

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
February 19, 2026

OSPREY HILL RANCH ACQUISITION

Project No. 25-057-01
Project Manager: Louisa Morris

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$3,050,000 to Sonoma Land Trust for the Osprey Hill Ranch Acquisition Project, consisting of acquisition of a 365-acre ranch for public access and for natural resources, habitat, open space, agriculture, and cultural resources protection, restoration, and management in Sonoma County.

LOCATION: Four miles north of Village of Bodega Bay, on Sonoma Coast

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [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 a grant of an amount not to exceed three million fifty thousand dollars (\$3,050,000) to Sonoma Land Trust ("the grantee") for the Osprey Hill Ranch Acquisition Project, consisting of acquisition of a 365-acre ranch, Assessor's Parcel Number 101-130-013, for public access and for natural resources, habitat, open space, working lands, and cultural resources protection, restoration, and management in Sonoma County, 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 of the Conservancy (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;

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- 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 the purposes of public access and for natural resources, habitat, open space, working lands, and cultural resources protection, restoration, and management. The property shall be permanently dedicated to those purposes by an appropriate instrument approved by the Executive Officer.
4. Conservancy Proposition 4 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.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, this Conservancy resolution is effective only if legislation is enacted that exempts program guidelines and selection criteria for the disbursement of funds from the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (“Proposition 4”), Public Resources Code Sections 90000-95015, from the requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act at Government Code sections 11340-11361.

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 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding a system of public accessways.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The 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 a \$3,050,000 grant to the Sonoma Land Trust (“SLT”) for the Osprey Hill Ranch Acquisition Project, consisting of acquisition of a 365-acre ranch for public access and for natural resources, habitat, open space, working lands, and cultural resources protection, restoration, and management (the “project”), located four miles north of the Village of Bodega Bay, in Sonoma County (Exhibit 1).

This acquisition will provide new public access and recreational opportunities by allowing for the extension of the California Coastal Trail and the creation of connecting trails, for a total of approximately two miles of new public trails to adjacent State and Regional parklands, including beaches, coastal bluffs, and coastal range mountains.

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The project will result in permanent protection of 365 acres within the regionally significant Coast Range-Marin Coast Wildlife Corridor. This consists of approximately 275 acres of perennial coastal grassland, 50 acres of coyote brush, 18 acres of freshwater marsh, 8 acres of Douglas-fir forest, 7 acres of riparian scrub, and approximately one mile of streams, providing habitat for a wide variety of wildlife, including special status species. Protection of Osprey Hill Ranch will protect water quality and flows in approximately 200 feet of Scotty Creek and 0.4 miles of tributaries to Scotty Creek, which is designated as a priority stream by California Department of Fish and Wildlife, due to the presence of steelhead trout and historic runs of coho salmon.

In parallel with this acquisition project, SLT will begin preparation of a Stewardship and Public Access Plan to guide recreation, agricultural use, restoration, educational programming, and cultural resource protection. This plan will identify and provide goals for property management. While this project includes only the acquisition, SLT will provide this draft Plan to Conservancy staff for review and comment.

Post-acquisition, SLT plans to manage and restore the various natural resources on the property, including riparian, wetlands, and grasslands. The restoration is not part of the scope of this acquisition project. SLT will explore, develop, and implement sustainable grazing practices to enhance grasslands, increase biodiversity, sequester additional carbon, improve climate resilience, and benefit the local economy. In addition, SLT will protect and maintain the historic barns and homestead area in this highly visible and scenic stretch of Highway One.

SLT places high priority on tribal engagement and is working closely with two local tribes, the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria and the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of Stewarts Point Rancheria. SLT will continue to engage and collaborate with the broader community and partners, so that this acquisition provides benefit to the public, adjacent parkland managers, tribes, residents, and visitors to the Sonoma Coast.

