

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
October 27, 2005

CALIFORNIA COASTAL TRAIL IN STATE PARKS

File No. 04-090
Project Manager: Steve Horn

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement with the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the California Conservation Corps for collaboration in developing the California Coastal Trail within units of the State Parks system, and authorization to disburse up to \$1 million to the Department of Parks and Recreation for Coastal Trail improvements using the services of the Conservation Corps.

LOCATION: Throughout the Coastal Zone

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Memorandum of Agreement draft

Exhibit 2: Description of Trail Implementation Projects

Exhibit 3: 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:

1. Authorizes the Executive Officer to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement with the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the California Conservation Corps, substantially in the form of the attached Exhibit 1, providing for the Conservancy to work in cooperation with the other parties to develop the California Coastal Trail within units of the State Parks system using the services of the Conservation Corps.
2. Authorizes the disbursement of \$1,000,000 (one million dollars) to the Department of Parks and Recreation to develop improvements to the Coastal Trail within units of the

State Parks system using the services of the California Conservation Corps, subject to the following condition:

If the Department of Parks and Recreation, as the lead agency, or the Executive Officer of the Conservancy determines that any project to be funded pursuant to this authorization is not exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), then Conservancy funds shall not be used for that project until the Conservancy has made the findings required under CEQA.”

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 Conservancy is authorized to grant funds to the Department of Parks and Recreation to develop lands for public access purposes, including the Coastal Trail, by Public Resources Code Sections 31400.1, 31400.2, 31400.3 and 31409.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The Coastal Conservancy, consistent with its statutory mandates to “coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail” and to “have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways”, has the opportunity to facilitate a new institutional arrangement that will increase trail construction on existing state lands.

It is recommended that the Conservancy enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (“MOA”) with the Department of Parks and Recreation (“DPR”) and the California Conservation Corps (“the Corps”) that would commit each agency to help implement the Coastal Trail through a cooperative effort. As a result, an improved, more efficient administrative arrangement between DPR and the Corps will increase the use of Corps personnel in trails construction, maintenance and rehabilitation within State parks. DPR would have greater assurance that Corps personnel would be adequately trained to undertake trails construction on environmentally sensitive lands within State park units, and DPR could plan for trails projects with greater assurance that Corps services would be available when needed. The draft MOA is attached as Exhibit 1.

This new arrangement should provide a significant incentive for DPR to increase its efforts to plan for the Coastal Trail on its lands, by streamlining the use of cost-efficient construction services. It will also prepare for the future installation of Coastal Trail identification signs along the length of the trail within DPR ownership, approximately 250 linear miles, which will also be within the capacity of the Conservation Corps.

The recommended implementation grant to DPR will provide for materials and staff costs to enable the Conservation Corps to complete Coastal Trail projects within several State Park units, as generally described in Exhibit 2. Along trail alignments that have been selected by State Parks, including some existing “use trails” that would be improved to facilitate increased public use, the Conservancy Corps will undertake grading and

leveling, construction of small bridges, boardwalk and other grade crossings, installation of erosion control measures, and similar basic trail improvements principally requiring careful hand labor. DPR personnel will work with the Corps' staff to assist with training and oversight to assure that the final product meets DPR trail development standards. Over time this process will increase the capacity of Conservation Corps staff to meet DPR needs, and should enable expanded use of the Corps services in more complex projects.

Through the initial grant funding, improvement projects using the Conservation Corps would be carried out at six sites as generally described in Exhibit 2. For each improvement project a budget would be created that reflects individual project costs for work hours, materials and supplies, and other expenses. The total distance of the Coastal Trail to be constructed across the six sites using the initial grant will be approximately seven and one-half miles.

Site Description: The Memorandum of Agreement would cover all of the State Park units within the coastal zone.

Project History: The Coastal Conservancy, in cooperation with DPR, the Coastal Commission and the nonprofit organization Coastwalk, issued the report Completing the California Coastal Trail in January 2003. This describes the extent of need for additional public actions to realize the goal of creating a continuous trail system that would provide public access to and along the State's shoreline. The report indicates that approximately 245 linear miles of the Coastal Trail could be completed through improvements on coastal lands already in public ownership; the majority of those improvements are needed on land within existing units of the State Parks system where trail improvements are currently not adequate. The report proposes a "braided" trail system that would provide for pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian use and would meet the federal Accessibility Guidelines for disabled persons where feasible.

