



Coastal Conservancy

STATE of CALIFORNIA

Annual Report 2023

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.

2023 has been an exciting and rewarding year at the Coastal Conservancy. This year, we have awarded an unprecedented amount of funding to projects that are restoring coastal habitats and resources, creating new ways for the public to access the coast, and preparing coastal communities for the impacts of climate change.

Over the past three budgets, the Governor and Legislature have appropriated substantial resources to the Coastal Conservancy primarily to fund nature-based climate adaptation. Thanks in large part to this funding, the Governing Board of the Conservancy authorized a total of **\$236 million in grants to over 200 projects spanning the length of the coast in 2023**. This is an increase of \$85 million over last year's already-high funding level and was matched by over \$200 million in state and non-state funding.

California's 2023/24 Budget Act included significant one-time funds to the Conservancy from the General Fund to address urgent sea-level rise adaptation and coastal resilience needs using nature-based solutions or other strategies. **At the Board meetings in September and December of 2023, the Conservancy funded 28 sea-level rise adaptation projects**. These projects are located in nearly every coastal county, from Del Norte to San Diego. Projects include a variety of adaptation strategies with an emphasis



on the use of nature-based sea-level rise adaptation approaches. While the challenge of sea-level rise is enormous, this funding has been deployed very quickly to support on-the-ground projects to address the urgent problem.

In addition to the influx of state funding, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) had five to ten times their usual levels of funding available for coastal restoration projects in 2023. The Conservancy joined with federal and regional agencies for a public webinar in May to help partners navigate these new and expanded funding streams.

As well as funding nature-based solutions, this year the Conservancy has been focused on expanding our **Wildfire Resilience** program, supporting **lower cost coastal accommodation** projects, developing the **Great Redwood Trail**, funding programs to help more Californian's **access and enjoy the coast**, building our **Coastal Stories** grant program, improving our **tribal engagement** efforts, and continuing the work to center **equity and inclusion** in everything we do.

I extend my thanks to the Conservancy Board, to the terrific staff of the Conservancy, and to our many project partners who make these coastal projects and programs a reality.

- Amy Hutzel, March 2024

Prioritizing Equity

The Coastal Conservancy is committed to addressing injustices and inequities along the California coast. In 2020, the Coastal Conservancy Board adopted Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Guidelines (JEDI Guidelines) that set out principles about our agency's role in promoting equity, inclusion, and diversity and addressing environmental justice.

In 2023, the Conservancy made progress in implementing the JEDI Guidelines by directing funding to projects that directly benefit systemically excluded communities, reducing barriers to access our funding and supporting projects that share power with California's tribes.

- The Coastal Conservancy's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan targets spending 40% of the agency's funding to benefit systemically excluded communities and California Native American tribes. In 2023, about **65% of Conservancy funding went to projects that benefit systemically excluded communities.**
- The Conservancy offers **office hours** to help grant applicants during grant solicitations and onboarding grantees following their grant award. The office hours help answer grant program, project, and invoicing questions to make the process smoother for partners.
- We also host **onboarding webinars** following each grant round to help set grantees up for success and have created a **workforce development** tip sheet for staff and grantees to have clear guidelines for fair wage compensation on state projects.

Working with Tribes

The Conservancy is committed to improving and expanding our efforts to return power to tribes, and to prioritizing tribal partnerships in our work.

- The Conservancy has funded **12 projects this year in collaboration with Native Californian tribes.** This includes funding tribal engagement and planning, "Land

Back” projects, and projects that support tribal leadership of restoration projects, including:

- \$4,500,000 to the Hoopa Valley Tribe to acquire the **10,300-acre Hupa Mountain Conservation Property** in the Klamath River watershed to protect and restore water quality, anadromous fish habitat, wildlife habitat, wildlife connectivity, and forest health, and for tribal and public access. The acquisition was completed in December 2023.
- \$725,000 to the Elk Valley Rancheria for the acquisition of the **9.19-acre Bush parcel** on Crescent Beach, south of Crescent City, in Del Norte County.
- \$10,673,555 in funding from the Conservancy and NOAA to restore approximately 15.9 acres of riparian habitat on lower **Prairie Creek** as part of the Redwood National and State Park Visitor Center and Restoration Project in Humboldt County. Of this funding, up to **\$8,496,000 is going to the Yurok Tribe for the implementation** of this project and to plan for the continuation of similar restoration activities upstream in Prairie Creek and its tributaries. The project has completed has third year of construction to restore floodplain salmonid habitat, improve coastal trail and public access, and develop a Yurok Village Site for cultural activities.
- \$685,546 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) to develop a **Tribal Access and Engagement Plan and conduct cultural resource assessments for the Frank and Joan Randall Preserve/Genga property** (formerly known as Banning Ranch). The Plan will provide for Tribal access to the property, cultural resources, natural resources, and cultural sites with minimal protocols; a “serious effort to engage tribes” consistent with the Coastal Conservancy project selection criteria, including a full fair equitable representation on decision making bodies related to the long term management of the site; meaningful Tribal engagement and involvement in the property; and other actions



Prairie Creek restoration. Photo: Yurok Tribe

identified in dialogue with Tribal members whose ancestral homeland includes the property.

