

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
May 29, 2004

**CARRINGTON RANCH INITIAL PUBLIC USES**

File No. 04-020  
Project Manager: Richard Retecki

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$260,000 to the California Department of Parks and Recreation for interim public access and facility planning, environmental analysis, and property cleanup for the Carrington Ranch in coastal Sonoma County.

**LOCATION:** Coastal Sonoma County (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: Project Maps

Exhibit 2: Carrington Evaluation Sheet

Exhibit 3: Sonoma County Coastal Parcel Study Priorities

Exhibit 4: Letters of Support

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400-31409 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred sixty thousand dollars (\$260,000) to the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) for interim public access and facility planning, environmental analysis, and property cleanup activities on the Carrington Ranch property in Sonoma County, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any funds, DPR shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (“Executive Officer”) a work program, budget, and schedule and the names and qualifications of any contractors and subcontractors to be employed.
  2. Prior to the removal of any buildings, DPR shall submit evidence that all necessary permits and approvals have been obtained.
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3. The Conservancy shall be acknowledged with respect to future trails through the installation and maintenance of a sign or signs, the design and placement of which have been reviewed and approved by the Executive Officer.
4. DPR shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's "Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development" into trail planning and future construction, as appropriate."

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 Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31400 *et seq.*
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001."

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

This authorization would enable the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to undertake planning, environmental analysis, and permitting activities for public access on the Carrington Ranch in Sonoma County, and to initiate the removal of unsafe and/or unnecessary buildings on the ranch.

Long a priority for acquisition, the 344-acre Carrington Ranch property was acquired by the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (SCAPOSD) in May of 2003. The Carrington Ranch is expected to be transferred to DPR sometime later this year, and will become an integral part of the Sonoma Coast State Beaches facility, which has the third highest annual visitor rate within the State Park system. DPR is willing to take on ownership and management of the property, but due to budget constraints is unable to undertake the necessary planning and initial site development activities required to open the property to the public. Conservancy funding would enable the planning process to begin immediately, facilitating public use and enjoyment of the property in the near term.

Pursuant to this authorization, DPR will identify interim public uses and necessary improvements that can occur on the property consistent with the soon-to-be completed General Plan for Sonoma Coast State Beach. DPR will also evaluate each building on the property for historic significance and potential for re-use. Those buildings that are not found to be historic or have re-use potential would be slated for demolition. In addition, DPR will undertake the necessary environmental analyses of impacts related to improvements recommended in the plan, including seasonal surveys of sensitive plants and animals species, evaluation of coastal prairie habitat, and identification of cultural resources. Necessary permits will also be identified and permit applications prepared. Finally, Conservancy funds would be used for initial site cleanup, to remove debris left behind by the former ranching operation.

This project is a unique example of cooperation between a local district, nonprofit organizations, and state agencies. The \$4.8 million dollar acquisition was funded solely by the SCAPOSD with funds generated by Sonoma County's local sales tax. DPR will take on ownership and manage-

ment and provide some funds towards planning efforts, and the Conservancy would fund the shortfall in the planning budget. Two nonprofit organizations, LandPaths and Coastwalk, have provided invaluable assistance with land stewardship and initial coastal trail route reconnaissance respectively. It is also anticipated that additional funding will be requested from the Conservancy for coastal trail and recreational facilities improvements on the property, when planning is completed.

**Site Description:** The landforms south of the Russian River area, including the Carrington Ranch, are comprised of broad coastal terrace and uplands. The coastal terrace slopes gently upward to hills that may reach above 1,200 feet, and that provide excellent hiking and spectacular views north and south. Existing sections of the Coastal Trail, such as the Kortum Trail, are found along the bluff, on the terrace, or within the dunes near Bodega Bay.

The Carrington Ranch is located approximately two miles north of Bodega Bay, and eight miles south of the Russian River. The Ranch has been grazed for many years and needs to rest and recover. The coastal terrace slopes inland and rises to create the uplands of the property. The hills on the adjacent inland property peak at approximately 1,100 feet. This easily traversed terrain will provide two miles of Coastal Trail and six miles of loop and connector trails. Most of the working ranch buildings remain and include the main residence, a barn, and several sheds and workshops.

