

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

May 27, 2004

EAST WEST RANCH COASTAL TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS

File No. 03-118

Project Manager: Prentiss Williams

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$300,000 to the Cambria Community Services District for improvements to the Coastal Trail on the East West Ranch in northern San Luis Obispo County.

LOCATION: The unincorporated community of Cambria, approximately 32 miles northwest of the City of San Luis Obispo, in San Luis Obispo County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location Map

Exhibit 2: Mitigated Negative Declaration for the *East West Ranch Resource Management and Public Access Plan*

Exhibit 3: Photos of eroded trail

Exhibit 4: Trails plan from the *East West Ranch Resource Management and Public Access Plan*

Exhibit 5: East West Ranch property map

Exhibit 6: Letters of Support

Exhibit 7: Resolution

Exhibit 8: Notice of Determination

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) to the Cambria Community Services District to construct improvements to the Coastal Trail on the East West Ranch property in Cambria, San Luis Obispo County, subject to the condition that prior to the disbursement of funds for construction,

the Cambria Community Services District (CCSD) shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

1. A signing plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy participation.
2. A final work plan for the project
3. The names of any subcontractors to be used in the completion of the project.
4. A project schedule and budget.
5. Evidence that the CCSD has obtained all necessary permits and approvals and has conducted all necessary environmental review.”

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 objectives of Sections 31400 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code regarding coastal access.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed the CCSD’s Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 2) for the project and finds that there is no substantial evidence that the project, as mitigated, may have a significant effect on the environment.
4. The CCSD has incorporated the guidelines of the Conservancy’s ‘Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development’ into the trail design.
5. The proposed project will serve greater than local needs.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy authorize the disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$300,000 to the Cambria Community Services District (CCSD) to make improvements to the Coastal Trail on the East West Ranch property in Cambria in order to increase visitor safety and reduce damage to sensitive environmental resources.

Visitors from throughout the state as well as from the local community frequent the trails of the East West Ranch year round. The Coastal Trail, also known as the Bluff Trail, in particular attracts large numbers of hikers seeking the spectacular views of the coastline afforded from the trail. The existing trail consists of an informal series of narrow dirt tracks that have been worn into the bluff top by the many visitors that use the trails each day (Exhibit 3). Some of these tracks come dangerously close to the eroding bluff edge and a sheer drop to the rocky beach some 20 feet below. The trail crosses over seasonal wetlands in several areas, churning the trail into mud in the rainy season and damaging sensitive wetland plants and animals in the process. The CCSD will use the Conservancy grant to consolidate these informal tracks into a single route set far enough back from the bluff edge to minimize further erosion, construct boardwalk crossings over wetland areas, repair eroded areas, and restore damaged vegetation.

The CCSD has successfully managed and maintained the East West Ranch since its acquisition, allowing pedestrian access on pre-existing trails, preserving the natural resources on the property, administering a grazing lease, and addressing the concerns of the neighboring private landowners. On April 24, 2003, the CCSD adopted the *East West Ranch Public Access and Resource Management Plan* (Management Plan), which will guide all future activities on the property. One of the priority actions recommended by the Management Plan is the restoration of the bluff edge and improvements to the Coastal Trail. Immediately following its adoption of this plan, the CCSD began taking steps to implement the plan by developing trail designs and seeking grant funding for trail construction. Conservancy staff worked with the CCSD and others to develop the Management Plan and has been working with the CCSD to assist in the implementation of the public access component of the plan (Exhibit 4). In addition to being one of the priority actions identified in the Management Plan, improvement of the Coastal Trail is also one of the recommended actions for San Luis Obispo County identified in the Coastal Conservancy's report *Completing the California Coastal Trail*.

Site Description: The East West Ranch is a spectacular oceanfront property located in the community of Cambria, approximately 32 miles northwest of the City of San Luis Obispo. The property is divided by Highway 1 into two sections (Exhibit 5). The eastern portion is approximately 74 acres and slopes to the west from the center of Cambria along the floodplain of Santa Rosa Creek. The western portion is about 350 acres in size and lies along the coastal terrace adjacent to the ocean. The most outstanding feature of the East West Ranch is the dramatic ocean bluff that extends approximately 1.2 miles along the Pacific coast. In addition to its spectacular ocean panorama, the property affords excellent views of the coastal mountain range and links with the downtown area of Cambria.