Site Description:

The Osprey Hill Ranch property is a picturesque 365-acre ranch on the Sonoma Coast, located four miles north of Bodega Bay. It consists of steep, coastal terrace grasslands with seasonal drainages, freshwater marshes, riparian forest, and numerous springs and seeps. The property is near several public coastal access points, including Gleason Overlook and Rock Point Beach. It is adjacent to the 10,000-acre Sonoma Coast State Park, 910-acre Red Hill (part of Sonoma Coast State Park), and the 1,236-acre Wright Hill Regional Park and Open Space Preserve. Osprey Hill Ranch fills a critical gap in a mosaic of 22,000 acres of protected land on the Sonoma Coast. Owned by the Hendren family since 1958, the property has been used primarily for cattle grazing. Its historic barns and homestead area provide scenic value and are visible from Highway 1.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: SLT was founded in 1976 and has conserved over 61,000 acres of land and water resources. An accredited land trust, SLT was awarded the Land Trust Alliance's 2019 National Land Trust Excellence Award, in recognition of its conservation leadership. SLT has a decades-long history of shared success, with completed projects including

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Sears Point Restoration and Stewardship, Jenner Headlands, Preservation Ranch, Howlett Ranch, Estero Ranch, McCormick Ranch, Gloeckner-Turner Ranch, Camp 4, and Kiser Ranch. SLT has proven to be a creative and dependable conservation partner on the Sonoma Coast, acquiring and stewarding some of the most ecologically significant coastal properties between Jenner and Bodega Bay. SLT has over 45 years' experience with planning and implementing land stewardship, including management, maintenance, and monitoring. SLT is qualified to complete this acquisition and committed to ongoing stewardship of Osprey Hill Ranch.

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 project leverages significant non-state partner funding to protect an important and iconic ranch on the Sonoma Coast, which is adjacent to State and Regional Parks on three sides. Acquisition of Osprey Hill Ranch protects the property in perpetuity against development, preserving public access and the property's ecological function, habitat connectivity, and climate change resiliency benefits. It advances the State's 30x30 Executive Order by conserving 365 acres of largely undeveloped coastline, including iconic and historic barns and ranch buildings.

- 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.**

SLT is committed to engagement, partnership, and collaboration with tribal governments and representatives during the acquisition, planning, restoration, and stewardship phases of the Project. SLT has a strong track record of consulting with tribes regarding land stewardship practices for cultural site protection. Osprey Hill Ranch is within the ancestral lands of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria and the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of Stewarts Point Rancheria.

SLT has already completed site visits and meets regularly with the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of Stewarts Point to discuss the Osprey Hill Ranch project. SLT has also discussed the project with the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria's Tribal Historic Preservation Officer and will conduct a site visit with this Tribe. Both tribes are expected to participate in a cultural resource survey to identify key cultural sites. SLT will continue to incorporate tribal guidance into stewardship and public access planning, with the goal of providing tribal access for cultural

practices, natural resource management, food sovereignty projects, and coordinating cultural site protection.

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

The project will protect and steward Osprey Hill Ranch's coastal habitats and working lands through science-based stewardship and an adaptive management framework. Osprey Hill Ranch will provide public access and recreational trail connections to adjacent public lands; these public coastal trails will be sustainably designed and resilient to climate change. Post-acquisition, SLT plans to utilize various stewardship tools, including seasonal and rotational grazing, prescribed burning, ecological vegetation management, and other nature-based management strategies to improve soil health, enhance biodiversity, increase carbon sequestration, and improve wildfire resiliency.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The project will deliver enduring public recreational, scenic, and ecological benefits by expanding Sonoma County's network of protected coastal lands. The project supports goals for equitable coastal access, climate adaptation, and habitat protection and connectivity. Osprey Hill Ranch is immediately adjacent to existing state and county parks, so its acquisition for public benefit, including coastal access and habitat protection, will build on past conservation investments. SLT is committed to a collaborative planning process with neighboring park partners and tribes to plan and implement an extension of the California Coastal Trail. Protecting the property also preserves the scenic integrity and open-space character of the Sonoma Coast, protecting public views between Jenner and Bodega Bay.

