

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
April 23, 2026

**BAY AREA RIDGE TRAIL COUNCIL MULTI-YEAR PLANNING 2026-2029**

Project No. 04-085-07  
Project Manager: Virgilio Cuasay

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$1,200,000 to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council to conduct planning necessary to facilitate opening 30 miles of Bay Area Ridge Trail, including preparing studies, designs and environmental review documents; and to conduct public engagement with underrepresented communities.

**LOCATION:** Various locations along the Bay Area Ridge Trail alignment within the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area (Exhibit 1, Figure 1)

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [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 hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed one million two hundred thousand dollars (\$1,200,000) to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (“the grantee”) to conduct planning necessary to facilitate opening 30 miles of Bay Area Ridge Trail throughout the nine county San Francisco Bay Area region, including preparing studies, designs and environmental review documents; and to conduct public engagement with underrepresented communities.

Prior to commencement 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.

In addition, to the extent appropriate, the grantee shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's 'Coastal Access Project Standards'.

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 San Francisco Bay Area Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

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## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy grant \$1,200,000 to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (BARTC) for planning necessary to facilitate opening 30 miles of Bay Area Ridge Trail (Ridge Trail) throughout the nine county San Francisco Bay Area region (Exhibit 1, Figure 1), and to conduct public engagement for underrepresented trail users (the "project"). The vision for the Ridge Trail is a 550-mile multi-use continuous trail (serving hikers, mountain bicyclists, and equestrians) that rings San Francisco Bay high on the ridgeline, which forms an interconnected system of open space and trails that provides recreational opportunities and scenic views to the public (Exhibit 1, Figure 2). BARTC's mission is to help complete the Ridge Trail by carrying out planning work, providing technical support to the public and private entities that will construct and manage Ridge Trail segments, and organizing volunteers to help build and maintain the Ridge Trail.

Through an earlier grant, the Conservancy funded BARTC to prepare the 2020 Bay Area Ridge Trail Gap Analysis Report and Action Plan (GAAP), which analyzed the full Ridge Trail network through focused area studies and identified strategies for closing remaining gaps. Using a Conservancy grant authorized in 2022, BARTC recently completed multiple tasks including the following: (1) planning work that helped add 46.1 miles to the network, 43.3 of which are primary Ridge Trail and 2.8 consisting of newly built trails; (2) additional planning studies and updates to the GAAP, including a Napa/Solano Border Route Study which identified strategies to close large and critical gaps; (3) and the Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop Trail Wayfinding Project, which installed directional and interpretive signage in Solano County, improving safe, continuous access for Vallejo and Benicia residents, who were identified as priority communities.

As of December 2025, BARTC reached a milestone of 406.4 miles of dedicated ("officially opened") Ridge Trail miles. Progress towards completing the network varies on a regional level, with areas in North Bay counties such as Napa and Solano, along with the southern stretch of Santa Clara County, featuring larger gaps than those within the central Bay Area (Exhibit 1,

Figure 3). The remaining gaps across the network are increasingly difficult to close due to physical constraints such as steep terrain, sensitive habitat, and major road or highway barriers; staff capacity and funding limitations at the public agency level, where nearly half of the gaps remain; potential user conflicts; and private landowner challenges.

The project consists of conducting planning activities necessary to enable dedication of at least 30 miles of the primary loop, including route alignments, gaps, spurs, and access trails. The planning activities include: identifying and refining the trail route, establishing alternate routes for longer-term gaps (which are planned alignments that have remained incomplete for many years due to a variety of factors and that may have multiple possible alternatives), negotiating and developing agreements for the acquisition of property from willing sellers (including fee title and trail easements), designing and engineering trail segments, analyzing overnight facility gaps along the network, addressing needed Ridge Trail signage, and preparing and reviewing environmental review documents, maps and permit applications.

The project activities will increase access to the Ridge Trail, including for underrepresented communities, by maintaining network maps and information, conducting community engagement, and pursuing National Scenic Trail designation. The project includes engagement with the following communities:

- Trione-Annadel State Park/Santa Rosa (Sonoma County)
- Downtown Calistoga (Napa County)
- Napa/Solano Border region (both counties)
- Vallejo Bluffs/Vallejo (Solano County)
- Gilroy/Pajaro Valley (Santa Clara County)
- Downtown Petaluma (Sonoma County).

The project will provide technical support to the cities, counties, nonprofit organizations, and park and open space agencies that will construct and manage trail segments. Technical assistance activities include: advising with respect to project schedules, evaluating designs for feasibility and consistency with Ridge Trail specifications, and facilitating trail openings upon conclusion of construction activities.

