

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
May 27, 2004

**MORI POINT COASTAL TRAIL PLANNING**

File No. 03-115  
Project Manager: Prentiss Williams

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$74,000 to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy to determine the alignment of the California Coastal Trail on the property recently acquired by the National Park Service at Mori Point in Pacifica, San Mateo County; and to prepare plans and construction documents necessary for development of the trail.

**LOCATION:** Mori Point in the City of Pacifica, San Mateo County (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit 1: Project Location
  - Exhibit 2: Aerial Photograph
  - Exhibit 3: Detailed Site Map and Photographs
  - Exhibit 4: Photograph of Restored Calera Creek Wetlands and Trail
  - Exhibit 5: Letters of Support
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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 3100 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed seventy-four thousand dollars (\$74,000) to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (GGNPC) for the development of plans for construction of the California Coastal Trail on the National Park Service’s Mori Point property in Pacifica, San Mateo County, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, GGNPC shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, budget, schedule for the completion of the project and the names and qualifications of any contractors or subcontractors to be employed to carry out the work program.
  2. GGNPC shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy’s ‘Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development’ into any design criteria included in the plan.
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3. GGNPC shall incorporate into the trail designs a signing plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy participation and the use of Proposition 12 funds.”

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 authority of the Conservancy under Public Resources Code Sections 31111 and 31400-31400.3 regarding public access to the coast.
  2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
  3. The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The proposed project consists of a grant of up to \$74,000 to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (GGNPC) to conduct trail planning and site assessment for the Mori Point property in San Mateo County. The U.S. National Park Service (NPS) acquired the 110-acre Mori Point property in 2002 and it is the most recent addition to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA). The GGNPC will use the Conservancy funds to identify the optimal alignment for the California Coastal Trail across the site and to prepare plans and construction documents necessary for development of the trail. This planning effort will also identify secondary trails linking Mori Point to local communities and formulate measures to protect, restore, and enhance sensitive habitats and their species at Mori Point.

The City of Pacifica has completed construction of the Coastal Trail south from Mori Point, and potential exists for the development of a section of the Coastal Trail across property owned by the City of San Francisco immediately to the north of Mori Point. Completion of the Coastal Trail across these two properties would result in an uninterrupted north-south route along the entire Pacifica coastline.

The National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service intend to develop and implement a species recovery plan for the endangered San Francisco garter snake and the California red-legged frog on Mori Point. A network of informal trails and the erosion of old road grades are adversely impacting critical habitat for these species (Exhibit 2). Conducting the trail planning and assessment simultaneously with the development and implementation of the species recovery plan will assure that improvements to the trail network will enhance public access while providing for the protection and restoration of important natural resource values at Mori Point.

The GGNPC has been active in the GGNRA system for over 20 years and its volunteers have been instrumental in the construction of trails and the completion of environmental restoration projects throughout the park system. The project at Mori Point is part of GGNPC’s larger *Trails Forever* initiative. The primary goal of *Trails Forever*, a new park-wide project undertaken in partnership with the National Park Service and the Presidio Trust, is to enhance the public’s enjoyment and access to the California Coastal Trail, and regional connecting trails such as the Bay

and Ridge Trails, through improvements to these trails. *Trails Forever* will include programs to foster a sense of stewardship for trails among park users and trailside communities. Improvements to the California Coastal Trail have been identified as the number one priority for the first phase (years 1-3) of the *Trails Forever* program.

The GGNPC has obtained NPS approval to construct and manage the trails on Mori Point and has identified Mori Point as a priority work site for 2004-2005. Following completion of the trail planning effort, GGNPC will begin work on trail construction and habitat restoration through its Site Stewardship program. Simultaneous to the trail planning effort, the Site Stewardship program will undertake several interim measures to manage public access and protect resources at Mori Point and to engage the public in stewardship activities.

