

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

June 18, 2026

NORTH FORK MATTOLE CONSERVATION AND RESILIENCE ACQUISITION: AMENDMENT

Project No. 23-008-02

Project Manager: Morgan Wright

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to amend the Conservancy’s grant authorized on February 15, 2024, to the Mattole Restoration Council to expand the scope of the project to include design and installation of interpretive signage and to conduct community and tribal engagement on the North Fork Mattole property in Petrolia, Humboldt County.

LOCATION: Petrolia, Humboldt County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [February 15, 2024, Staff Recommendation](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes an amendment of the grant authorized on February 15, 2024, to the Mattole Restoration Council (the “grantee”) to expand the scope of the project to include design and installation of interpretive signage and to conduct community and tribal engagement on the North Fork Mattole Property in Petrolia, Humboldt, 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.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.

Findings:

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

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapters 3 and 8 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the functions of the State Coastal Conservancy and the reservation of significant coastal resources, respectively.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Mattole Restoration Council 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 an amendment of the previously authorized grant to the Mattole Restoration Council (MRC) for the North Fork Mattole Conservation and Resilience Acquisition (“project”) to expand the scope of the project to include design and installation of interpretive signage and to conduct community and tribal engagement on the North Fork Mattole Property in Petrolia, Humboldt, County (Exhibit 1).

The Conservancy authorized a grant of \$800,000 to the MRC for the project on February 15, 2024 (Exhibit 2). The purpose of the authorization was to acquire the approximately 83-acre North Fork Mattole property on the North Fork of the Mattole River in Humboldt County and prepare baseline conditions and environmental assessment reports for the property. The property was acquired for habitat conservation and restoration, California Native American tribal and public access and recreation, open space, and potentially a public-serving facility that will facilitate climate resilience, access to, and enjoyment of the natural resources of the property.

During acquisition, the County of Humboldt found title discrepancies that delayed the final appraisal and acquisition. MRC rectified the discrepancy through a survey and eventual removal of the local cemetery from the acquisition area, resulting in a 7-acre reduction of the property to be acquired. The appraisal subsequently valued the fair market value of the property at \$685,000, less than the original authorization. The 73-acre property was ultimately acquired by MRC on March 3, 2026.

Because the appraisal reflected a lower-than-expected fair market value, MRC was left with \$83,000 in surplus funds in the original grant. MRC discussed options to utilize the remaining funding with the Collaborative Stakeholder Structure, comprised of local community members, tribal members, the Mattole Unified School District, Mattole Valley Community Center, Petrolia Fire Protection District, Mattole Valley Resource Center, and Mattole Salmon Group, tribal members, and community members. Through this collaborative dialogue, MRC identified a need for community outreach and engagement as well as interpretive signage to protect sensitive habitat and to enhance the recreational and educational opportunities at the site.

Interpretive signage informed by thorough community and tribal engagement will protect sensitive habitat and guide public access to ensure the resiliency of the property while also providing educational opportunities for the community and visitors alike. Interpretive signage will highlight tribal perspectives, history, and knowledge as well as provide insight into the natural resources of the watershed, the property, and fish, plants, and other wildlife.

Signs may include, but are not limited to:

- Culturally relevant signs to be designed in collaboration with tribal partners including the land name, land acknowledgment, and an audible native speaker/pronunciation sign.
- Signs designed and constructed in collaboration with Mattole Unified School District may include: 1) a local birds' wingspan interactive mural; 2) Protect the Wet Meadow; 3) a student-created wildlife imagery sign featuring either bats or birds.
- Ecological interpretive signs educating and inspiring the public on species and processes present on the land. These signs may include information on rare and native plants, invasive plants, prescribed/cultural fire and fire resilience, an updated trail map, lichens, bats, and birds.
- Property boundary signs.
- Signs to protect sensitive habitat
- SCC Funder Acknowledgment signs.
- Three signs inlaid into concrete benches' backrests. These will double as interpretive signs and public use/visitor amenities: one to contain tribal land acknowledgment and two with ecological interpretive info.
- Wooden kiosks to post the signs, made from local, sustainable wood sources.

The expanded scope of the project will enable MRC to meaningfully collaborate with the community and local tribal members to design and install interpretive signage. The project includes a five-day local children's summer camp resulting in a wingspan mural and additional land stewardship and wildlife informational signs. This opportunity provides local school children with the opportunity to meaningfully connect with each other and the land in a positive way. MRC also plans on hosting a fun and community centered contest to design the wooden kiosks. With community and tribal engagement at its center, the signage will provide educational opportunities for visitors to the land and will highlight tribal perspectives and knowledge, natural resources and special status fish, plants, and other wildlife. In addition to interpretive signage, the property boundary signs will provide clarity on where the publicly accessible land ends and private property begins and signs to protect sensitive habitat will ensure the resiliency of the property.

Site Description: See Exhibit 2.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: See Exhibit 2.

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 proposed amendment increases representation of tribal communities in California's publicly accessible outdoor spaces, making the outdoors more welcoming and inclusive for all Californians. The project will share the histories and stories of a systemically excluded community and provide a fuller interpretive history and sense of context and place as well as showcasing vital natural resources, including fish, wildlife, and plants, to the public. The project amendment helps achieve the goals of the California Natural Resources Agency's Outdoors for All Strategy priority of "Fostering Belonging." The amendment meets stated community desires and priorities, while also building organizational capacity and fostering meaningful partnerships between MRC, the community, and tribal communities.

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.

See Exhibit 2. In addition, MRC will work with a local tribe to incorporate tribal perspectives, acknowledgement, and historically accurate information into the signage designs. During the land acquisition, MRC collaborated with a local tribe to determine a name for the land.

