

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

April 23, 2026

COASTAL RESILIENCE SOLUTIONS FOR SAN DIEGO STATE PARKS

Project No. 21-061-02

Project Manager: Rodrigo Garcia

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$5,000,000 to Coastal Quest to undertake the Coastal Resilience Solutions for San Diego State Parks project, consisting of conducting community engagement, preparing feasibility studies, engineering, design documents, and obtaining permits for protecting and increasing resilience of public access improvements at San Elijo State Beach and Cardiff State Beach in San Diego County.

LOCATION: San Elijo State Beach and Cardiff State Beach, City of Encinitas, San Diego County

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 five million dollars (\$5,000,000) to Coastal Quest (“the grantee”) to undertake the Coastal Resilience Solutions for San Diego State Parks project, consisting of conducting public engagement, preparing feasibility studies, engineering, design documents, and obtaining permits for protecting and increasing resilience of public access improvements at San Elijo State Beach and Cardiff State Beach in San Diego County.

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.
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2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.

In addition, to the extent appropriate, Coastal Quest 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 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. Coastal Quest 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 \$5,000,000 grant to Coastal Quest to undertake the Coastal Resilience Solutions for San Diego State Parks project, consisting of conducting community engagement, preparing feasibility studies, engineering, design documents, and obtaining permits for protecting and increasing the resilience of public access improvements at San Elijo State Beach and Cardiff State Beach in San Diego County. This project, which is supported by State Parks, will enable State Parks to ensure continued public access and natural resource protection at these very popular parks.

The State Parks San Diego Coast District (SDCD) faces accelerating bluff erosion, flooding, and beach loss due to sea level rise. The SDCD manages 12 park units throughout San Diego County, 11 of which are coastal parks. The San Elijo State Beach and Cardiff State Beach are popular park units within the SDCD and are some of the most visited in the State. Between 2018 and 2021, San Elijo State Beach saw an average of 130,853 yearly vehicle arrivals and Cardiff State Beach saw an average of 338,903 yearly vehicle arrivals. Visitors from around San Diego County and the State come to these parks for unique beach-front camping, an easily accessible beach experience, and a world-renowned surf break.

The Coastal Hazards Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Pathways (January 24, 2024) ("the vulnerability assessment") is a report prepared by Coastal Quest that laid the foundation for the proposed project by delivering a comprehensive vulnerability assessment of eleven coastal park units in the SDCD. The vulnerability assessment helped SDCD understand the vulnerability of its assets to sea level rise, and identified adaptation pathways for priority sites in State Parks SDCD. Coastal Quest also produced a geodatabase of assets and a visitation study. The vulnerability assessment revealed that several assets within San Elijo State Beach and Cardiff State Beach, including roads, staircases, overlooks, bluff habitats, campgrounds, bathrooms, and parking lots are highly vulnerable even under minimal sea level rise scenarios. Recent storms have caused severe damage to Cardiff State Beach, forcing emergency measures

such as closures and temporary revetments. Without proactive adaptation, the public facilities at these State Parks could be permanently closed.

The project will advance the planning and design for the nature-based adaptation solutions to sea level rise that was started in the vulnerability assessment. The work will occur at San Elijo State Beach and Cardiff State Beach and Coastal Quest will work in close coordination with State Parks.

The project consists of planning adaptation measures at four sites within San Elijo and Cardiff State Beaches. Planning four sites together allows for a coordinated, comprehensive look at the whole area and adaptation measures that work together to address similar vulnerabilities. The major planning tasks are (See Exhibit 1 for location detail):

- Task 1 is to conduct feasibility studies and prepare 10% designs for two sites at San Elijo State Beach: the northernmost day use parking lot and access ramp (“Pipes Lot”), and the blufftop campground and staircases. Both sites are threatened by bluff erosion and storm damage. The feasibility study will explore alternatives to retreat the Pipes Lot and alternative layouts to accommodate retreating the campground.
- Task 2 is to prepare 90% designs and obtain permits for the southern turnaround at San Elijo State Beach, an emergency access point that has experienced several erosion events and is currently protected by a temporary revetment. The turnaround is required by the State Fire Marshal for emergency vehicle access and RV and trailer access to the campground. The design process will explore and select a more nature-based solution.
- Task 3 is to conduct feasibility studies and prepare 10% design and obtain permits for Cardiff State Beach North Day Use Lot (“Reef Lot”), which provides coastal access and is highly vulnerable to flooding and erosion. Reef Lot contains two temporary rock revetments authorized through 2029. The design process will explore and select a more nature-based solution.

Although outreach and community engagement was conducted during preparation of the vulnerability assessment, additional community engagement is necessary to inform the more detailed designs. The project includes public workshops, site visits, and virtual platforms to gather input from stakeholders. Stipends will support participation from underserved community representatives and Tribes, and project related materials will be produced in English and Spanish.