**Site Description:** Mori Point is a landmark on the Pacifica coastline, protruding several hundred feet into the ocean and visible from nearly every high point in the City (Exhibit 3). The Point itself is a dramatic vista, but from atop its ridge can be seen one-of-a-kind views of the Pedro Point Headlands to the south and, on clear days, the Marin headlands and Point Reyes to the north. The north boundary of the property consists of a steep ridge that rises up from the Laguna Salada Marsh and Sharp Park Municipal Golf Course, both owned by the City of San Francisco. To the west, the Pacific Ocean and the sandy shore of Rockaway Beach bound the property. To the south is the Calera Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant, and 20 acres of restored wetlands, owned by the City of Pacifica. The City has completed a section of the Coastal Trail along the Calera Creek corridor that will connect to the Mori Point Coastal Trail (Exhibit 4). Mori Point is bounded on the east by Highway 1.

The seaward edge of the Mori Point property consists of rocky intertidal areas and steep cliffs that support rare sea bluff vegetation. The upland portions of the property support annual grasslands and remnants of native coastal scrub and coastal prairie plant communities. The small freshwater ponds and marshes on the site's northwestern edge support the northernmost population of the San Francisco garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis tetrataenia*). This species is listed on both the federal and state endangered species lists, and occurs in only a few dozen sites in San Mateo County. The willow riparian areas found on the property support populations of the California red legged frog (*Rana aurora draytonii*), listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which is one of the primary food sources for the garter snake. There is high potential to enhance these wetland areas and adjoining uplands to increase their value to both the garter snake and the red-legged frog (Exhibit 2). The habitat value of these wetland areas and adjacent uplands is augmented by their proximity to the larger Laguna Salada marsh just north.

**Project History:** The Trust for Public Land (TPL) acquired the Mori Point property in 2000 using its own funds and a grant from the Coastal Conservancy. In 2002, the National Parks Service acquired the property from TPL. The Coastal Conservancy has identified the completion of the Coastal Trail across Mori Point as a priority action in its report, *Completing the California Coastal Trail*, released in 2002.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

|                              |                  |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| Coastal Conservancy          | \$74,000         |
| U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service | 40,600           |
| GGNPC:                       | <u>66,500</u>    |
| <b>Total Project Cost</b>    | <b>\$181,100</b> |

The expected source of the Coastal Conservancy funds for the proposed project is the Coastal Conservancy's FY 2001/02 Proposition 12 (Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000) budget appropriation for the Coastal Trail. Consistent with the purposes of this funding source, the grant would be used to develop public access pursuant to Division 21 of the Public Resources Code and would be used to facilitate the completion of the Coastal Trail. 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 Section 31111 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies and non-profit organizations to undertake plans and feasibility studies in implementing Division 21.

The proposed project is consistent with and will help to implement Chapter 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation: Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (§§ 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, and § 31408 directs the Conservancy to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail. Through its participation in the acquisition of the Mori Point property and 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 non-profit organizations for accessways to and along the coast that serve more than local public needs. Consistent with this section, the subject of the proposed action is a link in the California Coastal Trail, a trail system of statewide significance. The beaches and trails of Pacifica attract more than 150,000 visitors per year from throughout the greater Bay Area. The inclusion of Mori Point into the National Parks system indicates the site's importance as a national resource. The GGNRA system receives more than 17 million visitors per year from throughout the nation and the popularity of its park units in San Mateo County is steadily increasing. The NPS has authorized GGNPC to initiate this trail planning effort for Mori Point in advance of the completion of GGNRA's General Management Plan Amendment primarily because of the large numbers of cyclists, hikers, and birders who already visit the property on a regular basis. Mori Point itself is a feature of regional, if not statewide, significance and the proposed project will enable greater public access to this remarkable place.

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 GGNPC is a small non-profit organization funded through private donations and which run largely through the efforts of volunteers. Because of the importance of the proposed project, the GGNPC has committed more than \$60,000 of its own resources to the proposed project.

Section 31400.2 also 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.