**Site Description:** The proposed project will support development of a regional trail along the Bay Area Ridge Trail alignment, which includes ridgetops throughout the nine-county San Francisco Bay area (Exhibit 1, Figure 2).

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** Since its inception in 1987, the primary purpose of the BARTC, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has been to plan, promote, and maintain the Ridge Trail. BARTC's governing structure was designed to ensure an ongoing public-private partnership with public agencies and trail enthusiasts. BARTC has a membership base of approximately 5,500 people and hundreds of volunteers who regularly participate in its work. These aspects of the BARTC make it uniquely qualified to carry out activities necessary to develop or make accessible new segments of the Ridge Trail.

**Summary of Past Conservancy Investment:** Since 1998, the Conservancy has provided 7 planning grants to the BARTC, totaling over \$8,500,000 as summarized below:

Year	Grant Award	Project type
1998	\$300,000	Trail planning
2000	\$3,427,800	Trail planning and construction
2004	\$1,200,000	Trail planning
2010	\$1,200,000	Trail planning
2015	\$765,000	Trail planning
2019	\$750,000	Trail planning
2022	\$1,200,000	Trail planning

These 7 grants resulted in approximately 403 planned, 156 dedicated, and 66 constructed miles of Ridge Trail. With Conservancy funding, BARTC prepared trail construction plans, negotiated trail easements, developed and installed interpretive and wayfinding signage, provided technical assistance to implementing agencies, and conducted technical studies and analyses, including the aforementioned GAAP.

**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 Ridge Trail is specifically recognized in the California Recreational Trail Plan, as well as numerous regional and local plans including the San Francisco Bay Area’s regional Priority Conservation Area program, all nine Bay Area County General or Master Trail Plans, all relevant regional park and open space district plans, and dozens of local plans and policies.

The California State Legislature passed a resolution in 1990 to “recognize the value of the Bay Area Ridge Trail to the people of the Bay Area and encourage the creation of trails in the San Francisco Bay Area.” The Ridge Trail enjoys widespread recognition and support among State, regional and local governments, stakeholders, advocacy groups and the public. BARTC has a base of 5,500 members and volunteers who participate in trail advocacy, building, stewardship, and public events. (See project letters in Exhibit 2).

The Conservancy has played a major role in supporting completion of the Bay Area Ridge Trail; without Conservancy participation, the majority of BARTC’s work could not occur, and region-wide planning for completion of the Ridge Trail could become fragmented and/or halt altogether.

**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.**

The Ridge Trail route is within the ancestral home of many California Native American tribes. In recent years BARTC and land management partners have increasingly engaged California Native American tribes in design, access, and naming of public spaces and new trails. One example of this tribal engagement is the Patwino Worrta Kodoi Dihi Open Space Park (formerly Rockville Trails Preserve) which was re-named by the Tribal Council of the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation. The park's new name means "Southern Rock Home of the Patwin People" in Patwin, the ancestral language of the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation. Solano Land Trust, which manages the park, reached out to the Tribe and is partnering with them to recognize and include land acknowledgement and accurate historical information in signage, communications, and other project information at each juncture of trail development. In addition to examples of engagement, BARTC has integrated Native Land Digital's mapping data, which maps indigenous territories, to inform their planning work and to help facilitate informed conversations with tribes.

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

The Bay Area Ridge Trail is aligned high on the ridgetops encircling San Francisco Bay. The proposed project will therefore not be vulnerable to the sea level rise. Additionally, the Ridge Trail endeavors to provide alternatives to motorized transportation and in general seeks to implement low-maintenance, sustainable trail design and materials that lower the life-cycle emissions of the trail.

**5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.**

The Bay Area Ridge Trail is recognized as a regionally significant resource to be protected and improved in Conservation Lands Network 2.0 strategy and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's Priority Conservation Areas designation system. In addition, the spectacular scenic views, opportunities for extended trips and connectivity to other trail systems, 145 parks and natural areas enhance the appeal of the Ridge Trail as a destination for visitors from outside the Bay Area (Exhibit 1, Figure 2).

This ongoing project provides co-benefits and alleviates multiple stressors within communities, such as improving public health, addressing the need for additional recreational amenities, reductions in pollution burden, access to parks and open space, habitat enhancement, and other environmental benefits.

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

BARTC works in close partnership with park agencies and local governments, land trusts, landowners, other stakeholders, and volunteers to plan, acquire, design, build, care for, promote, and protect the Ridge Trail. Support from partners including the National Park Service and many regional park and open space districts and land trusts has been integral to establishing the Ridge Trail and its continued success.

