

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 8, 2005

GUERNEVILLE RIVER PARK ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

File No. 05-016
Project Manager: Richard Retecki

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$200,000 to the Sonoma County Regional Park Department for public access improvements at Guerneville River Park.

LOCATION: Guerneville, Russian River, Sonoma County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location

Exhibit 2: Site Map

Exhibit 3: Letters of Support

Exhibit 4: CEQA Notice of Determination and Mitigated Negative Declaration

Exhibit 5: Board of Supervisors Resolution

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 an amount not to exceed two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) to the County of Sonoma for use by the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department (RPD) in the development of public access improvements described in the accompanying staff recommendation at Guerneville River Park, along the Russian River, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the RPD shall submit for the written approval of the Conservancy’s Executive Officer a budget, work program, the names of any contractors it proposes to hire, evidence that all other funds and necessary permits have been obtained, and, a signing plan for the project that acknowledges Conservancy funding.

GUERNEVILLE RIVER PARK ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

2. The RPD shall carry out all mitigation measures and implement the Mitigation Monitoring Plan as specified in Appendix A to the Negative Declaration attached as Exhibit 4 to the accompanying staff recommendation.”

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 of criteria set forth in Sections 31400 et seq. of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code regarding the development of a system of public accessways to and along the California coast.
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 will serve greater than local public access needs.
4. The Conservancy has independently reviewed the Guerneville River Park Master Plan & Initial Study adopted by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors on October 5, 2004 as the Mitigated Negative Declaration for this project (attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as its Exhibit 4) and finds that, with the mitigation measures described therein, there is no substantial evidence that the proposed project would have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382.
5. There is no evidence before the Conservancy that the proposed project will have a potentially adverse impact on wildlife resources as defined under California Fish and Game Code Section 711.2.
6. The Conservancy has on the basis of substantial evidence rebutted the presumption of adverse effect contained in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 753.5(d) regarding the potential for adverse effect on wildlife resources as defined under California Fish and Game Code Section 711.2.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff is recommending that the Conservancy provide up to \$200,000 to Sonoma County for the development and construction of public access improvements for Guerneville River Park, in Guerneville, Sonoma County. River access improvements will provide new public day use and fishing access to the Russian River (See Exhibit 2), an officially designated water trail providing access to the coast. The total cost of development is estimated to be \$530,000, with Sonoma County contributing \$330,000 for park development.

The land for the park was owned by Cal Trans until ownership was transferred to Sonoma County for park planning and development in September of this year. The park site totals 8.8 acres, of which five will be used for park development. The new park site is located underneath the new Highway 116 bridge, recently constructed to replace the unsafe former bridge. The old bridge has now been repaired and is used for pedestrian and bicycle crossings (See Exhibit 2). Improvements will be constructed to the west of both bridges with vehicle access from Highway 116 near Neely Road.

GUERNEVILLE RIVER PARK ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

Conservancy funds will help the County to construct a 9,000 linear foot nature trail, two group picnic sites, 20 family picnic and recreation sites, a parking lot, and to restore a meadow with native vegetation.

- **Nature Trail:** the Nature Trail will consist of paved paths and compacted gravel paths. Paved paths will connect park facilities and provide access for disabled persons. The compacted gravel paths will also meet ADA standards, connect all parts of the park, and provide river access.
- **Picnic Areas:** the Group Picnic Areas will accommodate gatherings of up to 100 people. The family picnic areas will be much smaller and some of the sites will be paved to accommodate disabled access. All of the picnic areas will have tables, barbeques, trash receptacles, and will meet fire safety standards.
- **Parking Lot:** the parking lot will contain 22 paved vehicle spaces and three disabled spaces. The parking area will be for daytime use only and will be locked at night. Solid wood fencing will be installed to separate the park from the surrounding neighborhood.
- **Meadow Restoration:** an existing meadow and riparian area will be restored with native vegetation after the removal of invasive species. French broom and star thistle removal will take place and native riparian species will be planted.

Sonoma County, the RPD, and the Conservancy have been partners on many successful projects, including efforts to increase public access to points along the Russian River and to the coast. The Regional Park Department is highly qualified to execute this unique river park development. As with other Russian River park development projects, this project is a cooperative funding venture between the Conservancy and Sonoma County.