The project also provides significant biodiversity, watershed, and climate resilience benefits. Initial surveys have confirmed the property supports several special status species—including American badger, grasshopper sparrow, Bryant's savannah sparrow, and blue violet (*Viola adunca*), the host plant for the federally endangered Myrtle's silverspot butterfly.

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

SLT has conducted outreach to multiple local and state agencies, academic institutions, and non-profit partners regarding the Osprey Hill Ranch acquisition. SLT will continue to develop these partnerships and collaborations, so that Osprey Hill Ranch becomes a coastal preserve that extends and expands the California Coastal Trail, protects cultural resources, enhances a regionally significant wildlife corridor, maintains coastal working lands, and preserves the health of an important coastal watershed.

Project partners engaged to-date include the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of Stewarts Point Rancheria, Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation + Open Space District, Sonoma County Regional Parks, California State Parks, Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District, and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. These collaborations are essential for developing a comprehensive vision for the property, including stewardship, sensitive resource and cultural site protection, restoration, and recreation planning for an extension of the California Coastal Trail and connections to neighboring parklands.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$3,050,000
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation	\$1,800,000
Sonoma County Ag + Open Space (pending)	\$2,500,000
Sonoma Land Trust (pending)	\$700,000
Project Total	\$8,050,000

Conservancy funds are anticipated to come from the Fiscal Year 2025/26 appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (2024 Climate Bond, or Proposition 4), codified at Public Resource Code Sections 90000-95015, to the Conservancy for the purpose of coastal resilience. These funds are available as described in Section 92010 of the Public Resource Code, which sets forth a detailed description of the purposes of Proposition 4 coastal resilience funds. These funds may be used for coastal resilience projects and programs, including, but not limited to, grants and expenditures to protect, restore, and increase the resilience of beaches, bays, coastal dunes, wetlands, coastal forests, watersheds, trails, and public access facilities. “Protection” is defined as those actions necessary to prevent harm or damage to persons, property, or natural, cultural, and historic resources, actions to improve access to public open-space areas, or actions to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural, cultural, and historic resources (Public Resource Code Section 90100(h)). The proposed project is consistent with this funding source, because acquisition of the property will protect it from development, allowing for the continued use and enjoyment of property and natural resources along the coast, as well as facilitating future restoration work to enhance those natural resources. The proposed project will also facilitate development of a portion of the CCT, a trail of statewide significance, thereby improving access to a public open-space area.

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 will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 (Sections 31400 et seq.) of Division 21 of the Public Resource Code. Section 31400.1 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to acquire land, and/or to develop, operate, or manage lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. Consistent with this section, SLT is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 510(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and the proposed project will acquire coastal property that will host a future California Coastal Trail segment, increasing public access to the coast.

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Pursuant to section 31400.2, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of the acquisition of interests in lands and the initial development of public accessways by a nonprofit organization, as determined by the total amount of funding available and the fiscal resources of the applicant. Consistent with this section, the amount of funding proposed for this acquisition has been determined by an analysis of partner funding commitments and fair market value of the property.

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. Consistent with this section, under this project the Conservancy will provide funds to a nonprofit for a property acquisition that will eventually host a segment of the California Coastal Trail.

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

Consistent with **Goal 3.1, Conserve Lands**, the proposed project will protect 365 acres of open space and public access lands, specifically for the California Coastal Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 3.2, Restore or Enhance Habitats**, the proposed project will protect a regionally significant wildlife corridor and SLT plans to further restore the habitat.

Consistent with **Goal 3.3, Working Lands**, the project will support seasonal and rotational grazing.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act under California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15325, which exempts transfers of ownership of land to preserve open space and habitat, with examples including acquisition of areas to preserve existing natural conditions, to allow restoration of natural conditions, and to preserve land for park purposes. Consistent with this section, this project is an acquisition of land that will preserve open space and habitat and facilitate future restoration of natural lands.

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