

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

February 19, 2026

SAN GREGORIO RANCH ACQUISITION

Project No. 25-042-01

Project Manager: Erin Gravley/Tim Duff

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$2,000,000 to the Peninsula Open Space Trust to acquire the 196-acre San Gregorio Ranch to protect, restore, and enhance natural resources and wildlife habitat, including wildlife connectivity, and for public access and compatible agriculture use in San Gregorio, San Mateo County.

LOCATION: San Gregorio, San Mateo County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

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 two million dollars (\$2,000,000) to the Peninsula Open Space Trust (“the grantee”) to acquire the 196-acre San Gregorio Ranch (Assessor’s Parcel Numbers 081-030-060, 081-013-060, 081-013-070, and 081-021-130) to protect, restore, and enhance natural resources and wildlife habitat, including wildlife connectivity, and for public access and compatible agriculture use in San Gregorio, San Mateo County (the “project”), 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, conservation easement, 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 to protect, restore, and enhance natural resources and wildlife habitat, including wildlife connectivity, and for public access and compatible agriculture use. The property shall be permanently dedicated to those purposes by an appropriate instrument approved by the Executive Officer.
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.
5. The grantee must submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer any amendment to its conservation easement over the property.

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 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Peninsula Open Space 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 \$2,000,000 grant to the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) to acquire the 196-acre San Gregorio Ranch (the “property”) to protect, restore, and enhance natural resources and wildlife habitat, including wildlife connectivity, and for public access and compatible agriculture use in San Gregorio, San Mateo County (the “project”). See Exhibit 1 for project location.

San Gregorio Ranch is a stunning property located just north of San Gregorio State Beach on the San Mateo coast. The property is currently owned by the Walter W. Bridge Trust and has been in the Bridge family for several generations. Walter Bridge donated a conservation easement over the property to POST in 1996. The property’s main uses have been for cattle ranching and privately-managed public access to the 1.5 miles of pristine beach that sits immediately adjacent to the property. However, the existing conservation easement allows for increased development on the property, which currently includes a 2,000 square foot residence and two 1,400 square foot caretaker homes.

In 2023, a Bridge Trust representative contacted POST to express interest in selling the property. While POST's conservation easement protects conservation values, if a new private owner developed the property to the fullest extent allowable, the change in land use would negatively impact established habitat for important wildlife species, including listed anadromous fish that rely on San Gregorio Creek. Private ownership would also compromise the coastal access that the public has enjoyed for decades. Acquisition of this property will therefore provide significantly greater protection to the natural resources, wildlife habitat, and public access than the conservation easement.

POST will serve as an interim steward of San Gregorio Ranch, but it plans to eventually transfer the property to the California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) at no cost, dependent on State approval. This acquisition and potential subsequent transfer to State Parks will: a) augment permanent conservation of this property by limiting future residential development, and b) expand existing public access by adding the property to San Gregorio Beach State Park. Permanently removing the threat of additional private development will preserve the biodiversity and habitat values on site and within the San Gregorio Creek Watershed, and additionally protect against sea level rise by allowing for natural erosion. Beyond the scope of this project, POST's long-term vision for this property includes developing a new segment of the California Coastal Trail, assessing the option for dry, rustic camping, and retaining the historic coastal access allowed by the current landowner. In San Mateo County, demand for affordable coastal accommodations, such as camping, far outpaces the supply. The parcel on the east side of Highway 1 has a residence on it, which could serve as ranger housing if and when the property transfers to State Parks, but only as reasonably necessary for the acquisition purposes.

To address the goal of ensuring continuity of public access, POST and State Parks staff from the local district have been meeting twice monthly to develop an interim management plan. POST will lead short-term management and improvement of this property during the acquisition and interim ownership period. POST will work with State Parks to develop and execute a stewardship lease which will allow State Parks to provide continued public access during POST's period of ownership. POST is completing due diligence investigations, ensuring site remediation to State Parks standards, and hiring a land use planning consultant to identify improvements that facilitate safe and immediate public access as soon as possible, and inform long-term management needs. State Parks is working to ensure the property can be ready for transfer and future master plan integration and development.

Upon taking ownership, State Parks will be solely responsible for the long-term management and maintenance of the property. POST will continue to hold the existing conservation easement over the property and will monitor compliance with the easement in perpetuity.

Site Description: San Gregorio Ranch straddles Highway 1 at its junction with Highway 84 in San Mateo County, with about 128 acres west of Highway 1 (nearly 4,500 feet of highway frontage) and roughly 67 acres inland south and north of Highway 84. The property rises from sea level to 500 feet, encompassing rolling hills, grasslands, creek beds lined with riparian vegetation, coastal bluffs, a naturalized pond, and a large beach with over 3,500 feet of coastline. The property contains excellent habitat for California king snakes, California red-legged frogs,

California tiger salamanders, burrowing owls, acorn woodpeckers, and California quail. San Gregorio Creek runs along the property's southern inland edge before discharging into a seasonal coastal lagoon connecting to the Pacific Ocean. The San Gregorio Creek watershed is the second largest watershed in coastal San Mateo County, offering critical habitat for several listed anadromous fish species, including Central California Coast (CCC) coho salmon, tidewater goby, and CCC steelhead trout. San Gregorio Ranch is in the coastal zone and directly abuts San Gregorio State Beach to the south and San Gregorio Farms to the southeast. It is near a mosaic of protected properties in San Mateo County (Exhibit 1).

