

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

May 24, 2007

FITZGERALD MARINE RESERVE COASTAL TRAIL AND BEACH ACCESS PROJECT

File No. 07-020-01

Project Manager: Janet Diehl

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorize disbursement of up to \$90,000 to the County of San Mateo to prepare plans and construction documents necessary to build a segment of the Coastal Trail and a ramp to provide access to Moss Beach at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in San Mateo County.

LOCATION: James V. Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, Moss Beach, San Mateo County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Photos of Project Site](#)

Exhibit 3: [Letters of Support](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 3100 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed ninety thousand dollars (\$90,000) to the County of San Mateo for the development of plans for construction of a segment of the California Coastal Trail and a ramp to Moss Beach at James V. Fitzgerald Reserve in the town of Moss Beach, San Mateo County, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the County shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, budget,

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chedule for the completion of the project and the names and qualifications of any contractors or subcontractors to be employed to carry out the work program.

2. The County shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's 'Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development' into any design criteria included in the plan."

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 authority of the Conservancy under Public Resources Code Sections 31111 and 31400 *et seq.* regarding public access to the 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 would serve more than local public needs."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The proposed project includes the design of two trails at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve: 1) a quarter-mile section of the California Coastal Trail running the length of the Reserve, and 2) a new ramp to improve visitor access to the Moss Beach Reef, where the Coastal Trail meets the visitor center. Matching funds will support design and construction of the section of the Coastal Trail that crosses over San Vicente Creek, as well as a new stairway to Seal Cove Beach at the southern end of the Reserve. Together, the three projects will greatly improve public access through the entire Reserve.

The 1,500-foot-long multi-use Coastal Trail through the Reserve will accommodate pedestrians, people walking leashed dogs, bicyclists and equestrians (Exhibit 2, site photos). The proposed alignment will avoid conflicts between the protection of sensitive resources and the need for public recreation on the bluff, reef and beach areas. It will bypass a pre-historic midden and foundations of an old estate. Hikers will be able to connect to the rest of the Reserve's pedestrian-only trails to form a loop, taking in views of the ocean from the bluff top. Due to the natural sloughing of the bluff top, the trail will be aligned away from the edge.

Near the northern end of the new Coastal Trail, the Moss Beach Reef ramp will replace a crumbling road, makeshift stairs and stepping stones that currently get people from the visitor center to the beach and the famous reef (Exhibit 2). The ramp will be about 350 feet long and 15 feet wide.

This is a challenging location for public access, with the creek and the ocean waves constantly eroding any structures in their path, and the fragile nature of the tidepools and other resources dictating that recreational structures be designed to be as unobtrusive as possible. During the proposed planning process, the County will solicit the best design solution for this delicate area.

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Another challenge the site faces is the sheer volume of visitors to this fascinating but fragile area. More than 125,000 people come each year to view the intertidal life, including about 23,000 students from more than 100 schools. These attendance numbers pose both opportunities and challenges for the Reserve – opportunities for increased recreation and marine education, but also serious challenges in managing the environmental impact of visitors. The proposed Coastal Trail and Moss Beach Ramp projects are first steps in addressing these challenges.

The planning process will be managed by a multidisciplinary consulting team in four phases: site analysis, preliminary design, public review, and final design/cost estimates/permits. Plans should be completed within a year. Conservancy funds will be matched by \$125,000 from the California Department of Parks and Recreation and \$31,250 from the Command Oil Spill Restoration Fund (see “Project Financing” section, below).

Site Description:

The James V. Fitzgerald Marine Reserve is a 402-acre natural resources area on the northern coast of San Mateo County. The Reserve includes 370 acres of intertidal and subtidal marine habitat and 32 acres of upland habitat bluffs, with elevations up to 100 feet. The northern uplands area of the Reserve is distinguished by a 90-year old grove of Monterey Cypress originally planted as a windbreak. To the north and south of this grove, the Reserve is a broad band of shoreline with intermittent beaches and coastal bluffs. A small visitor center/office and a parking area are located on North Lake Street within the Moss Beach neighborhood, adjacent to the Moss Beach Reef.

The Reserve is about 15 miles south of San Francisco via Highway 1, and seven miles north of Half Moon Bay. From Point Montara, the Reserve’s boundaries extend three miles south to the southern end of Pillar Point, and 1,000 feet west into the ocean from the mean high tide line. On the eastern side of the reserve is the town of Moss Beach.

Established in 1969, when the State of California designated this area as a Marine Life Reserve to protect marine plant and animal species, the Reserve is now both a “State Marine Park” and an “Area of Special Biological Significance.” The property is under joint custodianship of the County of San Mateo and California Department of Fish and Game, with the County managing the land above the high tide line and DFG managing the reef property below mean high tide.

The Reserve is one of the richest intertidal areas on the California coast. Extensive shale reefs are home for a wide variety of marine life, such as giant green anemones, limpets, purple sea urchins, crabs and snails. 439 species of marine plants and animals have been found in the Reserve, including several endemic species and 25 marine invertebrate and plant species first discovered at the Reserve.

