

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

May 18, 2005

PRBO SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESEARCH CENTER

File No. 05-036

Project Manager: Brenda Buxton

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$201,500 to PRBO Conservation Science for education facilities, displays, and equipment at PRBO's San Francisco Bay Research Center.

LOCATION: Shollenberger Park, Petaluma, Sonoma County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Conservancy

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 31160-31164 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred one thousand five hundred dollars (\$201,500) to PRBO Conservation Science (PRBO) for education facilities, displays, and equipment at the San Francisco Bay Research Center, subject to the following conditions:

- 1.No Conservancy funds shall be disbursed until the Executive Officer of the Conservancy has reviewed and approved in writing:
 - a. The names of any contractors PRBO will retain to carry out all or part of the project.
 - b. Documentation that PRBO has obtained all permits and approvals required for the project under federal, state and local law.

- b. A final work plan for the project, including a final budget and schedule.

- c. A signing plan acknowledging the Conservancy's funding of this project.
2. PRBO shall enter into an agreement sufficient to protect the public interest in any improvement or development constructed as part of this proposed project, in accordance with the requirements of Public Resources Codes Section 31116(c)."

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 purposes and criteria set forth in Chapter 4.5 (Sections 31160-31164) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code regarding the enhancement of natural resources of the San Francisco Bay Area.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 25, 2001.
3. PRBO Conservation Science is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

PRBO Conservation Science (PRBO) requests \$201,500 for education facilities, displays, and equipment at its new San Francisco Bay Research Center. This project is recommended for funding because it will allow PRBO to expand its education programs to meet current demand as well as expand its programs to new audiences. Over 5,000 adults and 5,000 children visit PRBO's facilities each year, but the remoteness and small size of its west Marin location limits the capacity of its education programs. By moving its headquarters to a new location on Shollenberger Marsh in Petaluma, PRBO will be able to better focus on San Francisco Bay ecology, increase the numbers of participants in its educational programs, and serve as a visitor center for the adjacent Shollenberger Marsh. PRBO will continue to use the existing facilities in Marin for research and educational programming.

PRBO is currently conducting an \$8 million capital and endowment campaign for the purchase, build out, and maintenance of the office and the educational facilities and equipment. The office space for researchers and staff will be funded by this campaign and are not part of the Conservancy request. PRBO seeks Conservancy assistance for the build out of the 750 square foot, 55 person room in an existing building that will be used primarily for educational activities. In addition to providing funding for interior improvements, the proposed Conservancy grant will fund the purchase and installation of educational displays in the visitor-serving areas and viewing scopes for educational programs, as well as the preparation and installation of interpretative signage for the adjacent wetlands.

PRBO's mission is to conserve birds and wildlife through innovative scientific research and outreach. Since its founding in 1965, PRBO has become a leader in Pacific coast avian and ecological research. PRBO also uses bird ecology to educate the public about conservation

science and environmental stewardship. PRBO runs education programs at its west Marin field station, at research sites, and in classrooms in San Francisco, Marin, and Sonoma Counties. PRBO works with Bay Area teachers to provide hands-on classroom activities that reach key science and conservation concepts, including scientific methodology, life cycle of birds, habitat-specific food webs, and wildlife monitoring. In addition to training teachers, PRBO has undertaken several in-school and after-school education projects focusing on underserved communities including Bayview-Hunter's Point (San Francisco) and the Canal Community (San Rafael). PRBO reaches over 4,000 school children a year through these educational programs. With the new, expanded facilities PRBO will be able to provide more environmental education training for teachers, host workshops focusing on the San Francisco Bay ecosystem and lead educational tours of the adjacent wetlands for visitors and school groups. PRBO will run its educational programming out of the new Center by Spring 2006.

Site Description: PRBO's Center will be located in a business park adjacent to the Shollenberger Park and the Gray Ranch property, the latter being recently purchased by the City of Petaluma with a \$2 million grant from the Conservancy. Next to the Petaluma River, Shollenberger Park and Gray Ranch feature a mosaic of uplands, riparian, salt and brackish wetland habitats. Restoration of additional wetlands, creation of waste water polishing wetlands, and trail construction are planned for the Gray Ranch property. With the existing trails in Shollenberger Park and soon-to-be constructed trails around the Gray Ranch property there will be significant opportunities for public access and educational programs.

