

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

June 18, 2026

**GREAT REDWOOD TRAIL AGENCY—TRAIL DEVELOPMENT**

26-017-01

Project Manager: Hannah Bartee

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse an amount not to exceed \$10,000,000 to the Great Redwood Trail Agency for Great Redwood Trail planning, design, and construction in the counties of Mendocino, Trinity, and Humboldt.

**LOCATION:** Mendocino, Trinity, and Humboldt Counties

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [Great Redwood Trail Master Plan](#)

Exhibit 3: [Great Redwood Trail Agency Resolution 2026-11 Directing Proposition 4 Funds](#)

Exhibit 4: [Great Redwood Trail Agency Resolution 2025-09 Environmental and Tribal Commitments](#)

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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 ten million dollars (\$10,000,000) to the Great Redwood Trail Agency (“the grantee”) to plan, design, and construct segments of the Great Redwood Trail in the counties of Mendocino, Trinity, and Humboldt (the “project”).

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 that identifies the planning, design and construction work for Great Redwood Trail segments to be implemented within the grantee’s fiscal year, which runs July 1-June 30.

2. Names and qualifications of any grantees or contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.

For each Great Redwood Trail segment to be planned, designed, or constructed under this project, the grantee shall incorporate the guidelines of the 'Great Redwood Trail Master Plan' and to the extent appropriate, the Conservancy's 'Coastal Access Project Standards'.

Prior to commencement of construction of a Great Redwood Trail segment, the grantee shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer evidence that the grantee has entered into any agreements necessary to enable the grantee to construct the segment and that all permits and approvals required construct the segment have been obtained.

The grantee shall submit an updated work program for Executive Officer approval at least every 12 months. The grantee shall not plan, design, or construct any segment unless such work is included in the approved work program.

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 public access.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

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## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a grant of an amount not to exceed \$10,000,000 to the Great Redwood Trail Agency (GRTA) for Great Redwood Trail (GRT) planning, design, and construction in the counties of Mendocino, Trinity, and Humboldt (the "project"). The GRT is planned to be developed along the former North Coast Railroad Authority (NCRA) rail right-of-way (Exhibit 1). When completed, the GRT will be among the longest rail trails in the nation, providing a continuous regional corridor of hundreds of miles for walking, rolling, bicycling, and equestrian use, as well as key connections to local and regional destinations.

GRTA will use the grant funds as directed by the GRTA Board of Directors (GRTA Board), which will identify priority GRT segments for development. GRT development may consist of any tasks related to the planning, design, and construction of non-motorized recreational trail facilities (GRT Projects). GRTA's spending will be guided by the Great Redwood Trail Master Plan (Master Plan) (Exhibit 2), which was developed by Conservancy and GRTA staff using prior Conservancy authorizations and adopted by the GRTA Board in March 2026. As the overarching plan for the GRT, the Master Plan provides both general design guidance and specific recommendations for the trail development process for individual GRT segments. Another important part of the

master planning process and ongoing development of the GRT is extensive tribal outreach and community engagement as further described in the project selection criteria below.

Following Master Plan guidance, GRT Projects may include, but are not limited to, tribal outreach and coordination, community engagement, environmental review and permitting, engineering and design, right-of-way and access improvements, bridge and culvert rehabilitation or replacement, trail surfacing and drainage improvements, habitat restoration associated with trail development, planning and design for interpretive and wayfinding signage, development of trail amenities like murals and other public art that reflect local identities, and related pre-construction or construction-phase activities. Resource studies and surveys to be conducted as part of GRT projects are needed to obtain regulatory permits, to address environmental conditions that may affect trail development along the former railroad corridor, and to be consistent with the Master Plan, which requires study and review of environmental considerations pursuant to GRTA's adopted commitments to resource protection, environmental restoration and land stewardship. GRT Projects can include segments that have paved multi-use, crushed stone multi-use, or backcountry trail surface types, depending on the anticipated level of use, expected trail user types, and construction access considerations.