The property is a windswept coastal terrace but there are stands of trees and wind-rows that have been planted for protection from the ever-present wind. These stands of trees will be evaluated and recommendations will be made about their management and their place in the future design of the park.

**Project History:** The Conservancy first evaluated the Carrington Ranch for acquisition and coastal trail easements in 1988 during the Proposition 70 planning process. The Ranch ranked very highly in that process, but at the time the family was not willing to sell the property. In 1995, during the final Proposition 70 funding sequence, the Ranch was once again pursued for acquisition, but without success.

The Conservancy began an acquisition study for a 60-square-mile area south of the Russian River in 1998. The Sonoma County Parcel Study was the product of that public planning process. The Parcel Study evaluated and ranked numerous projects in several categories: acquisition, conservation easements, trail easements, resource value, adjacent to public land, areas for further study, willing sellers, and others (see Exhibit 2). Four major acquisition priorities were identified and the Carrington Ranch was one of those priorities (see Exhibit 3).

During this most recent planning process, the family was amenable to negotiations about selling. SCAPOSD was successful in the negotiations and the property was acquired in May of 2003. The planning and site cleanup activities proposed for funding under this authorization are crucial for the provision of public access, new trail construction, construction of inland trail connectors, camping facilities, public facilities, and historical significance.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	\$260,000
California Department of Parks and Recreation	<u>75,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$335,000</b>

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The proposed project is undertaken pursuant to Sections 31400 *et seq.* and 31111 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy's involvement in development of coastal access.

Pursuant to § 31111, the Conservancy may award grants to public agencies to develop plans and feasibility studies. This authorization will allow DPR to prepare a comprehensive plan for the eventual development of trails and recreational facilities for the Carrington Ranch.

Section 31400 states the Legislature's intent that the Conservancy have a principal role in implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the coast. Under the proposed project, the Conservancy's funds would allow DPR to prepare plans for access improvements, future facilities, and to prepare environmental analyses to determine the extent of impacts the construction and rehabilitation would have on the natural environment. Planning efforts will also provide a framework for the timely implementation of future facilities for the Ranch.

Pursuant to § 31400.1, the Conservancy may provide grants to public agencies to develop lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. All of the facilities and accessways to be planned and designed under the proposed authorization will provide public access to and along the Sonoma coast.

The proposed authorization is also consistent with § 31400.2 which permits the Conservancy to provide up to the total cost of the initial development of public access and facilities by a public agency. In determining the amount of funding, the Conservancy has considered the factors required by § 31400.2, as described in more detail under the "Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines" section found below.

The proposed project will help carry out the mandate of § 31408, which directs the Conservancy, to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail in consultation with the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Coastal Commission. The Conservancy is working with DPR, SCAPOSD, and LandPaths, a Sonoma County nonprofit organization that specializes in land stewardship, to establish priority recreation areas and trail segments for the Carrington Ranch property. The trail segments will become part of the Coastal Trail and will connect with available inland routes that parallel the coastline.

Section 31409 allows the Conservancy to award grants and provide assistance to public agencies to establish and expand inland trail systems that may be linked to the Coastal Trail. The Carrington Ranch trails will provide an opportunity to establish new coastal trail segments and will connect with inland trail routes to the Red Hill and Coleman Valley areas further to the north.

The proposed project is also consistent with the Sonoma County Local Coastal Program as described in the Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies below.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1 Objectives A, B, and C**, Coastal Trail Development, the project will design new trail segments, new Coastal Trail segments, appropriate facilities and signs for the improvements.

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objectives A, B, and D**, Develop a System of Coastal Public Accessways, Open Space and Parks, the project will establish a new park facility, provide a wide range of services, maintain the open character of the Ranch, create new trails, and connect to inland trail routes.