Site Description: The San Diego coast is world famous for its mild year-round climate. Both San Elijo State Beach and Cardiff State Beach are popular parks owned by State Parks and managed by SDCD and located on highway 101 adjacent to each other. San Elijo State Beach is a narrow, bluff-backed stretch of sand. The beach offers camping, swimming, surfing, showers, and picnicking. The campsite is located on a bluff above the beach offering sweeping views of the ocean and access to the beach through a staircase. Cardiff State Beach is a popular surfing location and offers outdoor showers and restrooms.

The Conservancy-funded Cardiff Living Shoreline project was completed to the south of the Cardiff “reef lot”, along a stretch of Pacific Coast Highway that is vulnerable to sea-level rise. The two project sites are near one another, but unrelated.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: Coastal Quest is a nonprofit that works collaboratively with partners to build resilient coastal communities. It manages grant funds for multiple public-private partnerships including National Fish and Wildlife Funds for Bay Area Climate Adaptation Network, settlements funds for the State Water Resources Control Board, and technical assistance and regranting program funds in collaboration with the Ocean Protection Council. Coastal Quest also successfully managed a Conservancy grant for preparation of the vulnerability assessment.

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 is a good investment of state resources because it builds on the vulnerability assessment, which was funded by the Conservancy. This project will advance this work by developing feasibility studies, designs, and permit applications for multiple adaptation projects that protect and increase the resilience of public access facilities. Its portfolio approach and emphasis on nature-based solutions create a replicable model for other State Parks coastal districts.

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.

During preparation of the vulnerability assessment, Coastal Quest and the SDCD engaged local tribes in project planning by creating an advisory committee that included tribal leaders and conducting outreach to gather input on affected tribal resources through site visits. These efforts highlighted the need for State Parks to build stronger relationships with local tribes, establish a permanent collaborative process, plan additional site visits, and share vulnerability assessment and adaptation pathway results for feedback. For this project, which includes feasibility studies and engagement, Coastal Quest will increase tribal involvement through multiple approaches, including work with tribal outreach consultants, State Parks outreach efforts, and expanded public feedback initiatives.

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

The goal of the vulnerability assessment and this project has been to assess the resilience and adaptability of the SDCD's assets and resources and develop solutions to help the region adapt priority sites to sea level rise. This project will expand this effort by working on multiple sites at the same time, strengthening partner engagement, and completing feasibility studies so

multiple resiliency projects are shovel-ready upon completion. This project will increase resilience for two coastal park units while ensuring sustainability and adaptability. State Parks SDCD has participated in all steps of the process and is prepared to manage implementation and maintenance.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The project will deliver multiple benefits for the region by increasing resiliency for public access improvements. It will help residents and visitors of San Diego County continue to enjoy coastal parks despite sea level rise impacts. Project sites were selected based on multi-benefit criteria, including support for vulnerable communities, adaptability over time, biodiversity maintenance, and protection of public access, informed by the vulnerability assessments and visitation studies. These efforts will reduce erosion and flood risk while minimizing loss of access.

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

The project builds on outreach and community engagement conducted during preparation of the vulnerability assessment, which included engagement with the public, regional climate organizations, local governments, Caltrans, the Coastal Commission, the San Diego Association of Governments, and the U.S. Navy. Outreach with these entities and others will continue during the project. Continued engagement will align with ongoing regional adaptation work and include coordination with California Native American tribes, tribal organizations, nonprofits, community-based organizations, regional partners, and government organizations.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$5,000,000
Anonymous donors	\$200,000
Project Total	\$5,200,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding for this project is an appropriation of the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, also known as the 2024 Climate Bond or Proposition 4 (Public Resources Code (PRC), Section 90000-95015). The funds are available for “the purpose of coastal and combined flood management projects and activities for developed shoreline areas, including areas with critical community infrastructure at risk of current flooding and flooding due to sea level rise.” (PRC 92015.) The project is consistent with this funding source because it will develop plans to protect public access infrastructure from sea level rise and coastal erosion impacts at two popular San Diego beaches.

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 is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 (sections 31400-31410) regarding a System of Public Accessways. Section 31400.1 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations to develop lands for public access purposes to and along the coast.

Section 31400.3 authorizes the Conservancy to provide such assistance as is required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division.

The proposed project will conduct the planning needed to enhance and protect public access facilities in response to sea level rise and erosion at San Elijo State Beach and Cardiff State Beach.

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

Consistent with **Goal 4.1, Sea Level Rise Adaptation Projects**, the proposed project will prepare a plan that addresses sea level rise and erosion vulnerabilities at two State Parks.

Consistent with **Goal 4.3, Multi-Benefit Nature-Based Climate Adaptation**, the project will develop and assess multiple nature-based adaptation alternatives to mitigate climate impacts on park infrastructure.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.57, which exempts activities and approvals necessary for or incidental to planning, design, operation or maintenance (among others) of public park and nonmotorized trail facilities that are funded in whole or in part by the 2024 Climate Bond. The recommended authorization is to grant funds needed to plan and design adaptation measures to maintain and protect park facilities at two state parks that are threatened by sea level rise and coastal erosion, and is funded by the 2024 Climate Bond.

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