

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 15, 2004

STEELHEAD BEACH RIVER PARK, PHASE II

File No. 04-060
Project Manager: Richard Retecki

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$215,000 to Sonoma County for Phase II public access improvements at Steelhead Beach River Park.

LOCATION: Forestville, Sonoma County (Exhibit 1, 2, & 3)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location

Exhibit 2: Local Project Location Map

Exhibit 3: Site Map

Exhibit 4: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

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

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to two hundred and fifteen thousand dollars (\$215,000) to the County of Sonoma for the development and construction of the second phase of public access and riparian habitat improvements at Steelhead Beach River Park, as described in the accompanying staff recommendation, subject to the condition that no funds shall be disbursed until the Executive Officer has received evidence that all other funds and necessary permits have been obtained and has approved in writing a final budget and work plan; and all subcontractors proposed to be used on the project.”

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 Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400 et seq.) related to development of a system of public accessways to and along California’s coast.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Guidelines and Selection Criteria adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001; and
3. The proposed project will serve greater than local public access needs.

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This authorization will provide \$215,000 to Sonoma County for the development and construction of Phase II public access improvements for Steelhead Beach River Park, in Forestville, Sonoma County. Phase II improvements will provide new and improved public and fishing access to the Russian River. (See Exhibit 3) The total cost of park development will be \$1,600,000, to be implemented in four phases, with the second phase costing \$410,000. Phase I public access improvement costs were \$455,000.

The Conservancy and its partners provided funds for Phase I public access improvements in 1998. Those improvements have been constructed and usage of Steelhead Beach has grown from 2,500 visitors per year to roughly 95,000 visitors per year in 2003, demonstrating the high demand for public access sites along the Russian River. Conservancy funds for Phase I were utilized for site preparation, disabled access improvements and trails, riparian corridor plantings, nature trails, and the initial fishing access improvements. Steelhead Beach is maintained by the Sonoma County Regional Park Department which oversees the development and management of the facilities.

The proposed Phase II project includes a number of elements to improve and expand public access at Steelhead Beach River Park:

- * An information kiosk and entrance station will be constructed as part of Phase II. Currently, there is not a display for public safety and general information about the park and river use. The kiosk will be designed and sited to provide maximum information and availability to park users. The entrance station will replace the existing “iron ranger” which is used to collect day use fees. The entrance station will allow parks staff to collect entrance fees, provide educational brochures, monitor the park site, and assist park users.
- * Restroom construction will replace the portable restrooms found on the site. The restroom, to include showers and sinks, will provide necessary services that are not presently met by the portable restrooms. Since the entire site is within the 100-year floodplain, the buildings are designed and equipped to survive a 100 year flood event.
- * Riparian corridor restoration will target Giant Reed and Himalayan berry that are interspersed throughout the riparian corridor. Removal of these invasive species will be followed with plantings of native species. Trail planning west along the river and to the western boundary of the park and fishing access improvements, will be implemented once the riparian restoration has been accomplished.
- * The development of 22 over night campsites will convert the park from a strictly day-use facility to an over night destination. The campsites will be “walk-in” and will offer basic

environmental camping amenities. They will be sited to provide privacy and proximity to the restroom.

As with Phase I, this project will be a cooperative finding venture between the Conservancy and Sonoma County.

Site Description: Steelhead Beach River Park is located along the Russian River near the intersection of Mirabel Road and River Road, in Forestville, approximately 15 miles west of Santa Rosa (see Exhibits 1 & 2). The park is 37 acres in size and extends along 2,000 feet of river frontage.

The site was somewhat disturbed by past gravel mining activities. The development efforts of Phase I eliminated some of the impacts from that activity but did not cover the entire park site. Phase II will mitigate more of the impacts from the gravel mining. The park site does contain several important forest and river habitats such as, redwood forest and stands of mixed riparian community.

The only structure on the site is a concrete, box-shaped gravel sorter that was used during the gravel mining activities. That structure is slated for an educational and interpretive display during a future phase of park development.

The entire park is within the 100-year flood plain. Public access improvements will be located at least 50 feet from the active river channel and some improvements will be removed on a seasonal basis.

Project History: In June 1991, the Conservancy, at the request of Mendocino and Sonoma Counties, provided funds for the preparation of a public access plan for the Russian River. The plan evaluated lands that could be acquired from willing sellers as well as publicly owned parcels larger than 1.5 acres as to their suitability for public access improvements.

During the Russian River Public Access planning process over three-dozen public sites were initially reviewed from Ukiah to the river mouth in Jenner, a distance of 120 miles. Of that number, 27 sites were evaluated by Conservancy staff and planning consultants. Steelhead Beach ranked number one in that planning process due to its location and its ability to provide a wide range of public access and river uses.

