



Coastal Access Project Standards

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The State Coastal Conservancy's vision is of a beautiful, restored, and accessible coast for current and future generations of Californians. The State Coastal Conservancy is responsible for helping develop a system of trails and coastal access points along the State's coastline and creating a continuous, interconnected public trail system spanning over 1,200 miles from Oregon to Mexico. Projects include trails, walkways, and stairways to the beach; amenities such as overnight accommodations, piers, parking, and restrooms; and programs that support coastal access, such as programs that provide field trips to the coast. The Conservancy's goals for coastal access includes access that is equitable and barrier-free; enhances inclusive public visitation; protects sensitive ecological areas; accounts for coastal hazards; incorporates sustainable design; encourages non-motorized transportation; fosters appreciation and stewardship of the coast's natural and cultural resources; and links communities to the coast. To achieve these goals, the standards should be used by public entities and non-profit organizations that are developing coastal access projects or preparing Local Coastal Programs. The Conservancy will use these standards, in addition to the Conservancy's Strategic Plan and Project Selection Criteria, in considering, evaluating, and prioritizing public access project proposals for funding and during management of grants for public access projects. As site conditions vary along the coast, the application of these standards is flexible.



Standard #1: Location

The location of public access projects should be prioritized by these criteria where possible:

- Location lacks adequate access improvements or needs additional access improvements to address current or potential demand from public.
- Project completes a segment of the Coastal Trail, San Francisco Bay Trail, or other federal, state, or regional trails, or project connects communities to the Coastal Trail, San Francisco Bay Trail, or other federal, state, or regional trails.
- The location has been identified in local, regional, or statewide assessments or studies as having high needs for community access to parks, open space, recreational opportunities, and nature.
- Project provides public access to beaches, shorelines, coastal waterways, piers, boardwalks, or other coastal resources.
- Location is easily accessed by, popular with, and/or selected based on engagement with underserved and/or frontline communities. Underserved and/or frontline communities include low-income communities, people with disabilities, immigrants, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.
- Location can be accessed in various ways, such as by walking or hiking, by bicycle or other non-motorized transportation, by public transportation or shuttles, and/or by private vehicle.
- Project location can be accessed via safe pedestrian and bicycle crossings of roadways and railroads.



Standard #2: Support Facilities

Projects should have adequate facilities and amenities to support public access to the coast and shoreline and provide for positive visitor experiences. Facilities and amenities should be based on regional needs and input from existing and potential users and should address accessibility for people with disabilities (see Standard #3). Projects should consider and address impacts of entry fees, parking fees, and other fees to equitable access. As site conditions and recreational activities vary along the coast, inclusion of support facilities and amenities should be based on local conditions and opportunities and constraints at the project site. Examples of facilities and amenities include the following:

- Visitor kiosks and visitor centers.
- Parking lots for cars and/or buses, electric vehicle charging stations, bike racks, bike repair or fix-it stations, equestrian facilities, and passenger drop-off areas.
- Lower-cost overnight accommodations (see Standard #9).
- Restrooms, showers, drinking water, and trash and recycle containers.
- Benches, picnic tables, overlooks, beach wheelchairs, and beach mats.
- Shade structures, pavilions, ball fields or courts, grilling/BBQ facilities, food vendors, and play structures or play areas.
- Facilities to support organized groups and outdoor education, such as seating areas, amphitheaters, or group picnic areas.
- Boardwalks, hiking trails, sidewalks, bike lanes or trails, equestrian trails, and piers.
- Launching facilities for a wide array of non-motorized boats and water-borne recreation, including ramps, docks, gear storage and rental facilities, and gear wash-down facilities.
- Fishing piers and other fishing access points, fish cleaning stations, receptacles for waste fishing gear, and other amenities for anglers.
- Lifeguard and first aid stations.
- Welcome signs, directional signs, and natural, historical, and cultural resource interpretation signs and displays.
 - Directional and interpretive signs should be welcoming and accessible to as many visitors as possible. This may include translation into multiple languages, use of images instead of or in addition to text, use of plain language, and inclusive design techniques that serve people with disabilities. Inclusive design techniques may include, but are not limited to, consideration of color contrast, font and font size, and height of signs. Inclusive design may also include three-dimensional maps or models that promote access to and understanding of the project site.
 - Interpretive themes should reflect California's diversity, be culturally relevant to a diversity of visitors, be developed in conjunction with tribes and a diversity of communities, and encourage personal connection to and stewardship of the California coast, San Francisco Bay, and Pacific Ocean.
- Signs that describe rules and regulations. The public's rights and responsibilities should be clearly described to encourage stewardship of coastal resources, to promote safety, and to reduce conflict among various users, including bicyclists, anglers, equestrians, dog walkers, and others.