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

The project will continue to deliver benefits over a reasonable period. Clear, educational signage will reduce unintentional damage to habitats—wet meadows, riparian zones, dunes, salmon-bearing streams—by guiding visitors toward appropriate behavior. MRC will maintain the interpretive signage and the signage produced will be displayed for at least 15 years.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

In addition to enhancing public access to parks and open spaces, the project as revised will deliver multiple benefits. By planning for and installing murals, modern and inclusive signage, and other interpretive exhibits, the project enhances recreational amenities and will beautify the property for all Californians. The project increases equity and environmental justice by increasing the representation of an historically excluded community. The project will provide job and volunteer opportunities that allow community members to be involved. Finally, the project strengthens partnerships between MRC, the tribe, individuals, and the greater

community – partnerships that may manifest in better serving communities and other meaningful projects.

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

The proposed amendment is community driven and will actively engage the communities in the region, including the local community, board members, neighboring landowners, the nearby school, non-profit organizations and local government agencies. The design of interpretive signage will be conducted in a co-visioning process to highlight community priorities and expertise. The project team has a proven track record of working within the community and incorporating insights gained from community engagement into project planning. MRC's engagement process makes it easy for community members to participate by, for example, meeting in convenient locations and times and using virtual venues. MRC actively engages community members through interviews, community meetings and events, and consults with the tribe.

PROJECT FINANCING

The fund sources for this project remain as described in Exhibit 2. Because the appraisal reflected a lower-than-expected fair market value, the remaining acquisition funds (\$83,000) will be allocated toward meaningful community and tribal engagement, as well as the development of interpretive signage. Funding for this project came in part from the Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of "urgent sea level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies" (Budget Act of 2022, SB 154 as amended by the Budget Act of 2023, SB 101). The coastal resilience funds are available for the purposes described in Section 52 of Chapter 258 of the Statutes of 2021, which includes "coastal resilience projects along the coast... and projects that build resilience for coastal communities [and] public access." The proposed project as amended is consistent with this funding because interpretive signage builds resilience for coastal communities by strengthening the social, cultural, and ecological foundations that help communities adapt to change. Interpretive signs explain coastal processes, watershed dynamics, fire ecology, native species, and climate-related changes. Clear, educational signage reduces unintentional damage to habitats—wet meadows, riparian zones, dunes, salmon-bearing streams—by guiding visitors toward appropriate behavior. Protecting these natural systems preserves the ecological functions that make coastal communities more resilient. When students help design signage or participate in educational programs, they develop a deeper connection to the land and a sense of responsibility for its care. This cultivates the next generation of coastal stewards, which is an essential component of long-term resilience. By highlighting tribal history, land acknowledgment, and traditional ecological knowledge, signage reinforces long-standing stewardship practices that have sustained coastal ecosystems for generations.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION

The elements of this project added by this amendment will be undertaken pursuant to Chapters 3 and 8 of Division 21.

Pursuant to Chapter 3 of the Public Resources Code, section 31119(c), the Conservancy may award grants for the construction and improvement of structures and facilities used for the educational projects and programs described in section 31119(b). Section 31119(b) authorizes the Conservancy to undertake educational projects and programs related to preservation, protection, enhancement, maintenance, and enjoyment of coastal resources, as well as those facilities that support activities and programs that support the delivery of science, history, and social science content. Consistent with these sections, the elements of this project added by this amendment will provide onsite educational opportunities that support learning through the development of interpretive signage and youth-centered instructional activities focused on coastal and watershed resources. By engaging students in hands-on creation of ecological and culturally informed signage, the project strengthens core knowledge, fosters direct engagement with coastal resource history and stewardship, and links scientific understanding to broader community and environmental contexts.

The project elements added by this amendment are also consistent with Chapter 8 of the Public Resources Code, Section 31350 et seq. because they expand on reserving coastal resources sites for public use as designing and installing interpretive signage furthers enjoyment of key coastal resource lands.

Consistent with Section 31351(a), this project is the result of Conservancy cooperation with MRC, a nonprofit organization, and ensured the reservation of real property interests for wildlife habitat protection and recreational uses, both of which meet the policies and objectives of the Coastal Act.

The Humboldt County Local Coastal Plan, South Coast Area Plan (LCP) discusses land use for this region of Humboldt County; below are the relevant sections to the project.

Section 3.25 of the LCP identifies recreational and visitor servicing uses of the North South Coast:

Policy 30222: The use of private lands suitable for visitor-serving commercial recreational facilities designed to enhance public opportunities for coastal recreation shall have priority over private residential, general industrial, or general commercial development, but not over agriculture or coastal-dependent industry. The project is located on private land owned by MRC and prioritizes design and installation of interpretive signage, which enhances public recreation.

Section 3.29 of the LCP discusses archaeological and paleontological resources and reads in part, "visitor education should be undertaken to promote awareness of the value of archaeological resources and to prevent vandalism." Included forms of educational material include descriptive sign boards. The project will educate visitors of ecological and archaeological resources of the property.

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

See Exhibit 2.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

See Exhibit 2.

The signage component of this project proposed under this amendment is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15303, which exempts new construction or installation of small structures or equipment. Consistent with this section, the signage component of this project consists of the installation of signage and informational kiosks consistent with this section.

The community outreach component of the project proposed under this amendment is categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15301, which exempts the operation of existing public structures or facilities involving negligible or no expansion of existing use. Consistent with this section, the summer camp and community contest elements of this project will be held on the property and in existing facilities without expansion of their use.

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