- \$446,400 to the San Francisco Estuary Institute for the **Mapping Yelamu's Historical Landscape project**, consisting of conducting an ecological and ethnographic study of San Francisco in partnership with the Association of Ramaytush Ohlone and development of cultural and ecological landscape maps that can be used for interpretive programs and capital project planning.
- In December 2022, the Conservancy hired a **Tribal Liaison and Equity Coordinator**. She has led internal tribal training such as cultural humility, tribal consultations, and tribal advisory board structure for our project managers to improve their knowledge about working with tribes. We also have a tribal guidance document to assist staff, though the document is ever evolving as our agency is learning.
- Conservancy staff created outreach plans with the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority and Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project to **establish Tribal representation** in these regional groups.

Enjoy the Coast

Improving the ability of all Californians to access and enjoy the coast is central to the Conservancy's mission. Our **Explore the Coast**, **Explore the Coast Overnight**, and **Coastal Stories** programs fund coastal experiences and projects that foster joy and belonging on the coast for people and communities who face challenges to accessing or enjoying the coast. Our **accessibility**, **trail building**, and **amenity enhancement** initiatives aim to reduce barriers and create new recreational resources so everyone can enjoy the coast.



Friends of the Petaluma River Explore the Coast funded outing

- In November 2023, the Coastal Conservancy awarded the second round of Coastal Stories projects. In total, **14 Coastal Stories projects** will tell their cultural connection to the outdoors through installations or interpretive materials that represent diverse communities and perspectives that historically have been excluded from narratives of California's coast and publicly accessible lands.



Coastal Stories funded Mural in Maywood, Los Angeles. Photo: Agua por Vida

- In September 2023, **16 Explore the Coast** projects were awarded grants, including a block grant to Justice Outside to sub-award block grants to community-based organizations.
 - Staff estimates the 2023 grants will engage **over 7,500 people**, serving over 6,100 low-income Californians, 6,600 people of color, 1,000 homeless or foster youth, approximately 1,800 people for whom English is not their first language, and at least 2,100 people with physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities.

- In late 2023, the **Crystal Cove** Conservancy began taking reservations for its 8 newly restored cottages in Newport Beach, one of the first projects to receive funding from our **Lower Cost Overnight Accommodation program, Explore the Coast Overnight**. Pricing for an overnight stay starts as low as \$49 a night, making it one of the most affordable options for a truly unique coastal experience. The Coastal Conservancy has supported this project with \$26,500,000 (of which, nearly \$24,000,000 came from the California Department of Parks and Recreation) to restore a total of 17 of the historic cottages.



Construction at Crystal Cove

- With Conservancy funding, the Bureau of Land Management completed the expansion of the **Mattole Beach Campground** in the King Range National Conservation Area, increasing opportunities for low-cost coastal access and recreation in the Lost Coast.

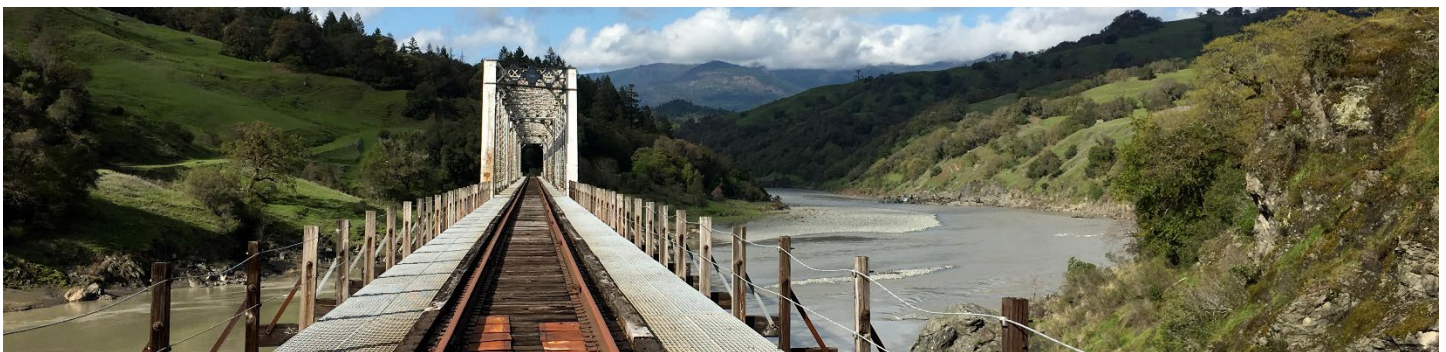
- The Conservancy authorized funding for the construction of cabins for low-cost coastal access at **Jughandle Creek Farm and Nature Center** in Mendocino County.