**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 a broad level of support from public agencies and officials, nonprofit organizations, trail advocacy groups, and the general public. Project supporters include: Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey, State Senator Wes Chesbro, Assemblymember Patti Berg, DPR, SCAPOSD, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, Sonoma County Regional Parks, Coastwalk, LandPaths, Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods. Letters of Support are attached as Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located entirely within the Sonoma County coastal zone.
5. **Need:** The proposed project is an essential part of the Conservancy and other participant efforts to implement conservation and access priorities for coastal Sonoma County. The priorities evolved from several public planning processes that established acquisition, easement, and trail priorities for the Sonoma coast. The Conservancy is a crucial participant in the implementation of these priorities. Conservancy funding and collaboration are essential to move this project to completion.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Sonoma coast and its existing recreational facilities will be further enhanced and more attractive as a result of the completion of this project. The addition of the Carrington Ranch facility will provide new recreation facilities and visitors to the already heavily used Sonoma Coast State Beaches Park. The Park currently ranks third in number of visitors per year in the entire State Park system.

**Additional Criteria**

7. **Urgency:** The Conservancy has been interested in the Carrington Ranch property since 1988 when priorities were set for Proposition 70 funds. The property was listed for sale in 1995 and again pursued for acquisition. Negotiations with the family evolved until an agreement was reached in 2003 that led to the acquisition by SCAPOSD. Without Conservancy participation, public access to the property will be significantly delayed, as DPR does not have funds available to do the public access and site planning.
8. **Readiness:** If this authorization is approved, DPR, SCAPOSD, Coastwalk, and LandPaths are all ready to begin work on the Carrington Ranch planning in July of 2004.

13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The project will enhance and implement the objectives of the Sonoma County Parcel Study (1999); the Sonoma County LCP; DPR's Bay North District General Plan; the Coleman Valley Trails Study (2002); the Bodega Bay Trails Plan (2002); and Completing the California Coastal Trail (2003). All of these plans have assisted and guided land protection and public access implementation for the Sonoma coast.
15. **Cooperation:** This proposed project derived from discussions and conversations between the members of the West County/ Coastal Working Group, a thorough planning and implementation analysis by State Parks and SCAPOSD, and the Conservancy's responsibility for Coastal Trail and public access development.

#### **CONSISTENCY WITH THE COASTAL ACT:**

The proposed project is consistent with the following policies of the Coastal Act, Public Resources Code Section 30000 *et seq.*: § 30240(a) states in part that "[E]nvironmentally sensitive areas shall be protected against significant disruption of habitat values. . . ." The establishment of a park and ongoing resource management under the property management plan, will ensure that the property's natural resources are protected and that public access improvements will be designed to be compatible with the preservation of resource and habitat values.

#### **CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The project is consistent with the Sonoma County Local Coastal Program, certified in 1981 and revised on August 3, 1999, in the following ways:

##### **V. RECREATION: Development Criteria for Access Facilities**

"As part of the Sonoma Coast State Beaches State Park, DPR owns and operates coastal access facilities from the Russian River to Bodega Head except for a couple of small subdivisions, a few individual parcels, and the Bodega Marine Laboratory. These facilities provide parking lots, restrooms, trails, interpretive signs, trash pickup, and emergency response personnel. Necessary facilities at a particular site will depend on expected use and the availability of facilities found nearby. As the level of use increases, facilities may be developed in several phases with new or expanded facilities added as needed. Access availability will be limited by the ability of public agencies to develop and manage the access facilities."

The recreation potential and scenic qualities of the Carrington Ranch make it a quality destination. The Ranch abuts the Sonoma Coast State Beaches State Park on the west and lands with conservation and trail easements to the east. The southern boundary of the property offers access to Salmon Creek. Trail corridors will serve the Coastal Trail and provide connections to a twelve-mile inland corridor that will connect the Russian River to Salmon Creek. The level of access improvements envisioned will not adversely impact surrounding land uses, and the access improvements anticipated will be easily constructed and maintained as part of the Sonoma Coast State Beaches facility.

#### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The planning, design, and environmental analysis portions of the proposed authorization are categorically exempt from provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306, which provides exemptions for data collection,

research, and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. It is also exempt under § 15262, which provides an exemption for feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions as not yet approved. Under § 15301(1), the demolition of small structures is exempt except where the structures are of historical, archeological, or architectural significance. All of the buildings found on the Ranch will be evaluated for their historical and cultural significance before any are removed. Upon approval of this project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.