

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
October 27, 2005

GUALALA BLUFFTOP TRAIL, PHASE II AUGMENT

File No. 03-073
Project Manager: Moira McEnespy

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse an additional amount of up to \$105,000 to the Redwood Coast Land Conservancy to construct the second phase of the Gualala Blufftop Trail, authorized on August 14, 2003, for a total amount of up to \$143,500.

LOCATION: West of Highway 1, town of Gualala, Mendocino County (Exhibits 1 and 2)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location Map

Exhibit 2: Project Site Map

Exhibit 3: Staff Recommendation for Project No. 03-073, "Gualala Blufftop Trail, Phase II" (August 14, 2003)

Exhibit 4: 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 additional amount not to exceed one hundred five thousand dollars (\$105,000) to the Redwood Coast Land Conservancy (RCLC) to construct the second phase of the Gualala Blufftop Trail on easements held by the RCLC west of Highway 1 and north of the Gualala River, in the town of Gualala, Mendocino County. These funds shall be used together with funding authorized on August 14, 2003, for a total amount not to exceed one hundred forty-three thousand, five hundred dollars (\$143,500), subject to all of the conditions of the Conservancy's August 14, 2003 authorization for this 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 the proposed Gualala Blufftop Trail project remains consistent with the purposes and criteria set forth in Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, and with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$105,000 to the Redwood Coast Land Conservancy (RCLC) to construct the second phase of the Gualala Blufftop Trail, along the Gualala River estuary in the town of Gualala. See Exhibits 1 and 2.

In October 1994, RCLC accepted three offers to dedicate public access easements, two lateral and one vertical. In its management plan for the easements, RCLC states its intent to develop a trail to give the public access to the scenic beauty of the Gualala River estuary, native flora, bird watching, whale watching, and views of the Pacific Ocean, and to provide a safe alternative for walking between businesses in the commercial district of Gualala.

In August 2003, the Conservancy authorized \$38,500 to assist RCLC in developing Phase II of the trail, which will run 700 feet from the southern end of the Phase I segment to the end of the southern easement, about a half-mile north of the Gualala River Bridge. Similar to the northern segment (Phase I), constructed in 1999, the pedestrian-only trail will be approximately five feet wide, and compacted crushed shale will create an all-weather surface. RCLC will also install fencing, drought-tolerant landscaping, and signs.

To minimize cost, RCLC originally planned and budgeted for much of Phase II of the trail to be constructed by volunteer labor. RCLC has since discovered, however, that certain features—a 45-foot-long bridge over an area where the trail access corridor has severely eroded, and a stairway down a steep section of the corridor, the landing of which will span a concrete drainage swale—are more technically difficult than originally envisioned and thus that construction will require use of professional contractors. RCLC is thus requesting an additional \$105,000 to construct the trail, based on materials and labor estimates from local contractors.

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of these additional funds for the following reasons:

- Although RCLC is a small, all-volunteer organization, it is committed to accepting and opening these OTDs.
- Completion of this project, Phase II, will complete the opening of these OTDs to the public and add a segment to the California Coastal Trail.
- RCLC is rising to the challenge of engineering this trail over an access easement corridor that poses geologic difficulties and constraints. Specifically, the easement corridor contains a steep vertical drop, and a significant stretch that has eroded to such a narrow width that a bridge is required to support a foot-trail.
- In 2004, the underlying fee owner of a portion of the trail corridor challenged RCLC’s right to develop Phase II of the trail, and in February 2005 initiated a lawsuit against RCLC. In July 2005, however, the Mendocino County Superior Court ruled in RCLC’s favor. Hence it is important to begin construction of the trail as soon as possible, given the delays caused by

the litigation and given the lawsuit's favorable outcome. Furthermore, RCLC was forced to expend over \$7,000 of funds it had raised for trail construction to retain an attorney.

- RCLC has, per its management plan, committed to carry out trail maintenance.

Site Description: Please see the "Site Description" section in the Staff Recommendation of August 14, 2003, attached as Exhibit 3.

Project History: Please see the "Project History" section in the Staff Recommendation of August 14, 2003, attached as Exhibit 3. In addition, the Conservancy authorized a grant of \$38,500 in August 2003 to assist the RCLC in developing Phase II of the trail.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy – August 2003 authorization	\$38,500
Coastal Conservancy – this proposed authorization	<u>105,000</u>
Total Coastal Conservancy funds	\$143,500
RCLC in-kind and cash match	<u>28,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$171,500

Conservancy funding is expected to come from the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000 (Proposition 12) funds allocated for the acquisition, enhancement, restoration, protection, and development of coastal resources, beaches, waterfronts, and public accessways north of the Gualala River. The proposed trail project will engineer and construct a coastal trail segment north of the Gualala River, and is thus consistent with the purposes of this funding source. The RCLC will provide a match in the form of volunteer labor and donations of in-kind services and materials.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project remains consistent with Chapter 9 of Public Resources Code Division 21, as further described in the "Consistency with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section of the August 2003 Staff Recommendation attached as Exhibit 3.

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

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives, as further described in the August 2003 Staff Recommendation attached as Exhibit 3.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, as further described in the August 2003 Staff Recommendation attached as Exhibit 3. See also new letters of support contained in Exhibit 4.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project remains consistent with the applicable Local Coastal Program policies, as further described in the August 2003 Staff Recommendation attached as Exhibit 3.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Please see the “Compliance With CEQA” section of the August 2003 Staff Recommendation attached as Exhibit 3.