- To further the Conservancy's goal of making coastal access available to all Californians, in December 2023 it authorized a grant of \$250,000 to Orange County Coastkeeper to provide small grants to nonprofits, public entities, and tribes for **beach wheelchairs and other adaptive equipment** to increase accessibility to California's beaches and coast in coastal counties statewide.



Beach Wheelchair

- In 2023, the Conservancy worked with the Great Redwood Trail Agency (GRTA) to prepare the Master Plan, a roadmap for planning, constructing, and managing the future **Great Redwood Trail**. To gather input on the trail master plan, the GRTA attended 23 community events, hosted 4 in-person and 2 online workshops, and held over 70 stakeholder meetings. Tribal engagement to-date has included attendance at 11 tribal community events, presentations at 7 tribal government and associations meetings and workshops, over 50 in-depth conversations with tribal members and leaders, a webinar for tribal leaders and representatives attended by representatives from 11 tribes, and direct outreach to 37 tribes and tribal/native interest associations. The Master Plan will be released in draft in Spring 2024. The Conservancy also authorized funding to construct 1.6 miles of trail through the City of Willits.



Great Redwood Trail corridor. Photo: Alicia Hamann

Protect & Restore the Coast

The Conservancy works to ensure the coast is protected and restored for existing and future generations. We support projects and activities that protect and enhance the coast's scenic, natural, and agricultural resources, which are vital to the state's economy and quality of life, as well as to the wildlife that depends upon them.

- In Trinity County, the Conservancy supported the Wildlands Conservancy with \$3,950,000 to complete the acquisition of **Lone Pine Ranch Phase III**, protecting 8,085 acres for fish and wildlife habitat and public access in the Eel River Watershed.



Eel River Canyon. Photo: Wildlands Conservancy

- Conservancy funding of \$3,420,000 enabled Save the Redwoods League to complete the purchase of conservation easements on the 3,862-acre **Weger Ranch** in the Big River watershed in Mendocino County to protect redwood forest, wildlife corridors and maintain sustainable timber management.
- In 2023, the Conservancy with the Smith River Alliance completed the acquisition of 33 parcels with the **Pacific Shores Subdivision** adjacent to Lake Earl, Del Norte County. These acquisitions are helping to protect hundreds of acres of beach, dune, wetland, upland, and forest habitat.
- The Conservancy authorized a \$5,500,000 grant to acquire the **175-acre Prior Ranch** in the lower Elk River Watershed in Humboldt County for the preservation of open space, protection and restoration of natural resources and wildlife habitat, protection of cultural resources, providing public access, and agricultural use and tribal cultural use. The acquisition and restoration design represents the launch of a restoration and coastal resilience vision cultivated for years and represented in detail in the Conservancy-funded Elk River Estuary Habitat Restoration Project Report.

- The Conservancy successfully removed the derelict **Terminal 4 Wharf in Richmond**, Contra Costa County, to improve success of Pacific herring, pilot innovative shoreline protection techniques, and protect and enhance eelgrass beds and other biological resources. Before demolition, it was the largest derelict wharf in San Francisco Bay.



Wharf removal at Terminal 4 in Richmond

- The Conservancy awarded \$5,100,000 to the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department to redevelop the **900 Innes** property in the underserved Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood into a mixed-use shoreline park with recreational amenities and enhanced habitat with climate change adaptation features.
- The Conservancy supported a number of acquisition projects in the **San Francisco Bay Area** to protect and expand open space and habitat this year, including:
 - \$7,000,000 to East Bay Regional Park District to acquire the 768-acre **Finley Road Ranch** Property in Contra Costa County for purposes of protecting, restoring, and enhancing natural and scenic resources, including wildlife corridors and habitat, and public access on the southern side of Mount Diablo.
 - \$7,000,000 to the Land Trust of Napa County to acquire 465 acres of the 2,300-acre **Walt Ranch Property** for habitat preservation, biodiversity

protection, climate resilience, improving wildlife corridors, and public access and tribal cultural uses in the Capell Valley.

