Coastal Conservancy
STATE of CALIFORNIA

Annual Report 2019

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It is May 2019, and in the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic 2019 seems like a long time ago. But the progress the Conservancy made last year to expand coastal access and to protect and restore coastal resources and watersheds built upon the State's legacy of preserving open spaces for all Californians; a principle that has proven invaluable as people turn to nature for solace in these uncertain times.

The year began with a change in administration in Sacramento. We welcomed a new Governor and a new Secretary of Natural Resources, who wasted no time setting out a bold agenda for the Agency. Secretary Crowfoot's priorities of access for all, protecting biodiversity, building climate resilience and "cutting green tape" dovetail with much of the Conservancy's ongoing work, and gives sharp focus to our objectives for the future.

The Coastal Conservancy continued to deliver the restoration, protection and access projects that are so important to the future of the California coast and its watersheds. Our funding helped to leverage millions in federal, local, and other matching funds, multiplying the impact of our projects. And we supported innovative approaches to enhance the coast's resilience to a changing climate and rising seas.

Building Climate Resilience

Significantly, our Climate Ready program, which has been running since 2013, was established in statute by SB 576. This grant program supports local governments and non-governmental organizations in preparing for the impacts of climate change. In six grant rounds, the program has awarded more than $14 million to over 60 projects throughout the state ranging from urban rainwater capture to carbon farming on grazing lands to sea level rise vulnerability assessments. With the program formally established, we look forward to expanding the funding available for this critical work.

One of the most exciting approaches to improving shoreline resilience to sea level rise are Living Shorelines. Living Shorelines use both engineered and nature-based solutions together to protect coastal infrastructure while simultaneously creating habitat for wildlife and plants.

In 2019, the Conservancy spearheaded projects in Newport Bay, Encinitas and the San Francisco Bay to advance the science of Living Shorelines and put them into place defending our State's roads, homes and businesses.

We also enabled projects that will build the state's long-term resilience, such as a groundwater recharge project in the Pajaro Valley that works with farmers to refill the water tables under their land, and the distribution of Fire Resilience funding on the Central Coast to better prepare the region for future wildfires. In 2019 we saw the successful beneficial application of dredged sediment in the San Francisco Bay, thanks to Conservancy funding. In collaboration with the US Army Corps of Engineers, 70,000 cubic yards of sediment dredged from Redwood City Harbor will be placed at upland sites, helping to create thriving wetlands that prepared for sea level rise.

Access for All

Following the publication of the Assessment of Lower Cost Overnight Accommodations along the coast in 2018, the Conservancy held its first grant round to fund projects that expand the supply of coastal lodging in 2019. With funding from Prop 68, we are supporting the development of new hostels, cabins and campsites. We also ran a grant round dedicated to funding the procurement of beach wheelchairs and adaptive equipment, resulting in new ways for people with disabilities to go to the beach at 18 locations in California.

Recognizing that physical access is not the only barrier to the coast, we maintained our strong focus on justice, equity, diversity and inclusion in 2019. We devoted much of this year to drafting Justice, Equity, Inclusion and Diversity (JEDI) guidelines for our agency, with the input of focus groups, interviews and a survey. We expect to finalize and adopt these guidelines in 2020, though we have already started to implement several of the commitments they contain. We have adapted our hiring, retention and promotion practices to support a diversity among the Conservancy team. We have established a community-based Advisory Board for our Explore the Coast grants which has helped to make them more accessible to applicants. And we are working to support meaningful community and tribal engagement in all projects we fund.

The year has been an opportunity to better understand how the Conservancy can serve the needs of all Californians, and reaffirmed the importance of our work in the last four decades to preserve coastal resources for California's future, whatever it may hold.

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Regional Highlights

North Coast

- Provided $3 Million to Save the Redwoods League (SRL) to help implement the Redwoods Rising Initiative, an innovative partnership between SRL, California State Parks and the National Park Service to restore redwood forest systems in Humboldt and Del Norte County.
- Funded the Redwood Community Action Agency to advance the coastal trail crossing of Little River in Humboldt County, which will improve trail connectivity for cyclists and pedestrians.
- In October 2019, Jughandle Creek Farm and Nature Center opened new lower cost accommodations at their property in Mendocino County. The Conservancy supported the planning, design and construction of a new bunkhouse that includes both dormitory rooms and family rooms, providing reasonably priced accommodations to visitors on the Mendocino Coast.

San Francisco Bay Area

- Broke ground on the restoration of Bel Marin Keys Unit V in Marin County. This 1,500 acre site adjacent to the recently-restored Hamilton airfield, will be transformed into a mosaic of wetlands to increase wildlife and migratory bird habitat and improve flood protection.
- Funded five nature-based adaptation projects in partnership with the Marin Community Foundation. This program seeks to increase knowledge and capacity-building for nature-based adaptation design and implementation in Marin County.
- Supported green infrastructure for communities and creeks in North Richmond, Contra Costa County, to create an urban trail, improve water quality, increase the urban canopy, provide environmental stewardship opportunities, and improve community health by creating a cleaner, more walkable, bikeable neighborhood.
- Constructed the Giant Marsh Living Shorelines Project, also in Richmond, to create oyster reefs, eelgrass beds, tidal marsh and native cordgrass; the design also incorporates upland ecotone components.
- "Outstanding Environmental Project" awarded to the Napa River Oakville to Oak Knoll Restoration Project at the biennial State of the Estuary Conference. This project restores important floodplain function to benefit steelhead and salmon, and stabilizes the river's banks, thus preventing additional erosion and associated water quality and property damage.

Central Coast

- Completed an innovative groundwater recharge project in the Pajaro Valley to help offset overdraft problems in this highly important agricultural region. The demonstration project uses a net-metering system to offset operation and maintenance costs.
- Restored 61 acres of tidal marsh at Elkhorn Slough to increase sea-level rise resilience, and improve habitat for dozens of species including the Federally threatened Southern Sea Otter.
- Assisted in the acquisition of a parcel along Arroyo Burro Creek in Santa Barbara that ensures the entire lower creek corridor is protected. And provided funding to acquire 58 acres of beach and bluff property south of Half Moon Bay which will enable the County of San Mateo to open a new beach park.
- Completed the restoration of 22 acres of dunes at Salinas River State Park to increase sea level rise resiliency and help protect adjacent agricultural lands and coastal habitats.

South Coast

- To address the undersupply of lower cost coastal overnight accommodation, we funded a coastal campground at the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park Campground in San Diego County to build 50 tent camping sites, 16 yurts, and 12 equestrian camping sites.
- Implemented a demonstration of farming practices to sequester carbon in the soil, including hedgerow planting and no-till row crops, at the Pauma Tribal Farms in San Diego County.
- Completed restoration of 4 acres of dune habitat to serve as flood protection for Pacific Coast Highway at Cardiff Beach in the City of Encinitas.
- Supported the Community-based restoration of 7.5 acres of Manzanita Canyon in City Heights, San Diego.
- Funded 13 projects for the Santa Ana River Trail and Parkway. These projects include trail building, park planning, and land acquisition in the counties of Riverside, Orange and San Bernadino.