The property consists of four parcels, each with access from either Highway 1 South, La Honda Road, or both. The largest parcel contains all the acreage west of Highway 1 and a mobile home used as a caretaker's residence. Access to this main parcel is through a gate on Highway 1. For several decades, current landowners have allowed public access for a fee to the coastal bluffs and beach through this entrance. This access is known as "California's oldest nude beach" and holds an important place in the Bay Area's LGBTQ+ history. The parcels on the east side of Highway 1 include a small house, animal shed, and garage. Land use on the inland parcels is limited to residential, grazing, and other agricultural purposes. The property has adjudicated rights to water from San Gregorio Creek not presently utilized, except for minimal stock watering.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: POST has over 45 years of experience in local land preservation and has developed strong relationships with partners to support and complement its work. Since 1977, POST has protected over 93,000 acres of land in San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz counties. These lands are now permanently protected private working lands and public open space and/or park lands held by a variety of city, county, regional, state, and federal agencies. POST holds 44 conservation easements on more than 14,500 acres in its working region. The Conservancy has provided numerous grants to POST over the years.

The plan is for State Parks to own the property long-term and be responsible for maintenance. POST and State Parks are developing an interim management plan to allow for public access while POST retains the property and until State Parks can assume ownership.

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:

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 funding to protect a cherished public resource, with State Parks identified as the eventual long-term owner. It protects the property in perpetuity against development, preserving public access and the property's ecological functions, habitat

connectivity, and climate change resiliency benefits. It advances the state's 30x30 Executive Order by conserving 196 acres of undeveloped coastline.

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.

POST is in conversation with tribal partners to identify opportunities for cultural access and stewardship at the property. As State Parks is the intended permanent owner of this property, POST is also working with State Parks' tribal liaison to find connection points between tribal access and stewardship goals that are in alignment with long-term management.

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

By protecting the property from private development, the project supports ecological function throughout the San Gregorio watershed, provides resilience to future habitat and species range shifts spurred by climate change impacts, and allows for natural bluff erosion which will facilitate beach resilience to sea level rise. After transfer of the lands, State Parks will ensure that future public access amenities contemplated at the site follow State sea-level rise guidance and recommended actions. With sea-level rise resilience in mind, the proposed future location of the California Coastal Trail segment is on a more inland portion of the property.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

Acquisition by POST and subsequent planned transfer to State Parks has many benefits as discussed above. Specifically it will preserve the property's biodiversity and habitat values on site and within the San Gregorio Creek Watershed; preserve the public's coastal access in perpetuity; improve public access to the area, by providing additional parking for and safer access between San Gregorio Ranch and San Gregorio State Beach; increase beach resilience to sea level rise; and facilitate planning for an additional 1.5 miles of California Coastal Trail over the property.

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

San Gregorio Ranch has provided coastal access to the public for over 50 years. Estimates based on entrance fees from 2023-2025 indicate that over 2,000 people visit the property each year. The acquisition and subsequent transfer to State Parks will protect and enhance this public access.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$2,000,000
Peninsula Open Space Trust	\$8,000,000
Project Total	\$10,000,000

Conservancy funds are anticipated to come from two sources. The first is an appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of "urgent sea-level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs" (Budget Act of 2023, Chapter 12, Statutes of 2023 (SB 101) as

amended by Chapter 38, Statutes of 2023 (AB 102)). The coastal resilience funds are available as described in Section 52 of Chapter 258 of the Statutes of 2021, which sets forth a detailed description of the purposes of the coastal resilience funds, including for projects that build resilience for coastal communities, public access, and critical infrastructure. The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it will protect 196 acres of coastal open space, preserving public access, increasing resilience to sea level rise, and precluding a change in land use that would negatively impact established habitat for important wildlife species. The project is considered urgent because the property has potential for development. If POST does not acquire the property, there is a risk that a private buyer would develop it to the fullest extent allowable, negatively impacting habitat for important wildlife species. Private ownership also compromises coastal access that the public has enjoyed for decades.

The second source of Conservancy funds for the proposed project is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoors Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68, California Public Resources Code (PRC) Sections 80000- 80173). PRC Section 80120(c) authorizes use of these funds for the protection of beaches, bays, wetlands, and coastal watershed resources pursuant to Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, including projects to complete the California Coastal Trail pursuant to PRC Section 31408. Consistent with these sections, this acquisition will permanently protect coastal resources and access to the beach and will facilitate the future construction of a new California Coastal Trail segment.

POST will be providing \$8,000,000 for the acquisition for a total purchase price of \$10,000,000. In addition to raising funds to secure the purchase of this property, POST has committed to raising an additional \$4 million to support interim improvements and stewardship actions on the property. POST also plans to complete site remediation needs identified during due diligence investigations.

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 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31165, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy. Section 31162 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area to achieve specified goals of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. These goals include protecting, restoring, and enhancing natural habitats and connecting corridors, (PRC section 31162(b)), assisting in the implementation of the California Coastal Act (PRC section 31162(c)), and promoting, assisting, and enhancing projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations (PRC section 31162(d)).

Consistent with Section 31162, the project is located within the San Francisco Bay Area. Consistent with Section 31162(b), the proposed project will protect natural habitats, and the property will also serve as a connecting corridor to other open space resources of regional importance, such as San Gregorio State Beach and Pomponio State Beach. Consistent with Section 31162(c), the proposed project assists in the implementation of the policies and programs of the California Coastal Act, which calls for maximum public access and recreational opportunities along the coast (PRC Section 30210). Consistent with Section 31162(d), the project will enhance public access to the San Mateo coast, a natural area that is within a short drive of the urban population of the Bay Area.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN:

Consistent with **Goal 3.1 Conserve Land**, the proposed project will conserve 196 acres of coastal lands in perpetuity.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed acquisition is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Title 14, Section 15325 of the California Code of Regulations, which exempts transfers in ownership of land to preserve open space or habitat, including the acquisition of land to preserve the existing natural conditions. Consistent with this section, this acquisition is a transfer of an interest in land in that will preserve open space and existing natural conditions.

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