

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 30, 2004

GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL PARKS COASTAL TRAIL SIGNAGE

File No. 04-039
Project Manager: Joan Cardellino

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$518,500 to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy for a comprehensive trail signage system through Golden Gate National Park properties in San Francisco and Marin Counties as part of the California Coastal Trail.

LOCATION: Seventeen miles of the Coastal Trail alignment in Marin and San Francisco counties between Muir Beach and the Cliff House. (See Exhibit 1.)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: Letters 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 of an amount not to exceed five hundred eighteen thousand five hundred dollars (\$518,500.00) to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (GGNPC) to establish a comprehensive trail signage system along a continuous 17-mile stretch of the Coastal Trail in Marin and San Francisco counties. Disbursement of the funds is subject to the following conditions:

1. No Conservancy funds shall be disbursed until the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (“Executive Officer”) has reviewed and approved in writing a final work program, including a budget and schedule; a sign plan acknowledging Conservancy and Proposition 12 funding; and any contractors to be employed in the project.

2. Prior to initiating construction, GGNPC shall provide written evidence to the Executive Officer that all permits and approvals necessary to the implementation and completion of the project under applicable local, state and federal laws and regulations have been obtained.”

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 Division 21, Chapter 9 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31409) regarding the Public Access Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This authorization would enable the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy to design and install a comprehensive trail signage system through Golden Gate National Park properties in San Francisco and Marin Counties along the Coastal Trail alignment.

For a continuous 17-mile stretch of California’s most photographed and visited coast there is a single land manager—providing an opportunity to create a consistent character to the California Coastal Trail and dramatically enhance visitor access and the quality of the visitor’s experience. To achieve this vision, the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, in direct cooperation with the Golden Gate National Parks and the Presidio Trust of San Francisco, proposes to complete a comprehensive inventory, re-design and installation of new wayfinding, safety, regulatory, mapping, educational, interpretive and informational signage along this trail segment.

The California Coastal Trail provides an unsurpassed public right-of-way for this remarkable coastline. But without a complete signage system, the California Coastal Trail is not truly accessible for any but experienced users. At none of the 30-plus access points along this 17-mile section are there signs identifying routes, exits, distances or difficulty. The Coastal Trail is a physical reality in this area, but hikers, bikers and other trail users cannot arrive at the trail and navigate, discover or explore it without commercial maps, which are available at only two of the 30 entry points along this section of trail. Additionally, valuable opportunities to make a deeper connection with visitors through learning and stewardship are being lost as a result of inadequate or non-existent education and interpretive signage.

Most of this section of trail is unsigned; where signs exist many are inconsistent; and wayfinding and interpretive signage is altogether missing. The existing system is an incomplete, difficult to maintain, often confusing, sometimes conflicting, hodge-podge of various styles. Visitor complaints about the number, quality, usefulness, reliability and placement of signs in the park are common. The current situation discourages new visitors, casual visitors and all but “trail

insiders” from venturing on the trails and exploring areas of the coast beyond parking lots and auto overlooks. For those who do rely on the trails, the signage system does little to enhance the visitor experience and can diminish it. Natural and cultural resources are also needlessly jeopardized as people unknowingly deviate from safe trails and approved uses.

Project deliverables include interpretive kiosks, maps, wayfinding, safety and regulatory signage along the Coastal Trail exclusively. A single compiled and comprehensive inventory is necessary to finalize locations. Based on the compiled inventory, a design and implementation plan will be prepared for review and approval by the Golden Gate National Parks (National Park Service). Following approval of the plan, fabrication of signs will begin. The final steps, removal of old signs and installation of new signs, are expected to be completed within one and a half years of the formal start of the project.

The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (formerly Golden Gate National Parks Association) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting historical and scientific work and educational and interpretive activities of the National Park Service, principally in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. GGNPC staff has expertise in developing and managing projects of this size and scope since 1981.

Site Description: The project area covers approximately 17 miles of coastline between Muir Beach in Marin County and the Cliff House in San Francisco. (See map, Exhibit 1.) The project area lies within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The topography includes a variety of coastal environments, including high coastal bluffs, narrow rocky beaches and wide sandy beaches. It also includes the Golden Gate Bridge and the coastal side of the Presidio of San Francisco. See Exhibit 1.

