



Annual Report 2021

Mission of the State Coastal Conservancy:

Our vision is of a beautiful, restored, and accessible coast for current and future Californians. We act with others to protect and restore, and increase public access to, California's coast, ocean, coastal watersheds and the San Francisco Bay Area.

Welcome. I am honored and excited to serve as the new Executive Officer of the Coastal Conservancy. I've been with this agency for over 20 years and have seen the impact of our work in restored wetlands, coastal accessways opened to the public, protected open spaces, and new programs to help more Californians access and enjoy the coast. The Conservancy is a remarkable team of people deeply committed to our mission. As Executive Officer, I aim to continue the great work already in motion and to accelerate projects that work with nature to adapt to climate change impacts and increase equitable access to the California coast.



Amy Hutz, Executive Officer

Last year, despite the challenges of an ongoing pandemic and the retirement of Sam Schuchat, our Executive Officer for the past two decades, the Conservancy awarded \$90 million to 111 projects in 26 of California's 58 counties. That's nearly twice the amount of funding we awarded in 2020, and 35% more projects.

This increase reflects several large funding items, a number of external grants successfully secured by Conservancy staff, funding for our new Wildfire Resilience Program, and an uplift for our small but mighty Explore the Coast program.

In 2021, our Board authorized:

- \$10 million to the County of San Diego to implement the Tijuana River Valley Smuggler's Gulch Improvements Project;

- \$13.4 million for construction, monitoring, and modeling of Phase 2 South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project actions at Eden Landing Ecological Reserve in Alameda County; and
- \$10.1 million to the City of Fullerton to acquire a 13.7-acre property in the West Coyote Hills area for open space, habitat protection, watershed management, and public access.

Funding at this level will move these large-scale projects forward substantially.

We also allocated nearly \$10 million to Conservancy projects from external funding sources, including the EPA, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service's National Coastal Wetlands Conservation grants.

Wildfire Resilience

Recognizing that catastrophic wildfires are a growing threat to coastal habitats, last year the Conservancy established its Wildfire Resilience Program. The program supports local partners to develop and implement projects that improve forest health and reduce the risk of catastrophic fire in areas where people are living near wildlands.

In the Spring, the Conservancy received a special appropriation of General Funds for urgent wildfire risk reduction. Thanks to a huge amount of extra effort from staff to identify and approve projects, including arranging a special Board meeting, the Conservancy awarded 35 grants for a total of \$11.4 million in a matter of weeks. The first projects started work July 1st – less than 3 months after the appropriation.

Among these grants, four went to Tribes for fire resilience projects on their lands: the Hoopa Valley Tribe, Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, Pala Band Mission Indians, and Lipay Nation of Santa Ysabel.



The Arroyo Honda Preserve in Santa Barbara County after the Alisal fire. The land on the right had been treated with prescribed herbivory to reduce fuel loads earlier in 2021, funded by a Wildfire Resilience grant. (photo: Land Trust for Santa Barbara County)

Centering Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

The ability for all Californians to get to and enjoy the coast has always been central to the mission of the Conservancy. In recent years, our understanding of public access has evolved to encompass non-tangible barriers to coastal access. In 2021, we were able to expand our public access programs and update our Project Selection Criteria and Coastal Access Project Standards to incorporate a greater focus on equity.

Through our Explore the Coast program we fund coastal experiences for groups including lower-income individuals and households, people with disabilities, people of color, immigrant communities, and foster youth. Last year, this program allocated \$1,721,088 to nonprofit organizations and public agencies for 45 projects, including several new projects serving inland and Central Valley communities.

With input from partners, community leaders, and the public, we revisited two key documents that guide the Conservancy's decision-making with the intention of centering equity and climate resilience.

We replaced our 40-year-old Coastal Accessway Standards with Coastal Access Project Standards that prioritize accessibility for people with disabilities, coordinating with California's tribes, and providing equitable and inclusive coastal access. The new standards take into account sea level rise, encourage sustainable design, call out the need for operations and maintenance, and expand the definition of lower-cost overnight accommodations beyond hostels.

We also updated our Project Selection Criteria, which was an implementation action under the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy in 2020. The update includes two new criteria related to meaningful community engagement and tribal engagement, and aligns the criteria with current state policy and guidance on climate change.

We use these documents, in addition to the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, in considering, evaluating, and prioritizing project proposals for funding and during management of grants. We hope these updates will result in a broader diversity of grantees receiving funding and a greater number of projects that meet the needs of California's historically underrepresented communities.



Jaclyn Schmidt and a beach wheelchair provided by Heal the Bay in Santa Monica, funded by an SCC grant. (photo: Jaclyn Schmidt)

The year ahead promises new and unprecedented opportunities. In late 2021, Governor Newsom signed a budget bill that includes a total of \$500 million for coastal resilience to be appropriated to the State Coastal Conservancy in Fiscal Years 2022-23 and 2023-24; this is in addition to our bond appropriations and a new \$14 million General Fund appropriation for the Explore the Coast program. As we complete the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan and begin drafting the plan for the next five years in consultation with public agencies, tribes, nonprofits, community groups, and the public, this funding lets us think even bigger about how we can protect and restore the coast, and make sure it is accessible to all Californians.

- Amy Hutzell
February 2022

2021 in Numbers

- **\$90 million to 111 projects** in 26 of California's 58 counties.
- A total of \$1,721,088 allocated to **45 Explore the Coast** projects. In total, they will help approximately **18,000 people get to the coast**, including over 15,100 low-income Californians, 16,200 people of color, 1,000 homeless or foster youth, approximately 8,800 people for whom English is not their first language, and at least 1,400 people with physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities.
- **\$3.5 million** authorized in Explore the Coast Overnight funding, the Conservancy's lower cost overnight accommodation program.
- \$11.4 million awarded to **35 Wildfire Resilience Projects**.