- \$1,500,000 to Sonoma Land Trust to acquire the 654-acre **McCormick Ranch Property** for the protection, restoration, and enhancement of natural and scenic resources, including wildlife corridors and habitat, wetland and water resources, and landscape resilience related to climate change; and providing open space, public access, recreational use, and Tribal and indigenous cultural uses in the Mayacamas Mountains of Sonoma and Napa Counties.
- Several large-scale acquisition projects in the **Central Coast** are helping to protect some of the state's most scenic and pristine landscapes:
 - The Big Sur Land Trust was awarded \$2,750,000 to acquire the 84-acre **Hiss Parcel** in the City of Monterey. The Hiss Parcel is located in a high priority conservation target area to protect the biologically significant and visually stunning "legacy landscape" found on the last remaining undeveloped, privately-owned marine terrace in the Monterey Peninsula region.
 - The Conservancy awarded \$2,000,000 to The Wildlands Conservancy to acquire 11,692 acres of the **Rana Creek Ranch** located in upper Carmel Valley between Salinas Valley and the Santa Lucia Range. The acquisition was successfully completed in November 2023. Rana Creek Ranch was the largest private landholding in California's Carmel Valley; its largely undisturbed landscape, open space values and abundant water resources were at significant risk from residential development and intensive agricultural uses. It will be operated as a preserve by The Wildlands Conservancy in partnership with the Esselen Tribe of Monterey County.
 - With a grant of \$1,570,000 the Conservancy helped the California Rangeland Trust to acquire a conservation easement over the 1,014-acre **Wong Asuncion Ranch** in unincorporated Atascadero. The property provides habitat for a number of species, includes more than 700 acres of coastal oak woodlands, and the drainages originating on the property to



Tom Little Bear Nason of the Esselen tribe speaks at the Rana Creek Ranch celebration.

effectively comprise the headwaters of Toro Creek.

- The Cayucos Land Conservancy was awarded \$1,500,000 to acquire and transfer to San Luis Obispo County 748 acres of land for addition to **Toro Creek County Park** located between Morro Bay and Cayucos. Toro Creek County Park is expected to include opportunities for hiking, beach access, and low-cost camping.
- During 2023, the Conservancy authorized over \$4,600,000 for projects along the Santa Ana River in Riverside County to develop the **Santa Ana River Trail** and Parkway. Once completed, the Trail will extend over 100 miles from the San Bernardino Mountains westward to the coast. It will be one of the longest urban recreation and river parkways in the United States, serving pedestrians, cyclists, commuters, and equestrians. The Santa Ana River Parkway refers to the mosaic of river and trail opportunities adjacent to the Santa Ana River Trail, including open space, other trails, wildlife habitat, agricultural land protection, water quality protection, educational use, and public access.

Climate Ready

Already, rising seas, intense storms, and catastrophic wildfires are changing our relationship with the coast. The Conservancy is funding and supporting local communities, nonprofits, agencies, and other partners to plan multi-objective climate change adaptation strategies along the coast and implementation of nature-based climate adaptation projects to mitigate the current and future impacts of a changing climate. Between July 2022 and December 2023, the Conservancy Board authorized more than \$230 million of General Fund and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Funds for coastal protection and sea level rise adaptation projects.

- Around **Humboldt Bay**, which is experiencing the fastest rates of relative sea level rise in California, the Conservancy authorized \$5,552,800 to the Redwood Community Action Agency to restore 350 acres of coastal dune habitat to increase sea-level rise resiliency on the north spit of the bay, and funded living shoreline and sea level rise adaptation planning in Humboldt Bay. Adaptation planning efforts are focused on King Salmon and Fields Landing, two priority underserved communities that are heavily impacted by flooding.

- In December 2023, the **South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project** breached the levee in the Ravenswood Pond complex at the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Menlo Park, San Mateo County, to reconnect 300 acres of former industrial salt ponds to the tides and currents of San Francisco Bay. Ravenswood is one of three South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project sites which will collectively restore over 15,000 acres of historic wetlands, helping to protect the south bay from rising sea levels.



Breach of the Ravenswood R4 Pond, part of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project

- Finding sources for sediment that can be used for wetland restoration remains an ongoing challenge, however, in 2023, approximately **80% of dredged material in the San Francisco Bay was put to beneficial use**. Most was brought to Montezuma Wetlands in Solano County.
 - In December 2023, approximately 800,000 cubic yards of dredged material were used to implement the Eden Landing Shallow Water **Strategic Placement Pilot Project** approximately 1 mile offshore from the Eden Landing Ecological Reserve. The project is testing how the Bay's waves and currents can bring sediment to the adjacent shoreline and tidal marsh as a sea level rise resiliency strategy.