Standard #3: Inclusion and Access for Persons with Disabilities

Projects should address accessibility for persons with disabilities during the planning, design, construction, and maintenance of a project, as well as in the provision of programs at the project site. To the extent feasible, projects should incorporate inclusive access design. Barriers to access include physical obstacles that prevent or restrict the use of a facility or trail, lack of information about accessibility of the site, and lack of programs that serve people of all abilities. Projects should:

- Be planned, designed, constructed, and maintained to comply with state and federal accessibility standards and guidelines, and incorporate inclusive design principles where possible.
- Incorporate recommendations from the California State Parks Accessibility Guidelines, and the reports referenced therein, during the planning and design process.
- Ensure facilities and amenities designed for persons with disabilities are integrated to the maximum extent feasible.
- Design and construct facilities and amenities that allow for the provision of inclusive programs and activities that serve people of all abilities.
- Seek feedback from people with disabilities during project planning and design.
- Provide clear descriptions about site and facility accessibility on websites, signs, brochures, and in other forms to allow for persons with disabilities to make informed decisions prior to and during their visit. Important information includes, but is not limited to, trail widths, lengths, slopes, and surface condition, as well as availability of parking for people with disabilities and accessibility of restrooms and other facilities and amenities.
- Ensure licensees, consultants, service providers, and other entities are aware of their obligation to provide inclusive programs and activities.
- Monitor the physical improvements and any programs and activities; maintain and manage the project site to ensure continued accessibility.



Standard #4: California's Tribes

Projects should recognize the distinct cultural, spiritual, environmental, economic, and public health interests of California's tribes and tribal communities. Projects should value the traditional ecological knowledge held by California Indian tribes and tribal communities about the coast. Projects should, as applicable and feasible:

- Include early consultation and coordination with tribes. This consultation should start as early as possible to ensure the project is routed, planned, designed, implemented, and managed in a manner that respects Indigenous lands and culture.
- Assist tribes in regaining access to their ancestral lands, including the ability to engage in traditional stewardship and cultural practices or co-management of their ancestral lands and resources.
- Incorporate tribal land acknowledgements into programs and signage, developed in conjunction with tribal representatives.
- Ensure educational and interpretative materials and programming include Indigenous perspectives.

Photo: Yurok Tribe



Standard #5: Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

The project should be consistent with the Coastal Conservancy's Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Guidelines. To extent feasible, projects should:

- Create a welcoming environment that respects and represents people's differences; embraces multicultural and Indigenous histories and presence; and cultivates community empowerment, care and preservation of natural and cultural resources, personal connections, and a sense of belonging.
- Reduce socio-economic barriers to coastal access, such as localism, financial barriers, cultural barriers that prevent people from feeling welcome, lack of transportation options, and a lack of information about coastal access and the logistics of reserving or accessing sites.
- Increase equitable access to the coast and coastal watersheds for all Californians, prioritizing access for underserved and/or frontline communities that face barriers to coastal access.
- Promote meaningful community engagement, develop plans in collaboration with communities, and involve underserved communities early in project planning and decision-making.
- Provide coastal experiences and programs for people that may face challenges getting to or enjoying the coast (such as lower-income people, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, people with disabilities, English as a Second Language communities, or students from Title 1 schools) and create opportunities for people to visit the coast for the first time. Programs should be developed and delivered in partnership with community groups and outdoor education organizations.
- Provide a valuable recreational, environmental, cultural, or historic learning experience. In project design, recognize the cultural values intrinsic to coastal sites.
- Include a communication and outreach plan so that communities are aware of coastal access opportunities.