Site Description: The park site is located in Guerneville, one of the oldest established communities along the Russian River. The community was first recognized as a timber hub in the 1800's and then became a popular recreation destination. The Guerneville area is still very popular for Russian River activities such as: canoeing, fishing, hiking, swimming, and enjoyment of scenic redwood forests. The area is zoned a local redevelopment area in order to focus resources to help revitalize this part of the County.

The proposed park site is located along the south bank of the Russian River, below the State Highway 116 bridges in Guerneville. The site is on a river terrace within the 100-year flood plain. There is a dense stand of riparian vegetation with open grassy areas interspersed throughout the location. The site is mostly level with slopes of greater than five percent to the Russian River. There is a paved path between the pedestrian bridge and Drake Road. Utilities, including a sewer connection, telephone, and electricity as well as a construction access ramp to the river, were installed by Cal Trans for the new bridge construction and will remain in place.

Because the park site 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: The Conservancy provided funds for the preparation of a public access plan for the Russian River in June 1991, at the request of Mendocino and Sonoma Counties. The plan evaluated lands that could be acquired from willing sellers as well as publicly owned parcels

GUERNEVILLE RIVER PARK ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

larger than 1.5 acres for their suitability for public access improvements. The Guerneville Bridge area was part of that evaluation.

This location had the greatest potential for public access in the lower stretch of the Russian River. The popularity of the Guerneville area for river recreation has increased without a commensurate expansion of public facilities to address that need. It became apparent that new river access points would need to be developed to meet the growing demand.

In the early 1990's, the County and Cal Trans decided that a new and safer bridge for vehicles was needed to cross the river on Highway 116. Cal Trans began to plan for and construct the new facility. The new Highway 116 bridge was built in 1996 and is open for vehicular traffic. The old bridge was retained, improvements were made, and it is now serving as a river crossing for pedestrians and bicyclists.

With the completion of the Russian River Public Access Plan in 1996, the Conservancy and its partners began the development and implementation of river access improvements at several sites along the Russian River. Those sites are: Gobbi Street in Ukiah; Cloverdale River Park in Cloverdale; and, Steelhead River Park in Forestville. The Guerneville area, as evaluated in the planning process, demonstrated a high demand for river access improvements, but at the same time, sufficient land was unavailable for the creation of a river park. Now, after many years, the land is available for park development.

It was always Cal Trans' desire to donate the 8.8-acre site to Sonoma County. After years of negotiations and planning, the site was finally transferred in September of 2005. Ownership of the site by the County has allowed for park planning and development to proceed. This grant, along with the County's contribution, will permit the first phase of development for this new river park to move forward.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$200,000
Sonoma County	<u>330,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$530,000

The expected source of Conservancy funds is the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 (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 Park Mitigation Fees, Per Capita Bonds, and Russian River Redevelopment Funds.

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 access 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

GUERNEVILLE RIVER PARK ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

Army Corps of Engineers and is shown as such in the Sonoma County General Plan. In both Sonoma and Mendocino Counties, the river is used by fishermen, kayakers, and canoes, for recreation and access to the coast. The potential exists for the development of public parcels, evaluated in the public access plan, for kayak/canoe launch and landing sites and family recreation areas from Ukiah to the coast at intervals of eight to ten miles, thus implementing the river trail concept. Guerneville River Park is one of the designated locations for a launch and landing site.

Section 31400.1 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to a local public agency to develop lands for public access purposes to and along the coast, if the Conservancy has first determined that the subject accessway will serve more than local needs. For more than 130 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 County and the Conservancy. The need for more developed recreation and access areas was also verified. The development of Guerneville River Park and its ability to provide a variety of river 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 public access improvements for Guerneville River Park will be shared with the County. Sonoma County will draw upon the Aggregate Resources Mitigation Fund, Per Capita Park Bond Fund, and Russian river Redevelopment Funds to fulfill 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.” Consistent with that authority, the Conservancy is also authorized in section 31409 to award grants and provide assistance to public agencies to establish and expand inland trail systems that may be linked to the California Coastal Trail. The Guerneville River Park river access improvements will assist the County to create new public access, restore degraded riparian habitat, 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 public access improvements that will promote regional trails and river parkways connecting inland populations to the coast, and expanding coastal recreation.