The Master Plan also identifies opportunities and constraints along the trail corridor and describes the methodology for prioritizing individual trail segments for development based on project readiness, feasibility, and community impact. Tier 1 segments are generally high-impact and high-feasibility. They have existing momentum for near-term development, due to their proximity to existing segments or completion of early planning phases, and provide strategic value to local communities and agency partners. For example, with the completion of the Humboldt Bay Trail South segment of the GRT, which provided a paved, non-motorized connection between Eureka and Arcata using a mixture of Conservancy and other funding, there are now more than 15 miles of Humboldt Bay Trail/GRT providing an active transportation corridor through the two most populous cities in Humboldt County. This connection has increased local trail usage and created a greater demand for further extending the trail. Segments that could potentially be advanced under this funding include, but are not limited to, (1) Tier 1 GRT segments such as College of the Redwoods to Eureka (Segment 33), Loleta (Segment 32), and McCann to Founders Grove (Segment 24); (2) existing trail segments, such as Ukiah (Segment 4), that could benefit from additional trail amenities or other supporting auxiliary facilities; or (3) other segments along the former Northwestern Pacific Railroad main line identified by the GRTA Board.

In accordance with this framework, the GRTA Board will adopt a list of GRT segments under active development (Exhibit 3). It is anticipated that when authorizing construction of GRT segments, GRTA will require each segment to meet the requirements of the Master Plan, adopted GRTA policies, and GRTA enabling legislation. Prior to GRTA Board consideration, the GRTA will submit a revised work program to the Conservancy describing GRT Projects to be funded under this authorization for the Conservancy's review and approval to ensure that proposed projects for funding are consistent with this authorization. GRTA may utilize grantees or contractors to complete GRT Projects.

**Site Description:** The GRT is proposed to stretch from the Golden Gate Bridge and San Francisco Bay more than 300 miles northward to the Humboldt Bay area, largely following the former North Coast Railroad Authority’s right-of-way, including appurtenant railway branches that connect from the rail mainline toward Carlotta near Highway 36, Blue Lake near Highway 299, and Samoa near Highway 255. Along the way, the trail will pass through urban, suburban, and rural communities, redwood forests, grasslands, agricultural lands, and the currently largely inaccessible wild and scenic Eel River Canyon, before skirting the edge of Humboldt Bay.

The Conservancy assisted the GRTA with preparation of the Master Plan for the approximately 231-mile northern portion of the rail right-of-way owned by GRTA from the Sonoma/Mendocino county border (the “Dividing line”), near the community of Hopland, northward through the Cities of Ukiah, Willits, Fortuna, Rio Dell, Eureka, Arcata, and Blue Lake to its terminus on the North Spit of Humboldt Bay. The Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) District now owns portions of the rail right-of-way in Sonoma and Marin Counties, and will be responsible for planning, constructing, and operating the Southern Segment of the GRT with Larkspur at its southern terminus. The final connection between Larkspur and the Golden Gate Bridge may be planned, constructed, and operated by others.