Standard #6: Cultural Resources, Natural Environment, and Hazards

Projects should consider cultural and natural resources, as well as hazards. Project planning, design, construction, and management should:

- Assess and consider any sensitive cultural resources on or near the site such as archeological sites, historic sites, historic structures, and cultural landscapes. Projects should avoid or minimize adverse impacts to cultural resources and, if possible, enhance the cultural resource. Also see Standard #4.
- Assess and consider sensitive natural resources on or near the site, such as wetlands, tidepools, creeks and rivers, and habitat for special-status species. Projects should avoid or minimize adverse impacts to environmentally sensitive areas, and, if possible, enhance natural resources.
- Preserve and enhance coastal and water views.
- Include the evaluation of the potential impact of hazards on the project. The anticipated impacts of sea level rise, as well as storm surge and high tides, to the project should be assessed and planned for in projects. Sea level rise projections should be based on latest science and State of California guidelines. Wildfire, flooding, erosion, extreme weather, extreme heat, and other hazards should be planned for in project design. Nature-based adaptation to climate change should be used wherever possible.
- Not increase the potential impacts of hazards such as erosion, sea level rise, fire, and flooding to adjacent communities and infrastructure.



Photo: Judy Irving

Standard #7: Sustainable Design

The project should consider climate change and incorporate sustainable design wherever possible. Sustainable design may include:

- Site and landscaping design that includes drought-tolerant and/or native plants, use of grey water for irrigation, permeable surfaces, stormwater retention, minimal grading, urban forests, and design elements that decrease urban heat islands.
- Use of sustainable and/or recycled building materials, energy and water efficient fixtures, renewable energy such as solar panels, and inclusion of electric vehicle charging stations.
- Construction that minimizes greenhouse gas emissions and waste.
- Accessibility to the project site by public transit, walking, bicycles, or other nonmotorized transportation and ability for the project's trails or accessways to serve as alternative transportation corridors.



Standard #8: Operation and Maintenance

Project design should account for long term operation and maintenance considerations. Conservancy grants typically require grantee to operate and maintain improvements for 20 years. These considerations could include:

- Design that takes anticipated maintenance level into account.
- Use of design strategies and long-lasting construction materials that are resilient and/or adaptable to harsh environments, flooding, heavy public use, and sea level rise.
- Designs that include easily maintained landscaping, site infrastructure (such as utilities and stormwater systems), and facilities and amenities (see Standard #2).
- Designs to discourage graffiti and/or allow for easy removal.
- Easy access for operations and maintenance personnel and vehicles.
- Identification of the entity or entities responsible for operations and maintenance and a funding plan for long-term operations and maintenance.



Standard #9: Lower-Cost Overnight Accommodations

The cost of overnight accommodations can be a significant barrier to coastal access for low-income and middle-income Californians, particularly in popular locations (see Standard #1). If applicable and relevant, the project should:

- Improve the ability to access lower-cost overnight accommodations on the coast, particularly for low and middle-income households and organizations that serve underserved communities.
- Minimize barriers and inequities to accessing accommodations, with opportunities like reservation set-asides, discounts, outreach, partnerships with community groups, camping supply loan programs, and lower-cost transportation options such as community shuttles.
- Increase the overall quantity of lower-cost overnight accommodations on the coast. Criteria for qualifying as lower-cost overnight accommodations include overnight rates and populations served.
- Provide for overnight parking, where feasible and needed to support overnight stays or activities.



Standard #10: Federal, State and Local Land Use Policy Consistency

The project should promote, where possible, cooperation amongst public and private organizations and jurisdictions to achieve coastal access objectives and ensure connectivity between public access facilities. As applicable, the project should be consistent with the public access provisions of the State Coastal Conservancy enabling legislation, the coastal resources planning and management policies of the California Coastal Act, the public access provisions of the McAteer-Petris Act, certified Local Coastal Programs, the San Francisco Bay Plan, and other applicable federal, state, and local planning policies.



Photo: Wade Brown