Project History: In October 2002, the Conservancy helped fund the acquisition, restoration and trail construction on the Gray Ranch property, adjacent to the PRBO Center. These adjacent natural areas will be incorporated into PRBO's educational programming. In regards to environmental education centers, the Conservancy has funded such centers in the past because they promote appropriate public access to natural resources, involve and inform community members about environmental restoration, and build a constituency for stewardship of natural resources. Past projects have included numerous grants for planning, construction, and programming at environmental education and visitor centers along the coast and San Francisco Bay such as Crissy Field Environmental Education Center and Heron's Head Park's Living Classroom Education Center in San Francisco, and potentially in the future, the Delta Science Center in Antioch.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$201,500
PRBO	\$4, 560,100
Total Project Cost	\$4,761,600

The total cost to purchase and improve the San Francisco Bay Research Center is \$4,761,600. PRBO will raise most of these funds from a variety of private sources and loans. The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is the fiscal year 2004-05 appropriation to the Conservancy from the "Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Fund of 2002" (Proposition 50) which sets funds aside specifically for "the acquisition and development of facilities to promote public access to and participation in the conservation of land, water and

wildlife resources” including “training and research facilities” and “nature centers that are in or adjacent to watersheds and wetlands”. The improvement of the PRBO educational facility falls squarely within this authorization.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31164, to address resource and recreational goals in the San Francisco Bay Area. Under §31162(a), the Conservancy may help achieve its program goals through the provision of facilities such as interpretive centers that improve public access to and around the bay and urban open spaces.

By providing education about San Francisco Bay ecology and encouraging visitation of the adjacent wetland properties, PRBO will “promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes,” consistent with §31162(d).

The project also meets the criteria established in §31163(c), as the project 1) is supported by adopted local plans, including the Guiding Principles of the City of Petaluma’s 2005 General Plan and the land use and open space goals of the 1989 Sonoma County General Plan, 2) serves a regional constituency, 3) can be implemented in a timely way, 4) provides opportunities for educational programs focusing on wetlands and wetland restoration projects that would be lost if not quickly implemented, and 5) includes matching funds.

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

This project is consistent with the Conservancy’s **Goal 11, Objective A** which calls for implementation of approximately 20 projects that provide recreational facilities including interpretive centers.

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:** In addition to support from state Assemblymember Joe Nation, Senator Wes Chesbro, and Senator Carol Migden, PRBO’s Research Center is supported by members of the Petaluma City Council and wetland and bird conservation groups such as the

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance and the Madrone Audubon Society. Letters of support are attached as Exhibit 2.

4. **Location:** The project is located adjacent to the Petaluma River and its associated wetlands, one of the largest wetland areas around San Francisco Bay. This project will benefit the natural resources of San Francisco Bay by educating the public and school groups about the ecology and stewardship of San Francisco Bay.
5. **Need:** Conservancy participation is critical if PRBO is to meet its fundraising goal by the June escrow closure and to minimize borrowing necessary to fill any funding shortfalls.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The focus of PRBO's educational programs is the birdlife and ecology of the entire San Francisco Bay as well as the Pacific Coast. PRBO's remote west Marin facilities currently attract visitors from all over the region, state, and further. It is expected that a center closer to urban areas will be even more accessible to San Francisco Bay residents and visitors.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** PRBO seeks to complete funding commitments before the scheduled June escrow closure for the purchase and improvements to the Center.
8. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above. PRBO will raise \$4,761,600 as a match for the Conservancy's \$201,500.
9. **Innovation:** PRBO is a leader in researching and providing public education about avian ecology and conservation science.
10. **Readiness:** PRBO's fundraising campaign is well underway and escrow is scheduled to close in June.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** This project will provide environmental educational and visitor serving facilities for a Conservancy-funded acquisition as discussed in "Project Description" and "Project History" above.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

This project involves the construction of internal office space and visitor facilities in an already constructed office park and the purchase of educational equipment and displays. These activities are categorically exempt under the provisions of CEQA under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15301 regarding the operation and minor alteration of existing facilities involving negligible or no expansion of the use anticipated at the time the office park was constructed.

Upon approval of this project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.