

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 8, 2005

COASTAL TRAIL PROJECT ASSISTANCE

File No. 00-045
Project Manager: Steve Horn

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse an amount not to exceed \$300,000 to Coastwalk, Inc., to provide GIS mapping of the California Coastal Trail, develop local stewardship for trail maintenance and operation, and provide public information concerning the trail through the Internet and other means.

LOCATION: All Coastal Zone

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: 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 three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) to the nonprofit organization Coastwalk, Inc. to provide assistance to the Conservancy, Coastal Commission, State Parks and other agencies in the planning, design and implementation of the California Coastal Trail (“the trail”), including collection and analysis of geographic data, creation and distribution of public information concerning the trail, and organization of community stewardship efforts for management of portions of the trail.”

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 Coastwalk, Inc. to assist in the development of the California Coastal Trail by Public Resources Code Sections 31400 and 31400.3.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. Coastwalk is a private nonprofit organization existing under the provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, whose principal charitable purposes - the preservation of and promotion of access to public lands and tidelands, and the establishment

of the California Coastal Trail - are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize funding to continue the programs of the nonprofit organization Coastwalk, Inc. in furtherance of the development of the California Coastal Trail. The Conservancy made an initial grant of funds to Coastwalk in 2000 and Coastwalk has been an active partner with the Conservancy, the Coastal Commission, State Parks and other public agencies. Through the initial grant, Coastwalk has been involved both in the concept planning for the Coastal Trail project and in a variety of implementation efforts to design, construct and manage trail improvements and to encourage public involvement in the project.

Under the initial grant of funds, Coastwalk staff and members participated in creating the report Completing the California Coastal Trail, developed a substantial amount of geo-referenced data regarding existing trail alignments and associated access support facilities, created the website californiacoastaltrail.info as the principal public information outlet for trail users, attended numerous local agencies meetings to facilitate development of specific trail projects, helped direct the effort to design a standardized “logo” for the Coastal Trail for use in signing and other public outreach, and organized local volunteer stewardship efforts in most coastal counties. The current recommendation would build on this base of work, emphasizing the public information functions, collection of geographic data, and volunteer stewardship efforts.

Coastwalk is a statewide nonprofit organization with local chapters in most coastal counties. The recommended grant would continue support for a stewardship coordinator, a staff position that organizes the participation of community volunteers in trail planning, development and management. The grant would also continue support for a technical services consultant focused on mapping efforts that use volunteers to develop a database of geographic information (GIS) that can be used by local and state agencies in the planning and design of new segments of the trail. The GIS information is also used in the preparation of maps that are displayed through the Internet to provide a detailed guide for users of the trail, and the recommended grant would support the continued development of this public information resource. All of this work would be substantially assisted by the contributions of Coastwalk volunteers, who have collectively provided several thousand hours of unpaid effort during the course of the initial grant.

This grant would continue a cost-effective public investment. In the course of the work to date, Coastwalk staff and volunteers have developed considerable expertise in conducting the technical aspects of data-collection, mapping and electronic distribution of public information. This work is central to meeting the public goal of completing the Coastal Trail, and would have to be undertaken by consultants and public employees at considerably greater expense if Coastwalk volunteers were not willing to commit their efforts. The Coastwalk programs to develop local stewardship groups who can provide on-going support for trail maintenance and management may also be crucial to enabling public agencies to meet the costs of these recreational facilities.

Site Description: The recommended support for development of the Coastal Trail would be provided at sites located throughout the coastal zone.

Project History: Creation of a continuous California 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) directed the Conservancy to coordinate the planning and development of the Coastal Trail in consultation with the Coastal Commission and State Parks. The nonprofit organization Coastwalk, established in 1983, has been the principal private group supporting development of the California Coastal Trail.

In response to SB908, staff members of the Conservancy, Coastal Commission and State Parks conducted a series of meetings with representatives of Coastwalk and produced the report Completing the California Coastal Trail in January 2003. This report 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, and it indicates that approximately one-half of the total length of the California Coastal Trail, approximately 600 miles, would require planning and acquisition of new right-of-way and/or design and construction of significant trail improvements. 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.

Completing the California Coastal Trail includes a number of recommendations for action. Two issues raised are directly relevant to the recommended grant to Coastwalk. With respect to the public costs of the trail, the report recommends that future costs "should be controlled through a program encouraging local community volunteer participation in trail operation and maintenance efforts" along the lines of the existing Adopt-a-Highway and Adopt-a-Beach programs. With respect to the best means of encouraging public involvement in the Coastal Trail project, the report recommends that the State "should use the Internet as a means of organizing and encouraging volunteer participation efforts in management of the Coastal Trail, and for distributing information to potential trail users." It also notes that "a relatively small State investment in developing the initial format and content of an electronic Coastal Trail information portal would provide the foundation for a long-term program of public involvement that would reduce State costs and maximize benefits of the trail." The current recommendation is in furtherance of these recommendations.

