

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

January 18, 2007

**SAN DIEGO COUNTY BEACH ACCESS PROGRAM**

File No. 06-083

Project Manager: Prentiss F. Williams

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse an amount not to exceed three hundred thirteen thousand dollars to Accessible San Diego to provide equipment and management services to facilitate beach access for persons with disabilities at three public beaches in San Diego County.

**LOCATION:** Silver Strand State Beach, Coronado City Beach, and Oceanside City Beach, San Diego County (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: Photos of Project Sites

Exhibit 3: Photos of Power Beach Chairs in use

Exhibit 4: Letters of Support

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**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 the disbursement of an amount not to exceed three hundred thirteen hundred thousand dollars (\$313,000) to Accessible San Diego to provide equipment and management services to facilitate beach access for persons with disabilities on three public beaches in San Diego County, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the Executive Officer of the Conservancy shall approve in writing a work plan, budget and project schedule, and any contractors and subcontractors to be employed in the project.
  2. The grantee shall provide a signing plan for the project, to include appropriate acknowledgement of the Conservancy.”
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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 objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Guidelines and Selection Criteria adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. Accessible San Diego is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code, whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The project consists of a grant to the non-profit organization Accessible San Diego (ASD) to implement and manage a program that will provide beach access to persons with disabilities at three public beaches in San Diego County. ASD will work with the cities of Coronado and Oceanside and with the State Department of Recreation (DPR) to provide equipment and support services at Coronado City Beach, Oceanside City Beach, and Silver Strand State Beach (Exhibits 1 & 2).

ASD was instrumental in the design and development of the first motorized beach wheelchair ever used on a public beach in California and has been operating beach accessibility programs for the last five years in the cities of San Diego and Imperial Beach. Using the proposed grant from the Coastal Conservancy, ASD would work with three other jurisdictions to establish accessibility programs at an additional three public beaches. Should these programs prove successful and feasible, ASD would seek to establish similar programs at beaches throughout San Diego County and beyond.

The Beach Access Program is designed to expand beach accessibility to persons with varying degrees of mobility impairment. A major component of the program would be the provision of “power beach chairs” in each location. Power beach chairs are specially designed motorized wheelchairs with balloon tires which enable users to safely traverse the sandy beach independently (Exhibit 3). ASD would procure and provide three such chairs at each location and assist local city and state beach staff to make them available free of charge to persons with impaired mobility.

ASD began the first Beach Access Program jointly with the City of San Diego at Mission Beach. The City recently expanded its power beach chair program to two other city beaches using a Coastal Conservancy grant. These programs are extremely popular because the motorized wheelchairs enable independent movement that is not possible with non-motorized beach wheelchairs, which must be pushed by another person.

In addition to providing and maintaining the power beach chairs, ASD would work closely with city or DPR staff in each location to provide the following additional services to establish a Beach Access Program:

- Review conditions at each of the three locations to assess the adequacy of parking, paths of travel, public restrooms, and directional signage for persons with disabilities, and make recommendations for improvements
- Procure and maintain for the first year of the program's operation nine motorized beach chairs (three at each of the three beaches) as well as manual push beach chairs (which can be used in the water)
- Provide training for staff at each of the three locations to maintain equipment and operate the program
- Conduct a marketing campaign to publicize and promote the program to local residents and visitors through the internet, publications and events
- Conduct research to identify accessible beach equipment providers and work with local vendors to design build improved accessible beach equipment, including ramps and power beach chairs.

After the first year of operation, it is expected that City staff and DPR staff will assume full responsibility for operating the Beach Access Program in each location with occasional input and assistance from Accessible San Diego.

**Site Description:** Coronado, Oceanside and Silver Strand are all flat sandy beaches located in urban areas developed with visitor serving facilities such as parking lots, rest rooms and lifeguard stations, and are suitable for use by persons with disabilities.

**Project History:** In 2000, the Coastal Conservancy provided funds to the Cities of San Diego and Imperial Beach to establish power beach chair programs. At that time all other beach wheelchairs needed a second person to push them through the sand. The introduction of the motorized beach chairs provided a great improvement by allowing freedom of movement on the beach to all persons with impaired mobility. ASD initiated the program in the City of San Diego at Mission Beach and worked with the City of San Diego to obtain the funding from the Coastal Conservancy. ASD employees have also operated the Mission Beach program since it began until 2005 when the program became a part of City Park and Recreation. In 2005, the Coastal Conservancy made another grant to the City of San Diego to expand its power beach chairs program to another three city beaches.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	\$313,000
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$313,000</b>

Funds would be provided from the Coastal Access Account and the Violation Remediation Account, both appropriated to the Coastal Conservancy for public access purposes in fiscal years 2005/06 and 2006/07. Pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 30620(c)(2), the Coastal Access Account may be used for grants to nonprofit organizations for the development, maintenance and operation of new or existing facilities that provide public access to the shoreline. 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 project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31405), which establishes the Conservancy's role in implementing a system of public accessways to and along the State's coastline. Through the proposed authorization, the Conservancy would play a role in providing an important public coastal access opportunity for persons with disabilities.

