

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

January 18, 2006

MILLIKEN WATERSHED RIDGE TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY

File No. 06-100

Project Manager: Betsy Wilson

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$60,000 to the County of Napa to prepare a feasibility study for the development of a 3.2-mile segment of the San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail, a connector trail, and a staging area on the City of Napa's Milliken Watershed lands located in Napa County.

LOCATION: Milliken Watershed area, Napa County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: Potential Trail Alignments Map

Exhibit 3: Milliken Watershed Photographs

Exhibit 4: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31164 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed sixty thousand dollars (\$60,000) to the County of Napa to prepare a feasibility study for the development of a 3.2-mile segment of the San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail, a connector trail, and a staging area on the City of Napa's Milliken Watershed lands located in Napa County, subject to the condition that no Conservancy funds shall be disbursed until the Executive Officer of the Conservancy has approved in writing a final work plan, including a budget and schedule, and any contractors proposed to be used.”

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 criteria set forth in Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the California Public Code (Sections 31160-31164) regarding the Conservancy's mandate to address the resource and recreation goals of the San Francisco Bay area.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001."
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

This authorization would provide up to \$60,000 to the County of Napa ("County") to prepare a feasibility study for the development of a 3.2-mile segment of the San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail, a connector trail, and a staging area on the City of Napa's Milliken Watershed lands located in Napa County. Products of the study will include a trail alignment, a draft operations and management plan, and cost estimates for construction and management. The project will also include outreach to neighboring property owners and community leaders along adjacent and nearby segments of the proposed alignment of the Ridge Trail.

The City of Napa ("City") is the owner of 2,198 acres in the vicinity of the Milliken Reservoir. These City-owned Milliken Watershed lands were utilized for environmental education and outdoor recreation prior to 1978 through a cooperative agreement with the Napa Valley Unified School District. Unfortunately, the funding crisis created by the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 eliminated this agreement, and the watershed has since been closed to the public. The City has agreed to cooperate with the County in studying the types of public recreation which would be appropriate in this watershed, taking into consideration the City's water supply operational and management responsibilities.

The proposed study is very timely given Napa County voters approved the formation of the Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District ("District") in November 2006. Based on research conducted by the Napa County Parks and Open Space Advisory Committee, the first focus of the District will be to partner with other public agencies in providing new recreational opportunities on existing public lands. If authorized, this grant will enable to District to hit the ground running, exploring the feasibility for construction and operation of what could become the first public trail managed by the District and the longest segment of Bay Area Ridge Trail in Napa County. Even though the County is the applicant for the grant, and the District will be a distinct legal entity, there will be no break in continuity because the County will provide the staffing and financial support for the District for at least a few years after its formation.

The focus of the proposed study will be on the construction and operation of approximately 3.2 miles of Ridge Trail traversing the Milliken Watershed along the north-south tending ridge generally running along the eastern boundary of the City-owned lands. However, to ensure the trail is useful, both as a local trail and until such time as extensions can be constructed to the north and south of the public lands as part of the regional Ridge Trail, the study will also consider several options for connector trails to link the Ridge Trail segment to a usable loop trail system, staging area, and to a public road (Exhibit 2).

The City's Milliken Watershed lands provide the largest block of publicly-owned open space along the proposed Ridge Trail route in Napa County, thus making this property a primary anchor site. Making progress on the Ridge Trail in this location is the lynchpin to moving

forward with other significant trail segments both to the north and to the south on a combination of public and private lands. In addition, the Milliken Reservoir property is just a 15-minute drive from the City of Napa downtown area, thus offering the best opportunity for near-to-home outdoor recreation of any existing undeveloped public open space in Napa County.

Site Description: The City of Napa is the owner of 2,198 acres in the vicinity of Milliken Reservoir, located approximately five miles northeast of the City of Napa in unincorporated Napa County (Exhibit 1). The City's Milliken Watershed lands are an intact ecosystem, encompassing nearly the entire middle reach of the roughly 6,000 acres covered by the entire Milliken Watershed. The rugged terrain, rock outcrops and diversity of oak woodlands, grasslands, conifer forest, riparian zones and chaparral combine to make a complete viewshed of great natural beauty. The Milliken Watershed area has been nicknamed Napa County's Little Yosemite. Photographs of the City's Milliken Watershed lands are included as Exhibit 3.

Project History: The Conservancy is a major partner in helping to implement the Bay Area Ridge Trail. Since 2001, the Conservancy has approved approximately \$3.5 million dollars in grants for planning and project implementation, helping complete more than 60 miles of new trail. While 36 miles of the proposed Ridge Trail alignment is in Napa County, only 6.1 miles have been completed to date. Napa County currently has the least amount of Ridge Trail mileage of any county in the region.

