

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

September 17, 2026

GREAT REDWOOD TRAIL - WILLITS RAIL WITH TRAIL - AUGMENTATION

Project No. 23-080-01

Project Manager: Christine Aralia

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$935,000 to the City of Willits to augment the Conservancy grant authorized on November 30, 2023 to implement the Willits Rail with Trail Project, consisting of construction of a 1.6-mile trail between East Hill Road and East Commercial Street in the City of Willits that will be part of the Great Redwood Trail in Mendocino County.

LOCATION: City of Willits, Mendocino County

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [November 30, 2023 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 the disbursement of up to nine hundred thirty five thousand dollars (\$935,000) to the City of Willits ("the grantee") to augment the Conservancy grant authorized on November 30, 2023 to implement the Willits Rail with Trail Project, consisting of construction of a 1.6-mile trail between East Hill Road and East Commercial Street in the City of Willits that will be part of the Great Redwood Trail in Mendocino County, subject to the same conditions as set forth in the November 30, 2023 authorization. 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'.

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 accessways.
 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 grant up to \$935,000 to the City of Willits to augment and extend the grant term to June, 2027 for the Conservancy grant authorized on November 30, 2023 to implement the Willits Rail with Trail Project, consisting of construction of a 1.6-mile trail between East Hill Road and East Commercial Street in the City of Willits that will be part of the Great Redwood Trail in Mendocino County ("the project").

The State Coastal Conservancy approved a \$3,813,000 grant in 2023 to the City of Willits for this trail construction project. The project as initially authorized for a Conservancy grant is described in the attached November 30, 2023 staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

Construction is now close to complete; approximately two thirds of the trail has been graded and base material installed. All bridge structures have been delivered and are currently stored on site. However, there were permitting issues with the bridge abutments, which caused project delays and changes in mitigation requirements. Regulatory agencies are requiring construction of additional mitigation wetlands to compensate for impacts to wetlands and other environmentally sensitive resources. Amendments to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board permits were needed and have now been completed. The additional mitigation was not included in the original designs or bid package. These costs, coupled with cost escalation during the life of the project, increased the total cost of the project by approximately \$1,235,000.

The City of Willits has been providing construction management services valued at \$300,000 to help fill the funding gap, but a shortfall of \$935,000 remains. This funding augmentation will pay for the new mitigation requirements and cover cost escalation, as well as funding tribal interpretive exhibits being developed in coordination with the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians. The project remains the same as described in Exhibit 2.

If the proposed funding is authorized to complete the project, construction is anticipated to be substantially complete by December 2026, with full project completion and the trail open to the public by June 2027.

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.

See Exhibit 2.

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. Through this Conservancy-led process, the Sherwood Band of Pomo have indicated an interest in the Willits Rail with Trail project. The City of Willits is also developing tribal wayfinding exhibits in coordination with the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians.

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

See Exhibit 2.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

See Exhibit 2.

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

See Exhibit 2.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy (this authorization)	\$935,000
Coastal Conservancy (previous authorization)	\$3,813,000
California Active Transportation Program	\$4,066,680
Project Total	\$8,814,680

The source of funding for this augmentation is a fiscal year 2025/26 appropriation to the State Coastal 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 State Coastal Conservancy for the Great Redwood Trail Agency 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. This project is an appropriate use of these funds because it will develop the creation of a new segment of Great Redwood Trail. The Great Redwood Trail Agency has authorized the Conservancy to grant these Proposition 4 funds directly to the City of Willits for this project.

The City of Willits has secured planning and construction grants for the project from the California Active Transportation Program and the State Transportation Improvement Program. 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

See Exhibit 2.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN

See Exhibit 2.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to California Public Resources Code 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.