Creation of a continuous Coastal Trail has been a major goal from the outset of the State's Coastal Management Program. Proposition 20 of 1972, the voter initiative that established the original Coastal Zone Conservation Commissions, provided that "a hiking, bicycle and equestrian trails system shall be established along or near the coast". In 2001, Assembly Concurrent Resolution 20 declared the Coastal Trail an official state trail and urged the Coastal Conservancy to work cooperatively with other agencies to complete it. Senate Bill 908 (Chapter 446, Statutes of 2001) added Sections 31408 and 31409 to Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, directing the conservancy to coordinate the planning and development of the Coastal Trail in consultation with DPR, the Conservation Corps and other agencies.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	<u>\$1,000,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$1,000,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is Proposition 12 of 2000, from funds allocated by the bond act and appropriated under the 2004 State Budget Act for implementation of the Coastal Trail.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The Conservancy is directed by Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 31408(a) to coordinate development of the California Coastal Trail in consultation with DPR. PRC Section 31408(b) directs DPR to cooperate with the Conservancy in this effort and to make lands under its control available for construction of the trail. The recommended Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) and grant of funds would help implement those mandates.

The recommended MOA and grant of funds would also be consistent with the authority of the Conservancy under PRC Sections 31400, 31400.1, 31400.2 and 31400.3, which include authority for the Conservancy to implement a system of public accessways to and along the coastline through the provision of development grants to public agencies and such other assistance as may be required.

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

The Strategic Plan describes the Coastal Trail as the Conservancy's "core access strategy". Completion of the California Coastal Trail is Goal 1, Objective A, of the Conservancy's 2003 Strategic Plan, and defining and mapping the trail in cooperation with the Department of Parks and Recreation in that effort is Strategy 1 in achieving those purposes. Objective C of Goal 1 calls for the construction of at least 140 linear miles of the Coastal Trail within public and private ownerships, through strategies including prioritizing routes where trails can be constructed and developing a grant program to construct trail segments. The recommended agreements with State Parks and the Conservation Corps would assist in the process of prioritization and would provide funds for efficient trail construction projects that can be completed within existing public ownerships.

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:** Strong public support has been repeatedly expressed for completion of the California Coastal Trail.

4. **Location:** When completed the California Coastal Trail would extend approximately 1,300 miles, within the coastal zone from Oregon to the international border with Mexico.
5. **Need:** The Conservancy is the only State agency that currently has funding appropriated for development of the Coastal Trail
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The California Coastal Trail, and particularly those components of the trail located within units of the State Parks system, will be designed to serve visitors from throughout the state.

Additional Criteria

11. **Innovation:** The recommended action would result in the first comprehensive agreement for trail development services between DPR and the California Conservation Corps, which should result in both administrative efficiencies and an improved quality of service.
12. **Readiness:** The specific projects to be funded with the recommended grant are expected to be capable of being completed within the next two years.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** Development of a continuous shoreline access trail system has been a principal goal of the Conservancy since the inception of the agency.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The California Coastal Commission participated with the Conservancy and State Parks in the preparation of the report Completing the California Coastal Trail. The Conservancy and DPR will continue to consult with the Coastal Commission staff in the planning and design of specific trail improvement projects to ensure consistency with the policies of the California Coastal Act.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The recommended Memorandum of Agreement is not a “project” subject to analysis pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to Section 15378 of the CEQA Guidelines. The MOA is an administrative and organization action by the subject agencies, potentially including the creation of a governmental funding mechanism, the approval of which does not commit to any specific project and will not result in any physical change in the environment.

The specific projects to be funded with the recommended grant to DPR will require further review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). If a Negative Declaration, Mitigated Negative Declaration or Environmental Impact Report is needed for any of these projects, the Conservancy will be a “responsible agency” under CEQA and Conservancy approval of the CEQA document will be necessary prior to the commencement of construction. The Conservancy has delegated to the Executive Officer the authority to determine if any of the specific projects meets the requirements for

exemption from CEQA review, and in that event the Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the project.