In October 2006, the County of Napa applied for this planning grant to prepare a feasibility study for 3.2 miles of Ridge Trail in the Milliken Watershed area as well as connector trails and a staging area on the City's Milliken Watershed lands. Ridge Trail Council and Conservancy staff strongly endorsed funding this project as it would provide a good anchor for the Ridge Trail corridor through the eastern side of Napa Valley and provide momentum for encouraging public and private landowners to the north and south to join in the partnership.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$ 60,000
Napa County (In-kind)	37,000
Chandler and Chandler Landscape Architects (In-kind)	<u>5,400</u>
Total Project Cost	\$102,400

The expected source of the proposed grant is a FY 04/05 appropriation made to the Conservancy pursuant to the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 40), which allocates bond funds to the Conservancy to protect and restore land and water resources in accordance with the Conservancy's enabling legislation (Public Resources Code Section 5091.650(b)(8)). The proposed project will accomplish these purposes by planning for the development of land-based public access for recreational purposes.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program enabling legislation codified at Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources

Code (Sections 31160 to 31164). That chapter directs the Conservancy to address the resource and recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay Area in a “coordinated, comprehensive, and effective way.”

Pursuant to Section 31162, the Conservancy may award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area that help to achieve various goals, including the goal of increasing public access “to and around the bay, coast, ridgetops, and urban open space, consistent with the rights of private property owners, and without having a significant adverse impact on agricultural operations and environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife, including wetlands and other wildlife habitats through completion and operation of regional bay, coast, and ridge trail systems, and local trails connecting to population centers and public facilities, which are part of a regional trail system and regionally adopted master plans and general plans, and through the provision and preservation of related facilities, such as interpretive centers, picnic areas, staging areas, and campgrounds.” The proposed project plans for completion of approximately 3.2 miles of the Ridge Trail through the City of Napa’s Milliken Watershed lands in Napa County.

Section 31163(a) directs the Conservancy to cooperate with nonprofit land trusts and other organizations in identifying and adopting long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay area. Completion of the Ridge Trail is one of the goals identified in the Bay Area Open Space Council’s “Regional Needs Briefing Book.”

The proposed project satisfies the criteria for determining project priorities under Section 31163(c) in the following respects: 1) a regional trail through the Milliken Watershed land is included in the County’s General Plan Open Space Element, 1976 Park and Recreation Plan, and the draft Recreation and Open Space Element currently being prepared during the General Plan update process; 2) the Ridge Trail is a multi-jurisdictional resource that serves a regional constituency ; 3) the Milliken Watershed trail planning project can be implemented in a timely way; 4) the planning of the Ridge Trail through the City of Napa’s Milliken Watershed lands provides an opportunity to build momentum for public access projects following recent voter approval of the Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District; and 5) the project includes significant in-kind matching contributions from the County of Napa.

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

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective B** of the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan, this project will complete planning work to open approximately 3.2 miles of the Bay Area Ridge Trail to the public. The project will also plan for a staging area and community connector trails on publicly-owned land that is not currently accessible to the public.

**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 project has a great deal of local support for the project from trail users and members of the local community including the City of Napa, Assemblyperson Noreen Evans, Napa-Solano Audubon Society, Boy Scouts of America Napa Valley District, Sierra Club - Napa County Group, Berryessa Trails and Conservation, and the Carolyn Parr Nature Museum. Letters of support are attached as Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is in Napa County, within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
5. **Need:** Without Conservancy participation, this project will not occur in a timely manner.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Ridge Trail is truly a regional attraction. The 500-mile trail network offers spectacular views of the Bay Area and links many parklands and open space preserves. In addition, the Ridge Trail will be tied to the San Francisco Bay Trail and the California Coastal Trail systems, creating an extensive trail network. Completion of the Ridge Trail is one of the goals identified in the Bay Area Open Space Council's "Regional Needs Briefing Book."

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** The proposed study is very timely given Napa County voters approved the formation of the Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District in November 2006. Based on research conducted by the Napa County Parks and Open Space Advisory Committee, the first focus of the District will be to partner with other public agencies in providing new recreational opportunities on existing public lands.

The City of Napa's Milliken Watershed lands provide the largest block of publicly-owned open space along the proposed Ridge Trail route in Napa County. Making progress on the Ridge Trail in this location is the lynchpin to moving forward with other significant trail segments both to the north and to the south on a combination of public and private lands.

8. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
9. **Innovation:** A key feature of the feasibility study will be to investigate the feasibility of providing on-site supervision and maintenance through the modification of the volunteer camp host concept which is successfully used at many public campgrounds. Successful development of a volunteer host program for trails would overcome one of the biggest

hurdles to development of public access trails in areas where there is insufficient funding for additional publicly-employed rangers.

10. **Readiness:** If approved, Napa County staff is ready to start work immediately. A consultant will be hired to complete the biological inventory in the spring season and the feasibility study will be completed in approximately nine months.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The Conservancy is committed to helping with the completion of the Bay Area Ridge Trail and to provide support to Bay Area counties that have proportionately less open space, which is the case with Napa County.
12. **Cooperation:** The San Francisco Bay Area Program of the State Coastal Conservancy has been working cooperatively with the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council to administer a competitive grant program to identify projects that help implement the Ridge Trail. The best proposals from that grant program are recommended for funding by the Conservancy.

In addition, the project involves a partnership between the City of Napa, the County of Napa, and the recently voter-approved Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District. Under the proposed partnership, the City provides the land, the County provides the staffing, and the District provides ongoing operation and management.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

This project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262 because it involves only feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions and will not have a legally binding effect on later activities. As also required, the project will involve full consideration of environmental factors. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.