PROJECT FINANCING: Coastal Conservancy \$300,000
Total Project Cost \$300,000

This grant will be provided from non-bond sources, from the Coastal Access Account and the Violation Remediation Account, both appropriated for public access purposes in the fiscal year 2005-2006 State Budget Act. The Coastal Access Account is available only for grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for the development, maintenance and operation of new or existing accessways to the shoreline, and the Violation Remediation Account is available for projects that will support the programs of the California Coastal Act (Public Resources Code Division 20).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed funding authorization is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which provides in Section 31400 that “. . . it is the intent of the Legislature that the State Coastal Conservancy have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state’s coastline. . . .” Public Resources Code Section 31400.1 provides that the Conservancy may award grants to nonprofit organizations to develop, operate or manage lands for public access to and along the coast, and 31400.3 authorizes the Conservancy to provide assistance to nonprofit organizations “in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division.” The activities that would be supported through the recommended grant to Coastwalk are all directly related to the development and operation of the California Coastal Trail, a principal part of the system of public shoreline access. Public Resources Code Section 31408 directs the Conservancy to coordinate the development of the Coastal Trail.

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

The 2003 Strategic Plan describes development of the California Coastal Trail as the Conservancy’s “key coastal access mandate” and “Develop the Coastal Trail” is Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan. Several Objectives of that Goal would be implemented by the recommended grant to Coastwalk, including defining and mapping the trail (Objective A, Strategy 1), describing potential projects within a GIS database (Objective C, Monitoring policy 1), and working with nonprofit organizations to implement the Coastal Trail (Objective D, Strategy 2).

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 will be designed to serve visitors from throughout the state.

Additional Criteria

11. **Innovation:** The recommended action would continue the development of an electronic “user guide” to the Coastal Trail, intended to be accessible from personal wireless devices. The geographic information that would be distributed through the Coastal Trail Internet site should be very valuable to all agencies concerned with planning and design of the trail, and the collection of this data using trained volunteers would result in a dramatically lower cost as compared to paid mapping services.
12. **Readiness:** The subject activities will continue the assistance that has been provided by Coastwalk to the Coastal Trail project for the past four years. The technical framework is already in place for the cooperative mapping effort between the Conservancy, Coastwalk and the Coastal Commission.
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.
15. **Cooperation:** This would be an entirely collaborative public-private effort.

CONSISTENCY WITH COASTAL ACT POLICIES:

Policies encouraging the development of public access facilities, including the Coastal Trail, are among the most prominent features of the State’s Coastal Management Program. The California Coastal Act indicates in Public Resources Code 30001.5(c) that the “basic goals of the state for the coastal zone” include the need to “maximize public access to and along the coast ...” Public Resources Code Section 30120 requires that “... maximum access, which shall be conspicuously posted, and recreational opportunities shall be provided for all the people ...” Public Resources Code Section 30530 expresses the intent of the Legislature that a program to maximize public access to and along the coastline be prepared and implemented “consistent with the provisions of Chapter 9 of Division 21” including the mandates for Conservancy action to create the Coastal Trail.

Similarly, the Coastal Act includes several references to the need to increase public knowledge of access opportunities and to involve community organizations in such efforts. Public Resources Code Section 30214(c) directs the Coastal Commission and other public agencies to “... encourage the utilization of innovative access management techniques including, but not limited to, agreements with private organizations which would minimize management costs and encourage the use of volunteer programs.” Public Resources Code Section 30012 includes the Legislative finding that “an educated and informed citizenry ... is necessary to protect California’s natural resources [and] ... through education, individuals can be made aware of and encouraged to accept their share of responsibility for protecting and improving the natural environment.” These purposes would be promoted through a continuation of the Coastwalk programs of public information outreach and volunteer stewardship for the Coastal Trail that would be supported by the recommended grant.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA: The actions that would be conducted under the recommended grant would be limited to compilation of geographic data, preparation of maps, distribution of information to agencies and the general public, and the organization of community groups to assist in stewardship (management) of portions of the Coastal Trail. None of these activities would have the potential to result in a physical change in the environment. The recommended action does not constitute a “project” subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as defined in Section 15378 of Title 14, California Code of Regulations.