

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
June 30, 2004

**EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT  
RIDGE TRAIL PLANNING**

File No. 04-044  
Project Manager: Mary Small/David Hayes

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize a grant of up to \$110,000 to the East Bay Regional Park District for planning the development of two segments of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, at the Vargas Plateau property and at the Garin – Dry Creek Regional Park in Southern Alameda County.

**LOCATION:** Hayward and Fremont, Alameda County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

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**EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit 1: Project Location Map
  - Exhibit 2: Vargas Plateau Site Map
  - Exhibit 3: Garin-Dry Creek Regional Park Map
  - 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 31160-31164 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred ten thousand dollars (\$110,000) to the East Bay Regional Park District to complete planning for development of two segments of the Bay Area Ridge Trail at the Vargas Plateau Property and the Garin-Dry Creek Regional Park in southern Alameda County, subject to the condition that no Conservancy funds shall be disbursed until the Executive Officer of the Conservancy has approved in writing: a final work plan, including a budget and schedule; and any contractors proposed 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 authority of the Conservancy under Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31164 regarding projects of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
  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 serves greater than local need.”
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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff is recommending that the Conservancy authorize up to \$110,000 to the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) to fund planning for development of two sections of the Bay Area Ridge Trail in Southern Alameda County (Exhibit 1).

EBRPD will develop a Land Use Plan and trail circulation plan to develop and open to the public a 4.5 mile segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail across the EBRPD’s Vargas Plateau property in Alameda County (Exhibit 2). The project will include developing a plan for construction of a future staging area for trail access. The Vargas Plateau has been in land bank status for ten years and the Land Use Plan needs to be complete in order for EBRPD to open the property for public use. It is anticipated that access to the property will be provided from Morrison Canyon Road, which provides access along the southern edge of this property.

EBRPD will also develop a Land Use Plan for the Bay Area Ridge trail alignment in the 3,000 acre Garin - Dry Creek Regional Park in Hayward, Alameda County (Exhibit 3). This plan will identify an alignment for about 3.5 miles of proposed trail. The plan will analyze environmental issues and regulatory requirements for the new construction required to extend the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

The EBRPD is a special assessment district in Alameda and Contra Costa County. The District was created in 1934 and has been dedicated to preserving open space and offering recreational opportunities for local residents for the past seventy years. EBRPD opened its first three parks in 1936, which included present-day Tilden Regional Park, Sibley Volcanic Preserve and Lake Temescal. Today, the East Bay Regional Park District is the largest local park agency in the United States, maintaining and operating over 95,000 acres of parkland and nearly 30 regional trails.

**Site Description:** The project is located in the ridglands of southern Alameda County. The project will work on trail planning for a major gap of the Ridge Trail, between Highways 580 and 680 (Exhibit 1). EBRPD will plan two separate trail segments, on the Garin property and the Vargas property. The Garin – Dry Creek project will complete plans for a 3.5 mile segment of trail connecting already proposed trail north of Niles Canyon. The Vargas Plateau planning project will help develop 4.5 miles of trail on the Vargas property immediately south of Niles Canyon. A gap will remain between these two projects across Niles Canyon. This project is part of the Diablo Ridglands, an important open space and habitat area in the east bay. The land supports rolling oak woodlands, chaparral, grasslands and some riparian corridors.

**Project History:** The Conservancy is a major partner in helping to implement the Bay Area Ridge Trail. Since 2001, the Conservancy has approved about \$3.5 million dollars in grants for planning and project implementation, helping complete more than 60 miles of new trail. This project would continue to build connections between existing trail segments and help complete the more than 400-mile trail along the ridgeline of the San Francisco Bay.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	\$110,000
East Bay Regional Park District	<u>40,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$150,000</b>

The requested Conservancy funds are expected to come from the FY 02/03 California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 40) appropriation for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. As discussed below, implementation of the Bay Area Ridge Trail is one of the goals of the Bay Area Conservancy Program.

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

This project implements the Ridge Trail and is consistent with the provisions of Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31164. Section 31162 states that the Conservancy may award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay area that help to achieve various goals, including the goal of increasing public access “to and around the bay, coast, ridgetops, and urban open space . . .” Section 31163 directs the Conservancy to cooperate with nonprofit land trusts and other organizations in identifying and adopting long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay area. Completion of the Ridge Trail is one of the goals identified in the Bay Area Open Space Council's “Regional Needs Briefing Book.” Per Section 31163(c), this project is consistent with the Alameda County General Plan and the 1997 East Bay Regional Parks Master Plan.

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

This project will complete planning work to open approximately seven miles of the Bay Area Ridge Trail. The project helps to implement Goal #11, Objective B of the Conservancy's strategic plan which seeks to develop an additional 60 miles of the Ridge Trail.

**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:** This project is supported by the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, a nonprofit organization dedicated to completing the Ridge Trail. The East Bay Area Trail Council, which represents a broad coalition of hikers, bikers, and equestrians, has expressed a strong support for this planning project. The City of Hayward, Hayward Area Recreation & Park District, California State University, the State of California, Alameda County, and all local cities and county jurisdictions are all supportive of opening these parks and developing the trail for public use. Letters of support are attached in Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within Alameda County, within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay region.
5. **Need:** Conservancy funding is needed to make these projects happen. EBRPD has not had the funding to complete the Land Use Plans and related documents needed to develop these trail segments.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Ridge Trail is truly a regional attraction. The 400-mile trail network offers spectacular views of the Bay Area and links many parklands and open space preserves. In addition, the Ridge Trail will be tied to the San Francisco Bay Trail and the California Coastal Trail systems, creating an extensive trail network. Completion of the Ridge Trail is one of the goals identified in the Bay Area Open Space Council's “Regional Needs Briefing Book.”

#### **Additional Criteria**

7. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
8. **Readiness:** The grantee can begin the planning work this summer. If approved, it is anticipated that work will begin immediately.
9. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** “See “Project History” above.”
10. **Return to Conservancy:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
11. **Cooperation:** The Bay Program of the State Coastal Conservancy has been working cooperatively with the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council to administer a competitive grant program to identify projects that help implement the Ridge Trail. The best proposals from that grant program will be recommended for funding by the Conservancy.

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

This project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262 because it involves only feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions and will not have a legally binding effect on later activities. Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for this project.