Project History:

The County has been working to acquire and improve park property upland from the reefs since

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the state legislature established the Reserve 38 years ago as a 1,000-foot wide area extending from the base of the bluffs between Montara Lighthouse and Pillar Point. In recent years, the County has focused its planning efforts on a new education center at the Reserve and better access to the beaches, the reef, and Pillar Point Marsh. Parks Department staff completed the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve Master Plan in 2002, and has sought funds since then to design and implement the projects included in the plan.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy*	\$90,000
CA Dept. of Parks and Recreation**	125,000
Command Oil Spill***	<u>31,250</u>
Total Project Cost	\$246,250

*The expected source of Conservancy funds for the proposed project is the FY 2004/05 budget appropriation from the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Fund (Proposition 40). This funding source may be used for the development of land and water resources in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. (Public Resources Code Section 5096.650(b)). The proposed project will assist in the development of land-based public access to and along the coast. Proposition 40 also requires the Conservancy to give priority to grant projects with matching funds (Public Resources Code Section 5096.651), and this project is supported by matching funds.

** Through the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the County has obtained \$500,000 of Proposition 40 per capita grant funds for the proposed project. A quarter of these funds -- \$125,000 -- is available for planning, including plans for the San Vicente Creek Bridge and the Moss Beach Access Ramp. The remaining \$375,000 will be used to construct the bridge and restore creek habitat adjacent to the new bridge.

*** The County has procured \$125,000 from the T/V Command Oil Spill Restoration Fund, which will go toward the Seal Cove Stair Access Project, which connects to the proposed Coastal Trail at its southwestern end. About a quarter of these funds have gone toward planning these stairs; the plans should be completed by June.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Section 31111 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies and non-profit organizations to undertake plans and feasibility studies in implementing Division 21.

Section 31400 states that the Conservancy shall have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline, and Section 31408 directs the Conservancy to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail. Funding the proposed Coastal Trail project would be consistent with these sections.

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Section 31400.3 states that the Conservancy may assist public agencies in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The proposed project will further these goals by enabling the County to develop a link of the Coastal Trail through a much-visited park. Consistent with Section 31400.1, the proposed grant to the County of San Mateo will serve more than local public needs.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

As a condition of approval, the project will be designed to be consistent with Conservancy's Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development as follows:

Standard No. 1 Protect Public and Coastal Resources

The project will be designed to minimize alteration of natural landforms by utilizing existing abandoned roads. It will be subordinate to the setting's character.

Standard No. 2 Correct Hazards

The project will be designed and located to minimize unwarranted hazards to public safety, and will serve to reduce hazards associated with visitors walking on the site's eroding blufftop and creek banks.

Standard No. 8 Trails

The paths will include appropriate paving materials, adequate trail drainage system, trash receptacles, benches, barriers, and signs.

Standard No. 9 Scenic Overlooks

The project includes a scenic overlook to provide the public with panoramic views of the coast and will be accessible to those with physical disabilities.

Standard No. 12 Support Facilities

The Coastal Trail and Moss Beach Ramp will include support facilities such as directional and resource interpretation signs.

Standard No. 13 Barrier-Free Access

The Coastal Trail and Moss Beach Ramp will be wheelchair-accessible.

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

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Consistent with **Goal 1 Objective C** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project would provide plans and designs necessary to construct a quarter-mile of the Coastal Trail at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve.

**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 State Senator Leland Yee and Assemblyman Gene Mullin and is supported by local and regional organizations including the Friends of Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and the San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Foundation.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located entirely within the coastal zone in the town of Moss Beach.
5. **Need:** More than 125,000 visitors come to the Reserve each year to view the intertidal life, including about 23,000 students from more than 100 schools. These attendance numbers pose both opportunities and challenges for the Reserve – opportunities for increased marine education but also serious challenges in managing the environmental impact of visitors. The proposed project will help the County to provide safe, accessible routes to bring visitors through the Reserve and down to the tidepools within the Reserve without posing threats to the natural resources.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** As discussed in greater detail in the "Site Description" section above, the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve is a natural resource of statewide importance.

Additional Criteria

9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
12. **Readiness:** As discussed above, the County has attracted matching funds and will be able to start the planning process immediately, if awarded Conservancy funds.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** Promoting and developing the Coastal Trail has been a Conservancy goal since 2001, when the legislature directed the Conservancy to determine what was needed to complete the Trail.
15. **Cooperation:** The proposed planning project will involve the cooperation of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, the California Department of Fish and Game, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, and the County, as well as the participation of local residents and community groups.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is consistent with the San Mateo County Local Coastal Program (LCP), which contains several policies that support the development of public access improvements specifically at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. The Shoreline Access Component of the LCP identifies “Site-Specific Recommendations for Shoreline Destinations” in Table 10.6 as follows:

“Fitzgerald Marine Reserve: Develop access along the bluffs and to the beaches of the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in stages as public funding is available to adequately improve and manage the access and protect the resources. The access should be oriented to education and nature viewing and interpretation. . . .

Bluff Area North, Lake Street to Cypress Avenue: Consolidate trails into several established trails along the bluff connecting with viewpoints an eventual continuous trail along the bluff above the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. . . .”

The proposed project will develop access along the bluffs and to the beaches, as directed above, and will consolidate trails along the bluff between Lake Street and Cypress Avenue.

The proposed project also would implement several policies contained in the “Recreation/Visitor Serving Facilities Component” of the LCP. Policy 11.13a calls for the establishment of a Coastal Trail system to link existing and proposed recreation facilities along the coast. Consistent with this section, the proposed project would serve to improve linkages between the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and Pillar Point Marsh. Finally, consistent with Policy 11.24.a(4), the project would serve to expand the recreational use of an existing publicly owned recreation area.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262 because the project involves only feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions which have yet to be approved or adopted. As required by this Section, environmental factors will be considered in the planning and design of the Coastal Trail. This project does not include the funding of any construction activities. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the action.