

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 11, 2003

**POMO BLUFFS PARK IMPROVEMENTS:
ENGINEERING AND DESIGN**

File No. 03-143
Project Manager: Moira McEnespy

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$78,000 to the City of Fort Bragg to conduct engineering and design of access improvements at Pomo Bluffs Park.

LOCATION: South of Noyo Harbor, City of Fort Bragg, Mendocino County (Exhibits 1 and 2)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location Map

Exhibit 2: Project Site Map

Exhibit 3: Conceptual Plan Map

Exhibit 4: Letters/Summaries of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31000 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement to the City of Fort Bragg of an amount not to exceed seventy-eight thousand dollars (\$78,000) to conduct engineering and design of access improvements at Pomo Bluffs Park, subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of any funds, the City of Fort Bragg shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work plan, budget and schedule, and the names and qualifications of any contractors and subcontractors to be used.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and criteria set forth in Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.

2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
 3. The proposed project will serve greater than local needs.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$78,000 to the City of Fort Bragg to conduct engineering and design of access improvements at Pomo Bluffs Park.

In 2001, the Conservancy and Caltrans provided funding for the City to acquire the approximately 20-acre Pomo Bluffs Park property (formerly called “South Noyo Bluffs”) for open space preservation, public access, and recreation purposes. Pomo Bluffs Park is one of the few locations in the Fort Bragg vicinity from which to watch fishing boats coming in and out of Noyo Harbor, catch a glimpse of migrating gray whales, or simply enjoy the view of the Pacific Ocean. The property also provides a valuable link in the Coastal Trail, affording trail users an alternative to Highway 1 and access to coastal bluffs overlooking the harbor, river mouth, and ocean. The Conservancy also funded the City’s preparation of a management plan for its new park.

The City now seeks to implement the park improvements identified in the management plan. Specifically, the City will engineer and design vehicular access and parking, trails and view-points, interpretive signs, benches and other site furnishings, restrooms, and restoration of the site’s native vegetation. The blufftop trail will add a 2,500-foot segment to the California Coastal Trail. See the Conceptual Plan Map attached as Exhibit 3. The City anticipates that engineering and design work will be complete by end of June 2004.

Site Description: Pomo Bluffs Park consists of approximately 20 acres on the northwestern portion of the Todd Point Subdivision. The park is a long narrow strip of blufftop land. To the north of the property is Noyo Bay and the entrance to the Noyo fishing harbor. To the east is a HVC-zoned (Highway/Visitor-Serving/Commercial) parcel that contains some RVs, and to the east of that parcel is The Cliff House restaurant and Highway 1. To the south is an RV Park and the Todd Point subdivision, which has six north-south streets that dead-end at the subject property. To the west is the Pacific Ocean.

Project History: In its March 12, 1999 approval of Caltrans’ request to retrofit the Noyo River Bridge, the Coastal Commission identified the Noyo Bluffs properties as desirable for acquisition and development as a public viewing area. In 2001, the Conservancy and Caltrans provided funding for the City to acquire the property, and the Conservancy provided additional funding for the City to prepare a management plan. Caltrans also provided the Conservancy with mitigation funds that are required to be used, under conditions of its coastal development permit, for acquisition and improvement of public recreational lands in Fort Bragg or Mendocino County, as discussed below.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$78,000
City of Fort Bragg	
(in-kind contribution for CEQA review and permitting)	<u>10,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$88,000

Funds are expected to come from a Caltrans mitigation fund for its retrofit of the Noyo River Bridge that are held in a Conservancy Special Deposit Fund Account. Pursuant to a special condition of Caltrans' coastal development permit for the bridge retrofit, and as subsequently memorialized in an MOA among the Coastal Commission, the Conservancy, and Caltrans, the Noyo River Bridge Mitigation fund must "only be used to acquire and improve . . . land in the Fort Bragg or Mendocino County area as a public recreational area offering views of the Pacific Ocean." Hence, use of these funds to improve the Pomo Bluffs Park for public access is consistent with its intended use.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed authorization would be undertaken pursuant to and is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, specifically Chapter 9 (Sections 31400 *et seq.*) pertaining to public access to and along the coast.

Section 31400 states the Legislature's intent that the Conservancy have a principal role in implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. In the proposed project, the Conservancy will fund engineering and design of public access improvements on the oceanfront Pomo Bluffs Park, including a segment of the California Coastal Trail. The proposed funding authorization is thus consistent with §31400.

31400.3 enables the Conservancy to aid public agencies in establishing a system of public coastal accessways; §31400.1 enables the Conservancy to award grants to any public agency having authority to develop, operate, and manage lands for public accessways to and along the coast that serve more than local public needs; and §31400.2 provides that the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of the initial development of public accessways by any public agency, as provided in §31400.1. The City of Fort Bragg is a public agency that seeks to develop and manage the Pomo Bluffs Park as a coastal public accessway for both the local community and visitors alike. As the Mendocino coast is a statewide, national, and international visitor destination, the proposed funding authorization is thus consistent with §§31400.3, 31400.1, and 31400.2.

Finally, §31408(a) states that the Conservancy shall coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail. In the proposed project, the Conservancy will award funds to the City of Fort Bragg to design and engineer a blufftop trail that will become a segment of the California Coastal Trail. The proposed funding authorization is thus consistent with §31408(a).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

The proposed authorization would enable the City of Fort Bragg to:

- consistent with **Goal 1 Objective C**, conduct engineering and design of 2,500 feet of the California Coastal Trail; and
- consistent with **Goal 2 Objective A**, improve public access park amenities in the newly-acquired Pomo Bluffs Park.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The management planning process provided several forums for public input, including a special public meeting, two City Council meetings, and a written survey. Development of public accessways was strongly supported. Please see summary and additional letters in Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of the City of Fort Bragg, Mendocino County.
5. **Need:** The City of Fort Bragg does not have adequate resources to implement the Pomo Bluffs Park Management Plan. Hence, design and engineering of the public access improvements identified in the plan will not occur without Conservancy participation.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Mendocino coast is a statewide, national, and international visitor destination.

Additional Criteria

12. **Readiness:** The City of Fort Bragg has developed a Pomo Bluffs Park Management Plan and is now ready to implement the recommendations.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See the "Project History" section, above.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is consistent with the relevant portions of the City of Fort Bragg's Local Coastal Program (LCP) (certified February 26, 1988).

The "Todd Point Annexation Area" section, Section G, of the "Introduction" chapter of the LCP states that the Land Use Plan shows a trail on the Pomo Bluffs Park site where fine views would be possible. Such a trail would link Todd Point with South Harbor Drive passing under Noyo Bridge. Furthermore, the "Area-wide Coastal Access" section, Section C, of the "Shoreline Access" chapter states that additional public access is proposed for Todd's Point, and the "City-wide Access" section, Section D, states the following reasons for improving public access to the City's coastline: (1) Desirability of providing coastal access in conjunction with and in support of visitor-serving facilities; and (2) the need for maximizing coastal accessibility for all the state's people.

In addition, the proposed project fulfills LCP Access Policy III-10, which states that “lateral access along that part of the south bank of the Noyo River within the city limits shall be acquired. This accessway shall eventually be connected to the trail system leading from the southern bluff of the Noyo headlands to South Harbor Drive.”

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is statutorily and categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262 in that it involves only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions which the Conservancy has not approved, adopted or funded; and §15306 in that it involves basic data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities which will not result in any disturbance to an environmental resource, and which will be undertaken as part of a study leading to an action which the Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted, or funded. Staff will file a “Notice of Exemption” upon approval of the project.