*Dredged sediment being strategically placed in the SF Bay.
Photo: USACE*

- Both the Strategic Placement Pilot Project and the high percentage of beneficial use in SF Bay were thanks to the Coastal Conservancy's funding and application to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' **Beneficial Use Pilot Program**.
- In another innovative approach to solving the problem of sediment supply, the Coastal Conservancy awarded \$1,500,000 to the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) to prepare permit applications for **beneficial reuse of excavated tunnel material** from VTA's BART Silicon Valley Phase II tunneling project in Santa Clara County at wetland restoration projects in the South San Francisco Bay.
- The Conservancy awarded \$5,100,000 to the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department to redevelop the **900 Innes** property in the underserved Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood into a mixed-use shoreline park with recreational amenities and enhanced habitat with climate change adaptation features.
- In 2023, the Conservancy obtained \$4 million in external grants to augment support for the **Regionally Advancing Living Shorelines Project**, which will develop an innovative programmatic approach to nature-based climate adaptation that uses techniques such native oyster restoration, eelgrass bed plantings, sand and gravel beach restoration, and green-with-grey solutions such as living seawalls and enhanced rock slope levees.
- The Conservancy supported the **City of Santa Barbara** with nearly \$3,000,000 to prepare technical studies and feasibility reports and to conduct community outreach for adapting waterfront areas at-risk to sea level rise; and to prepare conceptual designs and environmental review documents for relocation of wastewater and water system infrastructure.



Santa Barbara Harbor. Photo: King Tides Project

- In the **South Coast**, a number of high dollar value grants are helping prepare California's most populous region for climate change:

- \$31,852,000 to the Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority for planning, permitting, and construction of an initial phase of restoration and public access improvement of **103.5 acres of wetlands in Seal Beach**. This project is the first large scale restoration effort to be implemented in the Los Cerritos Wetlands after more than a decade of planning and stakeholder engagement. It will restore degraded uplands and tidal salt marsh,



Los Cerritos Wetlands

- increasing coastal resilience to climate change by creating new areas for coastal salt marsh migration in the face of sea level rise. The project also offers opportunities for Tribal access and co-management and will create open space access for systemically excluded communities in Seal Beach, Long Beach, and inland communities.
- \$16,200,000 to the City of San Buenaventura (Ventura) to construct **Phase 2 of the Surfers Point Managed Retreat Project**, a sea level rise adaptation project that relocates existing infrastructure landward and restores beach dune habitat.
- \$2,141,205 to the City of Imperial Beach for outreach, planning and permit applications needed to retrofit a 1.2-mile segment of the **Bayshore Bikeway** into a multi-benefit community flood protection and ecosystem resilience corridor in Imperial Beach, San Diego County.
- \$3,192,500 to the Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association to develop final design plans, to conduct pre-restoration monitoring, and to apply for permits for the first phase of the **Tijuana Estuary Tidal Restoration Program II**. When implemented, the project will facilitate dune-building which will increase the resilience of the intertidal system to sea level rise and large storm events.

Wildfire Resilience

In 2023, the Conservancy encumbered **\$11,200,000 through 20 wildfire resilience projects**, including:

- \$565,208 to the Tamien Nation for the **Tamien Nation Cultural Fire Stewardship Program**, a multi-partner cooperative capacity- building and project implementation project to restore cultural burning and wildfire resilience on ancestral lands while improving fire protection, survivability, long-term sustainability, and community education.
- \$999,136 to the Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District to expand their **targeted grazing** program in high fire risk public and private lands throughout Sonoma County and provide technical, educational, and financial support to public land stewards and livestock grazers.
- \$1,131,500 to the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County to conduct **wildfire resilience planning**, project development and permitting, implementation of demonstration projects, and education and outreach in Santa Cruz and San Mateo Counties.
- In May, the Conservancy hosted the **Governor’s Wildfire Task Force** meeting in Santa Cruz. Over 300 hundred people attended in-person and 200 online. The meeting gave wildfire resilience and response practitioners an opportunity to visit Conservancy-funded projects in the Santa Cruz mountains, site of the catastrophic CZU wildfire.
- East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) is working on the **largest eucalyptus reduction project in Northern California** at the Anthony Chabot Regional Park. The project uses a pilot carbonator to transform the cut trees into biochar. This process directly benefits the communities of Oakland and Castro Valley by reducing truck traffic as well as the risk of forest fire. The Conservancy granted \$1,000,000 to EBRPD to expand the fuel treatments in Anthony Chabot Regional Park and test the biochar facility.



Tamien Nation Cultural Fire Stewardship Program