MeWater Foundation, an Explore the Coast 2021 Grantee. (photo: MeWater Foundation)

Regional Highlights

Statewide

- Released the first complete digital map of the California Coastal Trail showing the 875 full miles of completed segments and giving a clear picture of where new trail could be developed.
- Approved funding for the construction of approximately 13 miles of California Coastal Trail including segments in Humboldt Bay, Usual Beach in Mendocino County, and the Bayshore Bikeway in San Diego County, and completed construction of award-winning Point Pinos Coastal Trail in Pacific Grove.
- Launched the Coastal Stories Grant Program to fund projects that plan, develop, and implement storytelling installations or materials (such as murals, signage, monuments, or guides) that represent communities and voices that have been historically excluded in the storytelling of California's coast and publicly accessible lands. These communities may include but are not limited to BIPOC people, people with disabilities, immigrant communities, low-income communities, and other communities.

North Coast

- Completed acquisitions of the Lone Pine Ranch on the Eel River and Mill Bend, and funded an acquisition program at Pacific Shores, Del Norte County to acquire lots at Lake Earl.
- Worked with Native American tribes to develop and implement projects, including grants to the Yurok for projects at lower Prairie Creek, Prairie Creek/Elk Meadows, and Lower Klamath Tributaries, and the Resighini Rancheria for salmonid habitat enhancement on their reservation.
- Funded wetland restoration projects at Ocean Ranch, Elk River and Mad River Floodplain, and provided funding for anadromous fish habitat improvements in the Lower Klamath tributaries and McKinney Creek.
- Funded 8 projects to develop plans for improved fish habitat, including projects in the Eel River, Humboldt Bay, Mattole, Prairie Creek and Klamath watersheds.
- Providing funding for public access improvements at Hawk Hill in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, a site that currently receives over 150,000 visitors a year



View of the Main Stem of the Eel River from the lower hillsides of the Lone Pine Ranch.

San Francisco Bay Area

- Breached the levee at Lower Walnut Creek to kick off restoration and enhancement of over 200 acres of tidal wetlands complex, and to begin restoring estuary-watershed connections in Martinez.
- Completed a long-awaited and highly used Bay Trail section in Albany, creating 18 miles of continuous Bay Trail running from Oakland to Richmond.
- Completed the Iron Triangle Urban Greening Project in Richmond, which planted trees and installed green infrastructure such as bioswales and rain gardens.
- Completed and continued projects under the Marin nature-based grant program, a multi-year partnership with Marin Community Foundation to conduct innovative nature-based adaptation projects.
- Celebrated progress on the Invasive Spartina Project, including construction of 15 high tide refuge islands and planting of 25,000 native seedlings (for a total of 500,000 outplanted in the last 10 years).
- Approved over \$4 million to support the removal of the Terminal 4 Wharf in Richmond, which will remove derelict pilings and debris, improve success of Pacific herring, pilot innovative shoreline protection techniques, and protect and enhance eelgrass beds and other biological resources.
- Completed the Markham Elementary Living Schoolyard Demonstration Project in Oakland, which removed asphalt, planted native trees and plants, and constructed a shaded outdoor classroom.



Living Schoolyard Demonstration Project at Markham Elementary in Oakland. (photo: Trust for Public Land)

Central Coast

- Helped conserve the Attiyeh Ranch in San Luis Obispo County - over 7,600 acres of watershed lands that are critical for protecting the water supply and water quality for the Salinas valley.
- Provided \$1.1 million of continued support for the Integrated Watershed Restoration Program which has helped design and permit over 180 restoration projects in San Mateo, Santa Cruz, and San Luis Obispo Counties.
- Supported public access throughout the region with grants to provide coastal amenities in Pillar Point Harbor, Big Sur, and Cayucos.
- Funded coastal habitat restoration with grants for restoration in the Santa Maria watershed and along Los Osos Creek, and restoration planning at Moran Lake and in the Carmel River watershed.



Point Pinos segment of the California Coastal Trail, named the Best Public Works Project of 2021 by Monterey County Weekly. (photo: City of Pacific Grove)

South Coast

- Completed the Tijuana River Valley Campground. The 79-acre campground offers panoramic views of the valley, with connections to the park's trail system which is enjoyed by hikers, bikers and equestrians. It contains a nature education center, 51 primitive campsites and 10 yurts for six to ten guests each. It also features an amphitheater, nature play and a volunteer camp host for 24-hour maintenance and support.
- Provided funding to the City of Fullerton to acquire 13.7 acres in the West Coyote Hills. The acquisition is part of a 24-acre acquisition by the City that will protect the natural habitat and have a long-lasting public benefit.
- Broke ground on the replacement of the Santa Ana Blvd Bridge to facilitate the eventual removal of the Matilija Dam. Additionally, we funded the design of the replacement Camino Cielo Bridge and redesign of the Robles Diversion to allow for improved fish passage and sediment flow once the dam is removed.
- Funded a tribally-lead non-profit to create an acquisition vision and build the capacity of indigenous people in Orange County to engage in land use planning decisions.
- Installed over 300 "reef balls" near the Chula Vista Nature Reserve in San Diego Bay. The reef balls are designed to attract and establish native oyster populations that create structurally complex "reef" habitats for fish, birds, invertebrates, and aquatic plants that will protect the shoreline from sea level rise impacts and increase the biodiversity of San Diego Bay by creating new marine habitats.



Reef balls ready for installation adjacent to the Chula Vista Wildlife Refuge. (photo: Port of San Diego)