Project History: The Legislature and the Governor directed the Coastal Conservancy, through SB908 of 2001, to report on a proposed trail that would stretch along the entire California coast, the so-called Coastal Trail. The Conservancy produced a report on how that massive undertaking could be accomplished in January 2003. One element of developing the Coastal Trail is creating a signage and graphics program to provide continuity throughout the alignment. GGNPC approached the Conservancy in February of this year for assistance because this project provides opportunity to create a comprehensive signage program for 17 miles of Coastal Trail. Once a logo has been developed for the statewide trail, it will be incorporated into GGNPC’s signage.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$518,500
GGNPC	\$668,940
National Park Service	<u>\$1,160,793</u>
Total Project Cost	\$2,348,233

Conservancy funds are expected to come from the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000 (Proposition 12), which allocated a total of \$5 million for projects related to the Coastal Trail.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is consistent with Public Resources Code Section 31400–31409 in the following respects:

Section 31400.1 states in part that the Conservancy may award grants to nonprofit organizations to develop, operate or manage lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. GGNPC is a nonprofit organization and the project will improve public use and enjoyment of a long stretch of Coastal Trail.

Section 31400.3 states that the Conservancy may provide such assistance as is required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways. Directional and interpretive signage is a key component to public use of an extensive trail system such as is included in this project.

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

The proposed project is consistent with Public Access Goal 1, Objective B to sign approximately 275 miles of existing trails that form part of the Coastal 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:** The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, The Presidio Trust, Coastwalk, San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, Marin County Bicycle Coalition, and the Golden Gate Bridge District support this project. Letters of support are included in Exhibit 2.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of Marin and San Francisco Counties.
5. **Need:** GGNPC and the NPS are contributing substantial cash and in-kind services but cannot carry the full cost of this project without Conservancy assistance.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The project area is one of the most heavily visited stretches of the entire coast. Literally millions of visitors come to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco and Marin Counties each year.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** Both the visitor experience and the physical environment along the trails are suffering from a lack of adequate signage. Without clear and proper signage to provide interpretive information and direction, visitors can unknowingly deviate from safe trails and approved uses. Given the high volume of use in the project area, the impact of informal trails and improper use of trails can have serious effects on habitat and increase the costs of restoring damaged areas.
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
12. **Readiness:** GGNPC is already engaged in preliminary planning for graphics design, and is prepared to move forward and complete the project within 2 years.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The Marin County LCP for Unit I, southern Marin, states in policy number 16 regarding the Role and Relationship of Federal Parklands to LCP Policies, that: “The extensive amount of federal parkland within the coastal zone of Unit I provides significant opportunities for development of coastal access, recreational facilities and visitor support facilities.” Comprehensive interpretive and directional signage is a key component of the NPS coastal access facilities and is therefore consistent with this policy.

The Western Shoreline Plan of the City of San Francisco’s Master Plan constitutes the Local Coastal Plan for the City and County of San Francisco. The Cliff House and the Sutro Baths is one of the sub-areas of the Western Shoreline Plan and there is a set of policies specific to that sub-area. Objective 8 is to maintain the visitor attractiveness of the Cliff House and Sutro Bath complex. Policy 8.3 is to insure hiker safety by providing a clearly marked and well-maintained pathway system. The goal of the proposed project is to do that very thing: provide clear signage for the trails in this area which connect to and form a part of the Coastal Trail.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The installation of Coastal Trail wayfinding signage throughout the GGNRA will involve the replacement and/or upgrade of approximately 500 signs, measuring 18” by 12”, throughout the project area. Approximately 400 existing signs would be replaced, and approximately 100 new signs would assist visitors in orienting to the area, inhibit the use of social trails and focus visitor use on designated trails. Replacement of twelve kiosks at the trailheads will also assist in providing visitor information. The project does not entail a significant change or impact on the environment.

Those portions of the project that will replace small, existing structures are exempt under the California Environmental Quality Act, 14 California Code of Regulations sections 15301(g) (regarding the replacement of existing signs) and 15302 (regarding the replacement and reconstruction of existing facilities). Placement of the new signs is also exempt by virtue of sections 15303 (regarding new construction of new, small structures) and 15304 (regarding minor alterations to land). Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the proposed project.