Project History: The Coastal Conservancy has been involved with efforts to preserve the East West Ranch as open space since at least 1998. In November 2000, the property was purchased by the American Land Conservancy (ALC) with a grant of \$8,000,000 from the Coastal Conservancy (including 1,000,000 in federal Transportation Enhancement Activities Program (TEA) grant funds), \$1,500,000 from the CCSD, \$500,000 from the County of San Luis Obispo and, most remarkably, nearly \$1,000,000 in private contributions raised by the Cambria Community. ALC subsequently transferred the property to the CCSD for permanent ownership. The primary reason for the Conservancy's grant was to preserve the truly outstanding opportunities for public access and recreation afforded on the property, both east and west.

When it acquired the property from the American Land Conservancy in 2000, the CCSD managed the property pursuant to an MOU among the Conservancy, ALC, and the CCSD. On February 22, 2001, the Conservancy granted \$200,000 to the CCSD for the preparation of the Management Plan.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$300,000
CCSD (in kind services)	<u>100,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$400,000

The expected source of the Coastal Conservancy funds for the proposed project is the Coastal Conservancy's FY 2001/02 budget appropriation for the Coastal Trail from Proposition 12 (the

Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000). Consistent with the purposes of this funding source, the grant would be used to develop public use facilities in a coastal area within the Conservancy's jurisdiction. Consistent with Section 5096.346(c) of Proposition 12, the proposed project would provide air quality benefits by facilitating pedestrian and bicycle travel.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation: Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31409), regarding public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 31400 states that the Conservancy shall have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. Through the proposed action, the Conservancy will play a primary role by funding the development of an important link in the California Coastal Trail.

Section 31400.1 allows the Conservancy to award grants to a public agency for acquisition and development of public coastal accessways that serve more than local public needs. The East West Ranch is located in the heart of a region that is a major destination point for millions of visitors each year from throughout California and around the world. The East West Ranch attracts many of these visitors because of the incomparable views from coastal bluff and because of its location in the heart of Cambria. As discussed in the "Project Description" section above, the Coastal Trail is the most popular feature on the East West Ranch. The proposed project would assure the long-term stability of the trail and eliminate potential hazards.

Section 31400.2 requires the Conservancy to consider a number of factors in determining the amount of funding for an access project. Consistent with this section, the proposed level of funding was evaluated relative to the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal access projects. Also consistent with this section, the fiscal resources of the applicant have been taken into account. The sole sources of revenue to the CCSD are the fees it collects from Cambria property owners for water and sewer service. These fees do not afford the CCSD excess revenue for parks purposes. In spite of these fiscal constraints, the CCSD has devoted considerable resources, in the form of staff time and direct expenditures, towards the maintenance of the East West Ranch property. The CCSD will devote staff and equipment to the completion of the trail improvements.

Lastly, § 31400.2 stipulates that the level of funding for an access project be determined by an application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority. Consistent with this requirement, and as discussed in greater detail in the section below, the project has been evaluated and found to be consistent with the Conservancy's project selection criteria and guidelines.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1 Objective C**, the proposed project would construct one mile of Coastal Trail on the East West Ranch.

Consistent with **Goal 5 Objective A**, the proposed project would preserve and enhance the environmentally sensitive habitats by reconfiguring the trail alignment and installing structures to avoid impacts to such areas.

**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 proposed project has the support of State Senator Bruce McPherson and Assemblyman Abel Maldonado as well as a variety of organizations and individuals, including the American Land Conservancy, Friends of the Ranch, the North Coast Small Wilderness Area Preservation Foundation, and others. Letters received in support of the project are contained in Exhibit 6.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of the County of San Luis Obispo.
5. **Need:** The CCSO has made a great deal of progress towards improving and maintaining existing trails and opening new trailheads on the East West Ranch using its own staff and resources. However, the cost of the time and materials needed to make the improvements proposed for the Coastal Trail is beyond the capacity of the CCSO to provide. As discussed above, the CCSO does not have a regular source of funds available to pay for park and recreation facilities.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** As discussed in greater detail in the "Project Description" section above, the East West Ranch is located in the heart of a region that is a major destination point for millions of visitors each year from throughout California and around the world. The trails on the East West Ranch are heavily used year round by thousands of these visitors. In addition, the East West Ranch Coastal Trail will be a part of the California Coastal Trail, which is a trail system of statewide importance.