The wide range of partners and volunteer groups that work with BARTC results in a high level of support and coordination in developing trail opportunities. BARTC regularly works with dozens of local agencies, non-profits, private corporations, local advocates, political leaders, landowners, and citizen groups in making the trail a reality. Some of these planning teams included the Peninsula Trail Team where BARTC staff hold monthly meetings with partners to accelerate trail connectivity, Southern Loop Working Group, Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop Working Group, Bay Area Trails Collaborative, and the TOGETHER Bay Area Policy Committee.

To develop strong community support and connections, the BARTC forms local committees comprised of members, advocates, and stakeholders (“Trail Advocacy Groups” or TAGs) around the region. This project focuses on TAGs in Solano County and the South Bay due to their strategic importance. BARTC will continue to prioritize projects that serve historically underrepresented communities by focusing development in specific areas.

This project received 13 letters of support (Exhibit 2) from the following elected officials and major open space management organizations: California Assemblymember Matt Haney, California State Senator Dave Cortese, Congressman Jared Huffman, Congressman Mike Thompson, Congresswoman Lateefah Simon, Congressman Jimmy Panetta, East Bay Regional Park District, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District, Santa Clara County Parks, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority, Sonoma County Regional Parks, and No Worries Amigo Hiking Club.

### PROJECT FINANCING

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$1,200,000</b>
Bay Area Ridge Trail Council	\$2,744,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$3,944,000</b>

Funds are anticipated to come from the fiscal year 2025/2026 appropriation to the Conservancy 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 Resources Code, Sections 90000 – 95015. The 2024 Climate Bond makes funds available to the Conservancy for coastal resilience projects and programs, specifically including projects for purposes of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program under Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 (Section 92010(a)(5)). The proposed project is consistent with Section 92010 because the project is a San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program project for completion of a ridge trail system as described in the Consistency With Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section below.

BARTC anticipates matching Conservancy funds with funding secured from a mix of other grants, institutional and individual gifts.

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:**

Pursuant to Chapter 4.5 Section 31162(a), the Conservancy may award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area that will help to improve public access to, within, and around the ridgetops, consistent with the rights of private property owners, and without having a significant adverse impact on agricultural operations and environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife, through completion and operation of regional bay and ridge trail systems. Consistent with Section 31162(a), the proposed project consists of the planning necessary to open 30 miles of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, a regional ridgetop trail system located entirely within the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. As required by Section 31162(a), the proposed project is consistent with the rights of private property owners because BARTC will plan for Ridge Trail segments only where they can be built with the permission of property owners over which the trail is located. In addition, Ridge Trail projects will be designed to not have a significant impact on agricultural operations, environmentally sensitive areas, or wildlife. Any future trail development projects resulting from this proposed planning grant will require environmental review.

Consistent with Section 31163(a), BARTC cooperates with nonprofit land trusts and other organizations in identifying and adopting long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay Area.

Finally, the proposed project is appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in Section 31163(c) for the following reasons:

The proposed project is supported by adopted local and regional plans. The Ridge Trail is specifically recognized in the California Recreational Trail Plan, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's Priority Conservation Area framework, by the East Bay Regional Park District, by all nine Bay Area County General or Master Trail Plans, in all relevant regional park and open space district plans, and in many other local plans and policies.

The proposed project is multi-jurisdictional and serves a regional constituency by contributing toward the completion of a regional trail system that links ridgetops throughout the nine counties of the San Francisco Bay Area.

The proposed project can be implemented in a timely manner, because the proposed project supports BARTC's continuing efforts, which are ready to proceed due to previous Conservancy planning authorizations (See Project History, above).

The proposed project provides benefits that could be lost if the project is not quickly implemented, as there is current momentum built from the work supported by the previous Conservancy grants.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.3, Support Meaningful Engagement by Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will meaningfully engage systemically excluded communities through collaboration on trail projects.

Consistent with **Goal 2.3, Expand Accessibility**, the proposed project will partner with agencies and local organizations to improve staging areas for accessibility and by identifying accessible facilities on Ridge Trail documents and maps.

Consistent with **Goal 2.4, Build Trails**, the proposed project will plan for the development of approximately 30 miles of the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The project is statutorily exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to Section 21080.57 of the Public Resources Code, which exempts any activity or approval necessary for or incidental to planning, design, site acquisition, construction, operation, or maintenance of public park, or nonmotorized recreational trail facilities funded in whole or in part by the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (2024 Climate Bond). The project is consistent with Section 21080.57 because it will plan for nonmotorized recreational trail facilities.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the proposed project upon approval.