This location had the greatest potential for public access development to the river (see Exhibits 6 & 7). No other site evaluated offered such an ideal location and could handle such a wide range of recreational activities. The historic use of the location was compatible with river recreational activities and the immediate surrounding uses. Public access and fishing improvements proposed for Phase II will maintain compatibility with the river and riverine environment. Phase I improvements were completed in 2002 with Conservancy assistance.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$215,000
Sonoma County	<u>235,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$450,000

The expected source of Conservancy funds is Proposition 40, which provides funds for development and restoration of land and water resources in accordance with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Sonoma County will provide the remaining necessary funds from its Aggregate Resources Mitigation program and from the Per Capita Park Bond Fund.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Pursuant to Public Resources Code Sections 31400 and 31400.1, the Conservancy has a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways and may award grants to public agencies for the development of lands which are suitable for and which will be used for public accessways to and along the California coast. The Russian River has been designated a river trail by the Army corps of Engineers and is shown as such in the Sonoma County General Plan. In both Mendocino and Sonoma Counties, the river is used by canoers and fishermen for recreation and access. The potential exists for the development of public parcels, evaluated in the public access plan, for canoe/kayak launch and landing sites from Ukiah to the coast at intervals of between eight and ten miles, thus implementing the river trail concept. Steelhead Beach is one of the designated locations for a launch and landing sites.

For more than 120 years the Russian River has been a regional recreation attraction. The growing use and demand for river access was documented in the planning process conducted by the Conservancy. The need for more developed recreation and access areas was also verified. The development of Steelhead Beach River Park and its ability to provide a variety of recreational facilities will meet some of the growing regional demand for access improvements along the Russian River and to the coast.

Pursuant to Public Resources Code 31400.2, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of initial development of public accessways by any public agency. The Conservancy has worked cooperatively with Sonoma County on numerous public access, acquisition, and habitat enhancement projects. The cost of the Phase II public access improvements for Steelhead Beach River Park will be shared with the County. Sonoma County will utilize the Aggregate Resources Mitigation Fund and the Per Capita Park Bond Fund as its contribution.

The Conservancy is authorized under Public Resources Code Section 31400.3 to "provide such assistance as is required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division." The Steelhead Beach access improvements assist Sonoma County in the provision of public access facilities that will create new public access, restore degraded habitat areas, and increase public access to the Russian River and to the coast.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective E** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in the development of a river trail location, necessary river public access improvements that will promote local river recreation, as well as, river travel to the coast.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

In authorizing funding for Phase I in March 1998, the Conservancy determined that improvements proposed in the Steelhead Beach Park Plan would be consistent with Public Access Standards adopted by the Coastal Commission and the Conservancy. This remains the case in regards to the Proposed Phase II improvements. The Phase II project is also 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:** Along with strong public agency, legislative and nonprofit organization support, the project has broad support from the public and river users. (see Exhibit 8)
4. **Location:** The Russian River watershed is partly inside and partly outside the coastal zone, and is a coastal watershed with valuable and diverse resources, habitat, and offers enormous potential for public access. Phase II public access improvements will fulfill some of the public access potential to the river and offer a respite for those on their way to the coast. The availability of overnight camp sites will facilitate the use of the Russian River as a "river trail" providing access to the coast.
4. **Need:** Without Conservancy assistance, Sonoma County would not be able to develop and construct the project in the foreseeable future. The site's popularity, brought about by the Phase I improvements, now necessitates additional park improvements to accommodate more visitors.
5. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Russian River valley has been a prominent regional recreation destination for over a century. The development of Steelhead Beach will enhance the river users experience by the provision of safe, well designed recreation opportunities. Such facilities will draw more tourists and recreational users to the river valley and the county in general.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** This project will provide new and increased access to a river along which 95 percent of the land is in private ownership. Without development of new access sites, a growing population and a growing number of river users will not have adequate improved outlets for their recreation needs. Development of new access sites, and the publicity that these sites are available, should lead to a reduction in trespass. As more sites are developed, they will act as funnels to direct more people to the improved sites and thus reduce trespass and vandalism.
12. **Readiness:** The Sonoma County Regional Park District will have the Phase II river public access improvements completed within one year.

13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** This project implements a priority public access recommendation of the Conservancy’s 1996 Russian River Public Access Plan.

14. **Return to Conservancy:** See the “Project Financing” section above.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA: Sonoma County as the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act prepared and adopted an Initial Study and Negative Declaration for the Steelhead Beach Park Plan (Phases I – IV) in March 1996. The Negative Declaration identified potentially significant impacts in the areas of earth movement, water quality, flooding, biotic noise, light and glare, land use, transportation and safety, and cultural resources, and recommended 23 mitigation measures that would reduce these impacts to a level of insignificance. These mitigation measures have been incorporated into the project. In its March 1998 action authorizing funding for Phase I, the Conservancy found that the project as mitigated could not have a significant effect on the environment. There has been no change in the project or the circumstances in which it is undertaken, and no new information indicating that the Phase II actions discussed in this recommendation would have a significant effect on the environment.

SBII to Marcia August 13, 2004

Exhibit 1

Exhibit 2

Exhibit 3

Exhibit 4

Exhibit 5

Exhibit 6

Exhibit 7

Exhibit 8

Steelhead Beach Park Preliminary Plan
And
Initial Study

Hyden Associates Landscape Architects
And
Sonoma County Regional Parks

Exhibit 4

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