Section 31400.3 states that the Conservancy may assist public agencies in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The proposed project will further these goals by improving and enhancing a major public accessway in a heavily-visited coastal region as part of a regional, comprehensive public access plan.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STANDARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCESSWAY LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT:**

Consistent with Standard No. 1, the Mori Point Coastal Trail would be designed to minimize alteration of natural landforms and to be subordinate to the setting's character. The trail planning process would assure that the trail is designed in a way that prevents hazards to the land and to public safety (Standard Nos. 1 and 2), ensures the privacy of private landowners (Standard Nos. 1 and 4), and protects environmentally sensitive habitats (Standard Nos. 1 and 5). Consistent with Standard No. 8, the proposed project would help to establish a trail on an ocean front parcel that would connect inland units of state, federal, and local park systems with the shore. Further consistent with Standard No. 8, the planning process would be undertaken in part to eliminate existing trails on geologically unstable and erosive soils.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1 Objective C** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project would provide plans and designs necessary to construct 1.4 miles of the Coastal Trail on the Mori point property.

Consistent with **Goal 5 Objective A** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project would preserve and enhance one acre of environmentally sensitive habitats on Mori Point by designing the new trail alignment 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 U.S. Representative Tom Lantos, State Senator Jackie Speier and Assemblyman Gene Mullin. The proposed project is supported by a wide variety of local and regional organizations, including Coastwalk, the

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the County of San Mateo, the City of Pacifica, the Trust for Public Land, the Pacifica Land Trust, the Committee for Green Foothills, the Pacifica Beach Coalition, Pacificans for Mori Point, People for a GGNRA, the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club, Sustainable San Mateo County, and the Peninsula Open Space Trust.

4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of the City of Pacifica.
5. **Need:** As discussed in greater detail in the “Project Description” section above, the Mori Point property is already heavily used by hikers and bicyclists via a network of informal trails. Such uncontrolled access is contributing to soil erosion and damage to sensitive habitat areas. Completion of the NPS master plan for the San Mateo County park units is many years off. Improvements to the Mori Point trails and restoration of degraded areas are needed now. The proposed project would allow the GGNPC to proceed with these projects in a timely manner.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** As discussed in greater detail in the “Consistency With Conservancy's Enabling Legislation” section above, Mori Point is a scenic and recreational resource of regional and statewide importance. Completion of the Coastal Trail is a major goal of a number of state agencies, including the Department of Parks and Recreation and the California Coastal Commission.

#### **Additional Criteria**

8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The proposed project would facilitate the development of the Coastal Trail, provide for the restoration of sensitive habitat areas, and provide new connections to the property from inland areas.
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
12. **Readiness:** As discussed above, the GGNPC has plans to begin trail construction and restoration activities as soon as next year, provided that plans and designs can be completed.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See the “Project History” section above.
15. **Cooperation:** The proposed project would involve the cooperation of the NPS, a federal agency, the GGNPC, a private nonprofit organization, and will include the participation of students from San Francisco State University and San Francisco City College as well as the assistance of numerous local volunteers and community groups.

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

The proposed project would further many policies of the October 1997 City of Pacifica Local Coastal Plan; some of the most directly relevant are listed below:

##### **Public Access Element**

3. To enhance public safety, and facilitate visitor access, safe bicycle and walking paths should be established between neighborhoods and through the City.

##### **Circulation Element**

9. Develop safe and efficient bicycle, hiking, equestrian and pedestrian access within Pacifica and to local points of interest.

Open Space and Recreation Element

1. Retain open space which preserves natural resources, protects visual amenities, prevents inappropriate development, provides for the managed use of resources, and protects the public health and safety.
4. Promote community wide links to open space and recreation facilities which do not abuse the open space resource or threaten public safety.

Conservation Element

2. Require the protection and conservation of indigenous rare and endangered species.
4. Protect and conserve the coastal environment, sand dunes, habitats, unique and endangered species and other natural resources and features which contribute to the coastal character.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The project is statutorily exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262 because the project involves only feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions which have yet to be approved or adopted. As required by this Section, the GGNPC will involve the consideration of environmental factors in the planning and design of the Coastal Trail. This project does not include the funding of any construction activities. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the action.