For the purposes of this project, the GRT shall be defined as a non-motorized trail between the Dividing line and the terminus of the former Northwestern Pacific Railroad main line at Mile Post 300.5 in Samoa, California, along the historical Northwestern Pacific Railroad Line right-of-way or adjacent thereto, and the supporting auxiliary facilities to the trail, including, but not limited to, signage, access improvements, and restrooms. As the right-of-way was formerly used for rail purposes, it consists of a gentle grade with railroad tracks, passing over a number of rail bridges and trestles, and through tunnels, some of which have collapsed. Much of the rail line is in good condition for conversion to trail, but in some areas, erosive geology, deferred maintenance, and habitat disrupted by past rail activity create challenges that will need to be addressed through careful planning and implementation.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** GRTA was created by Senate Bill 69 (“The Great Redwood Trail Act”)—introduced by Senator McGuire and signed by Governor Newsom in 2021—as the successor agency to NCRA. In converting the NCRA to the GRTA, the focus of ownership has changed from an agency whose primary mission was to ensure rail service, to an agency that is now charged with developing the rail corridor into a world class trail. The GRTA formally succeeded the NCRA on March 1, 2022, and now controls the rail right-of-way for the section from the Sonoma/Mendocino County line north to Humboldt Bay. GRTA has successfully managed past Conservancy funding authorizations for its operations via an interagency agreement for financial services with the County of Sonoma. Through this assistance and strong leadership from GRTA staff and the GRTA Board, the agency has grown and now administers multiple contracts and grants to manage GRTA property and develop the GRT. Recent successes include the removal of more than 200 tons of waste from a GRTA-owned building utilizing funds from a CalRecycle grant, the digitization of GRTA parcel ownership and license agreements through a GIS consultant, and the emergency repair of a failed culvert area and subsequent restoration of fish passage on McNab Creek in Mendocino utilizing local contractors.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:**

The proposed project is consistent with 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 project will advance the planning and construction of the Great Redwood Trail, which will be a world-class, multi-use, rail trail that will provide significant recreational and economic benefits to Californians. The construction of the GRT is feasible, with significant portions already completed. The trail will take advantage of an intact rail right of way for the approximately 231-mile section from the Sonoma/Mendocino County line to the Samoa Peninsula in Humboldt County. The approximately 70-mile Southern Segment of the GRT in Marin and Sonoma Counties is being planned by SMART, in conjunction with its rail operation.

The project will advance the state's 30x30 Executive Order by facilitating habitat restoration along the GRT alignment. The project will also support the state's Outdoors for All Initiative, specifically by connecting statewide and regional trail networks to provide diverse experiences (Outdoors for All Strategy 1.7).

**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 proposed project will fund ongoing work the GRTA has undertaken to conduct intentional, meaningful tribal engagement with the many tribes whose ancestral territory and/or current lands intersect with the proposed trail. The Conservancy and GRTA have offered government to government consultation with and extended the invitation for collaboration and coordination opportunities to all California Native American tribes with ancestral territories and/or current tribal lands that interface with the project area. As part of the Master Plan development process Conservancy and GRTA staff and consultants have hosted a webinar for tribes, presented at tribal council meetings, and held in-depth one-on-one conversations with tribal representatives. California Native American tribes consistently emphasized early and ongoing consultation, protection of sacred sites and ancestral lands, incorporation of indigenous languages and local interpretation materials, economic participation, and meaningful involvement in trail governance. Tribal feedback also highlighted the need to respect culturally important plants, ensure construction monitoring, and create space to honor ancestral lands. Input gathered from California Native American tribes is reflected in the 13 tribal recommendations in the Master Plan. Ongoing tribal engagement is a critical priority for GRTA, as demonstrated by GRTA's May 2025 letters to tribes inviting tribes to collaboration and coordination opportunities along the trail corridor, and GRTA Resolution 2025-09 Environmental and Tribal Commitments (Exhibit 4). Tribes have distinct cultural histories and

relationships to place, therefore specific GRT Projects will require additional communication and collaboration with California Native American tribes to understand unique contexts.

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

Development of the GRT will be a sustainable and multi-benefit project. The GRT will protect and enhance the surrounding natural environment. Trail segments will be designed to restore the land, reduce long-term maintenance costs, utilize green infrastructure to address drainage management, and minimize visitors' impact on the environment. The GRT will feature a range of trail types—different widths and surface materials—that vary based on trail users, anticipated demand and use levels, and environmental context. Trail users will be educated on “Leave No Trace” and other sustainable practices, creating a lifelong ethic of environmental stewardship. The GRTA and its partners will ensure that the GRT will be maintained long into the future and continue to provide valuable benefits.

