Staff recommends that the Conservancy find that the project as mitigated avoids, reduces or mitigates the potentially significant environmental effects to a level of 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.