

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 30, 2004

**EL CORTE DE MADERA
STAGING AREA AND RIDGE TRAIL PLANNING PROJECT**

File No. 04-045
Project Manager: Mary Small/David Hayes

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize a grant of up to \$31,000 to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District for planning the development of a staging area and a segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail at the El Corte De Madera Regional Open Space Preserve in San Mateo County.

LOCATION: El Corte de Madera Regional Open Space Preserve, Unincorporated San Mateo County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: Project Location
 - Exhibit 2: Site Map
 - Exhibit 3: Conceptual Plan
 - Exhibit 4: Photographs
 - 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 31160-31164 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed thirty one thousand dollars (\$31,000) to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District to plan the development of a new staging area and a section of the Bay Area Ridge Trail at the El Corte de Madera Regional Open Space Preserve in San Mateo 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 a grant of up to thirty one thousand dollars to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD) to plan and design a regional staging area and a new 1.25 mile multiple-use trail at El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve in San Mateo County (Exhibit 1). This trail would connect to the Bay Area Ridge Trail / Skyline Trail located just across Skyline Boulevard in the California Water Service Company’s Bear Gulch Watershed property. The new trail would continue south along the prominent eastern ridge of El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve to the intersection with Springboard Trail and Bear Gulch Road (Exhibit 2).

There is currently no formal parking at El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve. Visitors utilize the CalTrans parking lot at Skeggs Point and frequently use pullouts along Skyline Boulevard. It is not uncommon for these parking areas to be full on nice weekends. There are safety issues associated with use of Skeggs Point, as visitors typically cross Skyline Boulevard at a location with very poor visibility to on-coming traffic. Located on a large flat near the Gordon Mill Trailhead (just across Skyline Boulevard from the Skyline Trail), a well designed parking facility would relieve much of the pressure on the nearby Skeggs Point parking lot, would provide a central area to disseminate information about El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve and other public lands in the area, and would provide welcome restroom facilities. A conceptual plan for the proposed staging area is provided in Exhibit 3. Equestrians in particular would greatly benefit from having areas dedicated to their trailers. From this regional staging area, visitors could directly access the trails in the Bear Gulch Watershed and in Wunderlich County Park.

The new 1.25 mile multiple-use trail would originate in the proposed staging area and would connect to many of the existing trails within the Preserve as shown in Exhibit 2. The trail would create opportunities for a number of additional short and intermediate distance loops within the Preserve and would help reduce conflicts between trail users. Its location along the prominent eastern ridge of the Preserve would offer sweeping views of the rugged Lawrence Creek canyon, and would serve as an excellent self-guided interpretive trail to highlight the Preserve’s remarkable natural resources and its regional significance within the San Gregorio Creek Watershed. Photographs of the Preserve are provided in Exhibit 4. The trail would also provide for a continuous loop around the Preserve’s perimeter. Finally, the trail would be designed with state-of-the-art erosion control techniques consistent with the Watershed Protection Program that was recently adopted by the District’s Board.

This project will complete plans, designs, and construction documents necessary to obtain permits and approvals for construction of the proposed trail and staging area. Planning studies

will address parking capacity; traffic patterns, signage, and visitor safety; site design, layout, and native landscaping; and environmental restoration of the site surrounding the proposed staging area. The trails component of the project would include focused biotic and geologic surveys. District staff will be responsible for facilitating public input into the planning and design process and for completing the necessary environmental review.

Site Description: El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve is one of the District's most popular preserves, well known for its dramatic scenery, rugged terrain, and extensive trail network. Thirty-six miles of multi-use trail are available for exploration at this 2,821-acre preserve. The Preserve is located in the headwaters of San Gregorio Creek. This watershed provides critical habitat for Steelhead Trout and Coho Salmon, both federally-listed as threatened species. The preserve has cool redwood canyons, mixed evergreen forest and chaparral along the drier, warmer ridges. Visitors to the preserve can enjoy views of the ocean and the forest.

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	\$31,000
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District	<u>31,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$62,000

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." Consistent with Section 31163(c), this project is consistent with the San Mateo County General Plan in that the Resource Management Zoning District permits public recreation, trails, and associated facilities. The proposed trail alignment is also identified in the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's "Regional Open Space Study" and in the San Mateo County

Trails plan as a key regional trail connection. This regional trail is intended to extend from El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve through La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve to the proposed Harrington Trail, which would connect to Pescadero Creek County Park.

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

This project will complete planning work to open approximately one mile 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:** There is a great deal of local support for the project from Preserve users and members of the local community. Letters of support are attached as Exhibit 5.

Recent user surveys reveal that mountain bicyclists currently comprise about 75 percent of the Preserve's regular visitors. The Responsible Organized Mountain Pedalers (ROMP) is a local cycling club with over 400 members. In recent meetings with ROMP, members expressed great enthusiasm for a new Bay Area Ridge Trail segment through El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve. They expressed strong interest in constructing the trail segment as a volunteer project under the direction of District staff. They also reiterated their interest in a formal staging area located entirely within Preserve boundaries. They felt that this would greatly reduce the likelihood of an accident occurring as visitors cross Skyline Boulevard to access the Preserve from Skeggs Point.

The Kings Mountain Association represents the homeowners along northern Skyline Boulevard and Highway 84. El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve is literally in the backyard of many homeowners along Skyline Boulevard, Bear Gulch Road, and Star Hill Road. The Association has been actively lobbying the District to develop a formal staging area at El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve to eliminate the potential for accidents along Skyline Boulevard. At the Kings Mountain Association meeting on March 11, 2004, many members offered stories of near misses between speeding cars and Preserve visitors. The Association also expressed enthusiasm for the proposed Bay Area Ridge Trail

segment.

4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located in San Mateo County, within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay region.
5. **Need:** Conservancy funding is essential for this project to go forward. Given the current budget crisis and the projected financial impact to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, discretionary projects are a lower priority for implementation than grant-funded projects. All grant-funded projects will proceed on schedule.
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 would like to start 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.