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

The GRT will be a multi-benefit project with significant positive impacts. The proposed trail will be an international tourist destination, providing new public access and a new way to experience California redwoods, North Coast vineyards, the wild and scenic Eel River, and the Humboldt Bay shoreline. Other regional rail-trails have become popular tourist attractions that have provided economic revitalization benefits to communities across the country. The GRT will create recreation opportunities for multi-day adventures as well as more local outings. Completed segments of the trail between Eureka and Arcata and in the City of Ukiah are already used by many locals and visitors, contributing important benefits to their communities and the region. Around the world, regional rail-trails and long-distance trails are popular tourist destinations, attracting visitors for the unique experience the trails offer. Beyond recreational opportunities, the trail will form the spine of a regional active transportation network, providing safe, non-motorized routes for everyday trips as well as longer journeys. Safety is a core trail benefit—supporting safer travel for users and improving access for emergency response, wildfire management, and long-term stewardship along the corridor.

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

The proposed project will support systematic efforts to conduct ongoing meaningful community engagement. Community engagement was a key element to the development of the Master Plan, helping to inform the project goals, trail design elements, amenities, access points, opportunities and constraints, policy considerations, and next steps for the GRT. The outreach program for the Master Plan included presentations at 32 tribal and community events, 6 in-person workshops and 4 online workshops with a total of 725 attendees, over 70 stakeholder meetings, and over 600 public comments and almost 800 public survey responses collected. In person outreach and community meetings were held in cities and communities along the GRT corridor in the counties of Mendocino, Trinity, and Humboldt. This engagement guided the development of a Master Plan that seeks to prioritize the needs of local communities, diverse trail users and stakeholders. The proposed authorization will fund the implementation of recommendations developed in the Master Plan related to coordination with California Native American tribes, coordination with community stakeholders, emergency

responders and other agencies, to support development of priority trail segments as ongoing engagement will be essential to future trail development phases.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$10,000,000</b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$10,000,000</b>

The anticipated source of funding for the project is a fiscal year 25/26 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Fund (Proposition 4, also called the 2024 Climate Bond), codified at Public Resources Code sections 90000-95015. The Budget Act of 2025 specifically appropriated Proposition 4 funds under Public Resources Code section 94030 to the Conservancy for the GRTA to complete the Great Redwood Trail. Section 94030 allocates funds for projects to expand recreational opportunities and public access to state and public park nonmotorized trails, including creation of new trails. The project is an appropriate use of these funds because it will plan for trail segments of the GRT. At its May 21, 2026 meeting, the GRTA authorized the Conservancy to grant these Proposition 4 funds directly to GRTA.

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 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400 et seq.) related to a system of public accessways. Section 31409 authorizes the Conservancy to provide assistance to public agencies to establish and expand inland trail systems that may be linked to the California Coastal Trail. The proposed GRT will connect inland populations to the coast and will include segments of the California Coastal Trail. This authorization will fund the work of the GRTA, a public agency, to conduct planning and tribal engagement and community outreach to inform trail development and to carry out trail construction, and is thus consistent with the purposes of Chapter 9.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN:**

Consistent with **Goal 1.1 Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed grant will assist with planning and construction of facilities that will improve recreational conditions and active transportation options within multiple disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged communities in the counties of Mendocino, Trinity, and Humboldt.

Consistent with **Goal 2.4 Build Trails**, the proposed grant will assist with the planning and construction of the GRT, which is one of five flagship trails identified in the Conservancy’s 2023-2027 Strategic Plan.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5 Recreation Facilities & Amenities**, the proposed grant will assist with the planning and construction of facilities that will enhance recreational opportunities, including benches, linear parks, education and interpretive facilities, public art, and signage.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to California Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 21080.57, 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," also known as Proposition 4. The project consists of planning, design and construction of non-motorized trail segments and appurtenant facilities and the project will be funded by Proposition 4 funds. It is therefore exempt from CEQA under PRC Section 21080.57.

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