Additional Criteria

8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The proposed project would render the East West Ranch Coastal Trail safer and more pleasant to use for hikers. The proposed project would also restore degraded habitat areas and prevent such damage from reoccurring in the future.
12. **Readiness:** The CCSO is prepared to commence work on the project as soon as the funds can be secured.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See the "Project History" section above.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project would be consistent with Policy 1 of the Coastal Plan Policies pertaining to shoreline access contained in the certified San Luis Obispo Local Coastal Program (LCP) Land

Use Element. The North Coast Area Plan, which includes the town of Cambria, makes specific mention of the East West Ranch (formerly known as the Fiscalini Ranch) as an area where public access should be preserved and improved.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

The pertinent standards from “Conservancy’s Standards and Recommendation for Accessway Location and Development” were incorporated into the trail design criteria of the Management Plan. Conservancy staff has reviewed the proposed improvements to the East West Ranch Coastal Trail and determined that the proposed accessway would be consistent with the Conservancy’s “Standards and Recommendations” in the following respects:

Standard No. 1: Protect the Public and Coastal Resources. The proposed trail has been designed to minimize alteration of natural landforms, prevent unwarranted hazards to land and public safety, and to protect environmentally sensitive habitats.

Standard No. 5: Environmentally Sensitive Area. The proposed project is consistent with the policies of Chapter Three of the Coastal Act, has been designed to avoid adverse impacts to seasonal wetlands.

Standard No. 6: Lateral Accessways: Construction and Location. The proposed trail would not be inland from any shoreline protective structures, would not be located within ten feet of any existing family home. Also consistent with Standard No. 6, the proposed trail design includes minimal support structures.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the CCSD, as lead agency, undertook environmental assessment of the proposed *East West Ranch Public Access and Resource Management Plan*, which includes specific plans for the improvements to the Coastal Trail currently proposed in this staff recommendation, through an Initial Study. The Initial Study determined that the proposed Coastal Trail Improvement project could have possible significant effects on the environment in two areas: air quality and cultural resources. Based on that Initial Study, the CCSD incorporated several mitigation measures into the project to reduce these impacts to levels of insignificance. The CCSD adopted the mitigated negative declaration and mitigation monitoring plan (attached as Exhibit 2) by resolution of its Board of Directors on April 24, 2003 (Exhibit 7). The CCSD filed a Notice of Determination with the State Clearinghouse and the County of San Luis Obispo on April 29, 2003 (Exhibit 8).

The potential environmental impacts of the East West Ranch Coastal Trail project and the corresponding mitigations, are identified and discussed in detail in Exhibit 2, and summarized below:

Air Quality

Impact: Construction of the trail, including clearing and grading, could result in potentially significant increases in dust and locally elevated levels of particulate matter downwind from construction activities. These increases would be temporary in nature and levels of dust and particulate levels associated with trail construction activity would return to previous levels following project completion.

Mitigation: The San Luis Obispo County Air Pollution District has identified a set of feasible Basic Control Measures for the control of dust and particulate matter on construction sites. These

measures, which are enumerated in detail in Exhibit 2, shall be followed at all times on the construction site and will reduce air quality impacts to less-than-significant levels.

Cultural Resources

Impact: Although no cultural, historical, or archeological resources have been identified in proximity to the coastal bluff, several archeological sites are known to exist on the East West Ranch property. However, there is potential to disturb unknown and undiscovered cultural sites in the course of trail construction.

Mitigation: Should any cultural, historic or archeological resources be uncovered in the course of project construction, all construction activities shall stop and the CCSD shall retain a qualified archeologist to conduct a reconnaissance and identify measures to protect these resources.

Conclusion

Conservancy staff has independently reviewed the CCSD's mitigated negative declaration and mitigation monitoring plan and concurs that the proposed project, as mitigated, will not have a significant adverse effect on the environment. Staff recommends that the Conservancy find that the project, as mitigated, will not have a significant effect on the environment as defined in 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15382. Staff will file a Notice of Determination upon the Conservancy's authorization of the project.