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:

GUERNEVILLE RIVER PARK ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

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 3).
4. **Location:** The Russian River watershed is partly inside and partly outside the coastal zone, and is a coastal watershed that offers enormous potential for public access. The Guerneville River Park development will fulfill some of the public access potential of the river and offer a respite for those traveling to the coast. The availability of new recreation facilities will facilitate the use of the Russian River as a river trail that provides access to the coast.
5. **Need:** Without Conservancy assistance, Sonoma county would not be able to develop and construct this project in the foreseeable future. The land transfer from Cal Trans to the County now provides the opportunity for new river park development that will accommodate more river users.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Russian River valley has been a prominent regional recreation area for more than a century. The development of Guerneville River Park will enhance the river users' experience with the provision of safe, well designed, recreation facilities. Such facilities will draw more tourists and recreational users to the river and river valley, and the County in general.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** The Guerneville River Park Project will provide new and increased river access to a river along which 95 percent of the land is in private ownership. Without development of new access sites, a growing local and regional population and a growing number of river users will not have adequate improved recreation sites. Development of new access sites, and related publicity about the sites, should lead to a reduction of squatters and 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:** Sonoma County Regional Parks Department will complete the new access improvements during 2006.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** This project implements a priority public access recommendation of the Conservancy's 1996 Russian River Public Access Plan.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA: Sonoma County as the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act prepared and adopted an Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for Guerneville River Park (Phases I – III) in November 2004 (Exhibit 4). The Negative Declaration identified potentially significant impacts in the areas of air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazardous materials, and noise, and

GUERNEVILLE RIVER PARK ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

recommended 19 mitigation measures that would reduce these impacts to a level of insignificance. These mitigation measures have been incorporated into the project.

Potentially significant impacts with regard to air quality, geology and soils, hazardous materials and cultural resources would be limited to those occurring during construction, and would be mitigated by means of contractual requirements to control dust, limit vehicular and equipment operations to reduce emissions, control erosion during grading and other earthwork activities, the implementation of a spill prevention plan and requirements for the disposal of petroleum-based products, inspections, and maintenance of equipment, and by measures to be taken in the event prehistoric-era archeological or paleontological site indicators or human remains are unearthed during the course of construction. The effects of construction noise on adjacent residential land uses would be mitigated by limiting and controlling noise-generating activities through a variety of measures, including the designation of a “noise disturbance coordinator” responsible for responding to complaints and taking corrective action. Because it is possible that acceptable noise levels could be exceeded at times from parking lots and group picnic activities constructed as part of the project, signage would be installed to encourage visitors to be considerate of neighbors and to prohibit excessively loud or amplified music. In the area of biological resources, potential impacts and mitigation measures included the following:

There is a potential that ground disturbance and construction underneath the Highway 116 bridge could impact special status bat species potentially roosting the weep holes of the bridge. To mitigate this potential impact, emergence surveys are to be conducted prior to construction by a qualified bat biologist; if bats are observed, construction will be delayed until the bats may be safely evicted or work will be constrained under the bridge. The project could also impact riparian forest at the boat portage area and proposed gravel pathways along the river. If these impacts cannot be avoided, Regional Parks will replace the permanent loss of mixed riparian forest habitat on-site at a minimum ration of 3:1. Other trees potentially impacted by the development of parking, restroom and other improvements will be protected by temporary fencing during construction, trimmed in accordance with International Society of Arborists Tree Pruning Guidelines, or replaced if damaged. Trees and other vegetation removed during construction will be replaced on-site as near as possible to the downed location. The proposed project could also result in disturbance of potential raptor and/or passerine nesting habitat. To reduce this potential impact to a level of insignificance, grading in the vicinity or removal of potential nesting trees will be conducted outside the nesting season unless no nesting raptors or passerines are observed during pre-construction surveys; if nesting species are observed, buffer zones will be established to prevent disturbance and take of the young until after the young have fledged.

The County adopted a Mitigation Monitoring Program to ensure compliance with these measures, which is included as Appendix A of Exhibit 4. Upon its independent review of the Mitigated Negative Declaration, staff concurs with the County’s finding and recommends that the Conservancy find that the project does not have a potential for a significant effect on the environment as defined under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382, or on wildlife resources, as defined under Fish and Game Code Section 711.2. Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination for this project.