Consistent with Section 31400, the proposed project would provide funding to ASD to effectively guarantee the right of members of the public, including those with impaired mobility, to access and enjoy coastal resources.

Consistent with Section 31400.1, the proposed project would serve a need greater than the immediate local area. The beaches of San Diego County serve the residents from throughout the region, both coastal and inland areas, as well as visitors from throughout the State. Millions of people visit the ocean beaches of San Diego each year. Statistics compiled by Accessible San Diego indicate that the Mission Beach power beach chair program served close to 300 unduplicated clients in 2003 and over 200 in 2004, more than half of whom were from outside San Diego County. (ASD attributes the reduction in the number of clients served in 2004 to the fact that the chairs were under repair and out of service for more days in 2004 than in 2003.) Thus, the proposed accessibility improvements will benefit visitors from well beyond the local area.

Consistent with Section 31400.2, the amount of funding proposed has been reviewed in light of the total amount of funding available for coastal public accessway projects, the fiscal resources of the grantee, and the relative urgency of the project. Consistent with Section 31400.3, the project would aid in the establishment of a system of public coastal access by removing barriers to certain segments of the public.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective B** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project would increase public access opportunities for persons with physical disabilities by providing additional means of access to and along the ocean shoreline within the County of San Diego.

**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:** The proposed project has the support of the Cities of Coronado and Oceanside, the County of San Diego and DPR (see Exhibit 4).
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of San Diego County.
5. **Need:** ASD would use the funds to set up the Beach Access Program and train staff at each of the three beaches to operate the program and maintain equipment. The local governments and DPR, for which these services would be provided, are using available staff and funds to maintain and operate existing facilities and programs and have very limited resources left to initiate new programs and train staff. It is unlikely that these Beach Access Programs would be established in these three locations without the assistance of ASD and the Conservancy funds. In addition, ASD has experience in working with the disabled community and particular expertise in selecting the equipment needed to provide beach access to this group.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** As discussed in the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above, the proposed project would serve the needs of people from throughout the region and the state.

**Additional Criteria**

11. **Innovation:** The power beach chair programs currently underway in the cities of San Diego and Imperial Beach are the only two such programs operating in the United States. Expanding this program to additional beaches in San Diego County would help to increase public awareness of the program and demonstrate its feasibility to other public agencies statewide.
12. **Readiness:** ASD has established relationships with beach staff in the cities of Coronado and Oceanside and with DPR and is in a position to initiate the Beach Access Program at all three beaches upon the Conservancy's authorization of grant funds.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See "Project History" above.
15. **Cooperation:** ASD will work closely with the cities of Coronado and Oceanside and with staff at Silver Strand State Beach to implement the Beach Access Program.

**CONSISTENCY WITH THE COASTAL CONSERVANCY'S STANDARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCESSWAY LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT:**

Standard No. 3 states in part, that "Wheelchair access should be provided wherever possible." Consistent with this standard, the proposed project would increase accessibility to the sandy beach by people with physical disabilities.

Conservancy funding of the proposed project is also consistent with Standard No. 13, which states that "Accessways that accommodate or plan to accommodate those with mobility problems are the highest priority for State funding."

**CONSISTENCY WITH COASTAL ACT/LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The project is consistent with policies contained in the Local Coastal Programs and Land Use Plans of the Cities of Oceanside and Coronado.

The City of Oceanside Local Coastal Program (LCP), amended and certified by the California Coastal Commission in 1992, includes the following objectives regarding Coastal Access and Recreation:

- I.C. Adequate access to and along the coast shall be provided and maintained
- II.C. The City shall provide and maintain a wide range of public recreation areas, beach support facilities, and visitor-serving facilities, commensurate with need.

The City of Coronado LCP and Land Use Plan (LRP), certified by the Coastal Commission in 1983, includes the following policies regarding Shoreline Access:

- A.1. Preserve existing shoreline access over public lands.
- A.2. Where appropriate, provide and encourage additional shoreline access over public lands.

Silver Strand State Beach is located in an area of unincorporated San Diego County for which there is no certified LCP or LUP. However, the project is consistent with policies of the Coastal Act, specifically Public Resources Code Section 30210, which provides that "maximum access" shall be provided for all of the people of California. As described above, the project is also consistent with the Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development, which were adopted jointly by the Coastal Commission and the Coastal Conservancy.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed project is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it would involve the placement of minor temporary structures (beach-accessible wheelchairs, and possibly wheelchair ramps) on existing public beaches (14 California Code of Regulation, Section 15311).

The proposed project is also categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15301, the operation and maintenance of existing facilities involving only negligible expansion of use.

The site assessments and recommendations would be exempt under CEQA pursuant to 14 CCR Section 15262 (feasibility and planning for future actions not yet adopted, approved or funded) and 15306 (information collection).

Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.