

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

September 17, 2026

AUGMENTATION FOR COMMUNITY AND CLIMATE CONNECTIONS IN THE NOVATO BAYLANDS

Project No. 94-003-05

Project Manager: Sara Haugen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$2,500,000 to Point Reyes Bird Observatory to augment two previous Conservancy grants to provide an additional two years of adaptive management of approximately 177 acres of restored wetlands by engaging the local community, maintaining and enhancing the wetlands, and implementing property improvements of public access amenities and other infrastructure in the Novato Baylands in Marin County.

LOCATION: Novato Baylands, Marin County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [Community and Climate Connections in the Novato Baylands](#)
(December 1, 2022 Conservancy Staff Recommendation)

Exhibit 3: [Augmentation for Community and Climate Connections in the Novato Baylands](#) (April 18, 2024 Conservancy Staff Recommendation)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

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

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy (the "Conservancy") hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed two million five hundred thousand dollars (\$2,500,000) to Point Reyes Bird Observatory dba Point Blue Conservation Science (the "grantee") to augment two previous Conservancy grants, authorized by the Conservancy on December 1, 2022 (\$2,150,000) and April 18, 2024 (\$2,500,000), for a total of \$7,150,000 to provide an additional two years of adaptive management of approximately 177 acres of restored wetlands by engaging the local community, maintaining and enhancing the wetlands, and implementing property

improvements of public access amenities and other infrastructure in the Novato Baylands in Marin County (the “project”).

Prior to commencement of the third two-year project period, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A revised work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any additional contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. Evidence that any additional permits and approvals required to continue the project have been obtained.
4. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to continue to implement, operate, and maintain the project for an additional two years.

The grantee shall comply with all relevant mitigation measures identified in Bel Marin Keys Wetland Restoration Phase 1 Project Addendum to the Supplemental Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement for the Bel Marin Keys Unit V Expansion of Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project and the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Plan – Volume II: Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff report 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 and Guidelines.
3. Point Reyes Bird Observatory dba Point Blue Conservation Science is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy (the “Conservancy”) authorize disbursement of up to \$2,500,000 to Point Reyes Bird Observatory dba Point Blue Conservation Science (“Point Blue”) to augment two Conservancy grants, authorized by the Conservancy on December 1, 2022 (\$2,150,000) and April 18, 2024 (\$2,500,000), for a total of \$7,150,000 to provide an additional two years of adaptive management of approximately 177 acres of restored wetlands by engaging the local community, maintaining and enhancing the wetlands, and implementing property improvements such as maintaining and enhancing public access amenities in the Novato Baylands in Marin County (the “project”) . See Exhibit 1 for project

location. The Conservancy has funded four years of the project and the augmentation of \$2,500,000 will extend the project by another two years for a total period to six years.

The project goals and history are described in detail in the December 1, 2022 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2) and the April 18, 2024 staff recommendation (Exhibit 3). The two previous authorizations covered work from January 19, 2023 through December 31, 2026. The recommended augmentation is to extend the work through December 31, 2028.

The project consists of adaptive management of approximately 177 acres of wetland habitat: 60 acres of tidal wetlands, 60 acres of managed wetlands, and 57 acres of seasonal wetlands through volunteer and student activities and workforce development at the Novato Baylands. Project activities include the following: monitoring and adaptive management (e.g., adjusting water levels in seasonal ponds, monitoring vegetation, monitoring bird numbers and behaviors), developing planting plans, propagating and planting native plants, controlling non-native invasive plant species, monitoring and managing planted areas, and controlling problematic erosive areas using small-scale nature-based solutions. Conducting these project activities involves providing opportunities for practical workforce development; managing a substantial volunteer cohort; providing educational programming for school, professional, and community groups about wetland ecology; and engaging community members in wetland restoration.

The project is intended to result in high-quality habitat characterized by native vegetation and controlled populations of high-threat invasive non-native plant species throughout the designated adaptive management areas. Other expected outcomes include progress towards desired soil salinities and native vegetation patterns in the Hamilton North Seasonal Wetlands; control of problematic erosive areas; and data contributions to monitoring reports based on four years of bird use data that will be combined with an existing dataset and analyzed as an indicator of habitat value. Point Blue has not yet identified what improvements are necessary to continue and/or enhance the life of the property's public access amenities and other infrastructure, except for the need to replace interpretive signs. Point Blue will obtain Conservancy approval before commencing any infrastructure improvements.

Point Blue has been monitoring, adaptively managing, and enhancing the site successfully over the past four years. For example, Point Blue staff have controlled a problematic erosive levee at Hamilton Wetlands by planting 12,467 native plants in that area and has worked with partners, students, and volunteers to plant additional native plants, around 11,270 in total, at both Bel Marin Keys Unit V and Hamilton. The majority of the native plants were grown by Point Blue staff in the onsite native plant nursery. Point Blue staff have undertaken actions to map and manage invasive species. Management of problematic weed species has included regularly mowing the sides of levees and trails in both Hamilton and Bel Marin Keys Unit V to reduce weed seed production and to keep these areas accessible for vehicles and the public. Point Blue has also added sheep and goat grazing to the weed management approach at Bel Marin Keys Unit V. In coordination with partners, Point Blue has managed water levels and resulting vegetation in the North Seasonal Wetlands to support the threatened Western Snowy Plovers found nesting there. Point Blue has also contributed monitoring data to annual reports on outcomes for both the Hamilton and Bel Marin Keys Unit V Phase 1 restoration projects. Finally,

Point Blue has carried out property infrastructure improvements, such as coordinating the process of installing new interpretive signage, addressing erosion around the North Seasonal Wetlands water control structure and in the South Seasonal Wetlands, maintaining access through pothole repair on gravel levee roads, and extending a fence to protect the Western Snowy Plover.

Since the project commenced in early 2023, Point Blue has scaled up its educational and workforce development programming. Through the Students and Teachers Restoring a Watershed (STRAW) program, over 2,000 students from first grade through high school from at least thirteen different schools have engaged in project-based learning activities on the site. Point Blue has also continued to cultivate the longstanding volunteer cohort at the Novato Baylands. Point Blue will continue to engage underserved communities through their Apprentice program, Community College Conservation Internship, and partnerships with local Conservation Corps.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy (2022 Authorization)	\$2,150,000
Coastal Conservancy (2024 Authorization)	\$2,500,000
Point Blue (Grant from San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority)	\$100,000
Proposed Authorization	\$2,500,000
Project Total	\$7,150,000

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Reappropriation of funds from the California Drought, Water, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoors Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68, California Public Resources Code Sections 80000- 80173). Chapter 8 of Prop 68 allocates funds to the Conservancy for projects to restore San Francisco Bay in accordance with the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority (SFBRA) Act (Public Resources Code section 80110(b)(10)). The SFBRA Act sets forth a detailed description of the purposes of the bond funds, including projects for the restoration, enhancement, protection, and enhancement of tidal wetlands and natural habitats on the shoreline in the San Francisco Bay area; projects that provide or improve public access or recreational amenities that are part of a project to restore, enhance, or protect tidal wetlands or natural habitat; and projects that build or enhance shoreline levees or other flood management features that are part of a project to restore, enhance, or protect tidal wetlands or natural habitat (Gov. Code section 66704.5). The proposed project is consistent with the SFBRA Act (Gov. Code sections 66700 – 66706) because it is located within the geographic boundary and supports the goals of the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority by restoring, protecting, and enhancing tidal wetlands and natural habitat, providing for public access and recreational amenities, and enhancing the shoreline levee.

Point Blue will apply \$100,000 of matching grant funds from the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority towards this project.

Point Blue will continue to provide in-kind services through the community volunteer program, environmental education program, and local conservation corps teams. The Conservancy does not typically require in-kind services, nor does it require documentation of expenditures of in-kind services.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is being undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (sections 31162-31165), as described in the December 1, 2022 staff recommendation.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.3**, the proposed project will provide funding for activities that directly benefit systemically excluded communities.

Consistent with **Goal 1.4**, the proposed project will support workforce development by working with Conservation Corps and providing training to community college interns.

Consistent with **Goal 3.2**, the proposed project will enhance 177 acres of wetlands habitat.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

In April 1999, the Conservancy certified the Environmental Impact Report/Statement for the Hamilton Wetlands Restoration project. On June 25, 2001, the Conservancy certified the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Plan Volume II Environmental Impact Report / Environmental Impact Statement and approved the Feasibility Report. On June 16, 2005, the Conservancy certified the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report / Environmental Impact Statement for the Bel Marin Keys Unit V Expansion of the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project and approved modifications to the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Plan to incorporate Bel Marin Keys Unit V. Prior to authorizing funding for construction of Bel Marin Keys Unit V Phase 1, the Conservancy prepared and considered the Bel Marin Keys Wetland Restoration Phase 1 Project Addendum to the Supplemental Environmental Impact Report Environmental Impact Statement for the Bel Marin Keys Unit V Expansion of Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project ("Addendum"). Since preparation of the Addendum, there have been no project changes, new information, or changed circumstances that trigger the need for additional CEQA review of the project pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15162.

Finally, the property improvements of public access amenities and other infrastructure, including replacement interpretive signage, are categorically exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15301, "Existing Facilities" because they involve the operation, maintenance, or repair of existing facilities and will not expand use of the property. Any proposed property improvement funded under this grant that is not exempt from CEQA must first be approved by the Conservancy prior to any implementation or construction.

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