

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 24, 2007

MOAT CREEK TO ARENA COVE TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY

File No. 07-029-01
Project Manager: Deborah Hirst

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$30,000 to the Moat Creek Managing Agency to prepare a feasibility study for coastal trail access on property between Moat Creek and Arena Cove in Mendocino County.

LOCATION: Point Arena Area, Mendocino County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS:

- Exhibit 1: [Location Map: Mendocino Coast](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Moat Creek Access Trail, Beach and Restroom](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Map of Proposed Trail and Offers to Dedicate](#)
- Exhibit 4: [Photographs of Moat Creek, Arena Cove, and Point Arena](#)
- Exhibit 5: [Letters of Support](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 through 31409 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000) to the Moat Creek Managing Agency to prepare a feasibility study for coastal trail access on property between Moat Creek and Arena Cove, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the Moat Creek Managing Agency shall submit for the

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written approval of the Conservancy's Executive Officer a work program, including schedule and budget, and the names of any contractors it intends to retain for the project.

2. To the extent appropriate, the Moat Creek Managing Agency shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's 'Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development' into the public access feasibility study."

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, 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 Moat Creek Managing Agency is a private nonprofit organization, existing under the provisions of Section 501 (c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service Code, whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000) to the Moat Creek Managing Agency (MCMA) to prepare a feasibility study for coastal trail access on property between Moat Creek and Arena Cove, in Mendocino County (Exhibit 1). The feasibility study will include outreach to potential partners and landowners for potential acquisition of trail easements and future implementation of a section of the California Coastal Trail on the properties west of Highway One.

The proposed project is consistent with the recommendations of the Completing the California Coastal Trail report (Conservancy 2003), which identifies this portion of the Mendocino Coast as requiring improvement to reach the goal of connecting the entire coast of California for public access from Mexico to the border of Oregon. The report also specifically recommends improving the Highway One corridor for non-motorized travel. The focus of the proposed project will be on the mechanics of developing three and a half miles of California Coastal Trail away from the noise and risk of highway traffic and along a marine terrace with dramatic views up and down the coastline (Exhibits 2 and 3). The proposed trail would connect the existing beach access and trail at Moat Creek and Ross Creek with two existing access easements held by MCMA following its acceptance of two Offers to Dedicate in December of 2005. Continuing north along the bluff, the proposed trail would make an accessway to the scenic harbor at Arena Cove and link inland with the tourist destination of small town Point Arena (Exhibit 4).

In addition, the project will enable MCMA to begin building relationships with Coastwalk, the Mendocino Land Trust and other area partners interested in future trail links with the nearby Stornetta Ranch Property (purchased with support from the Conservancy in 2003), the Point

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Arena Lighthouse and Manchester State Beach.

The feasibility study will incorporate the following:

- 1) workshops to survey community residents, area stakeholders and potential future trail partners for input on the proposed trail development;
- 2) collection and assessment of data necessary for trail design and placement (including social, environmental, geologic, biotic, historic and other resources);
- 3) research on ownership along the proposed trail route, outreach to property owners for potential donation or sale of easements, and surveys of property boundaries with willing owners as necessary;
- 4) preparation of a trail management plan including operation and maintenance requirements;
- 5) a plan for a system of interpretive signs or self-guiding program materials identifying areas of natural and historic significance along the trail.

MCMA will produce a final report for the feasibility study with recommendations for implementation of the Coastal Trail between Moat Creek and Arena Cove including a proposed trail route, a trail management plan and plans for interpretive materials.

Established in 1979, MCMA is a volunteer-run 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization whose primary purposes include restoring and preserving the Moat Creek watershed and promoting and managing public accessways to coastal areas. MCMA has successfully implemented projects with previous grants from the Conservancy for public access.

Site Description:

The existing Moat Creek and Ross Creek public access site consists of approximately 3 acres of coastal property located two and half miles south of the town of Point Arena in Mendocino County. The property is owned in fee by the Conservancy and offers visitors a trail to the popular surfing and abalone beach at Moat Creek, a handicap accessible single unit restroom, a 15-space gravel parking lot and a scenic half-mile loop trail along the coastal bluff between Moat and Ross Creeks.

The coast north of Moat Creek up through Arena Cove is the subject of the proposed study area and is held by private property owners, except that two parcels have existing easements held by MCMA through acceptance of Offers to Dedicate on those parcels. The coastline in the study area is characterized by high bluffs and coastal terrace with sweeping vistas (Exhibits 2 and 4). The Point Arena area has a number of visitor drawing features in addition to the historic town including the Point Arena Lighthouse, the Stornetta Ranch property purchased in part with Conservancy funds, and Manchester State Beach. The area will become an excellent section of the California Coastal Trail as future links, such as the proposed Moat Creek to Arena Cove Trail project, are completed.

Project History:

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The Conservancy acquired the Moat Creek and Ross Creek property in the late 1970s as part of a lot consolidation project involving the purchase of 65 substandard, subdivided lots in the area known as Whiskey Shoals. The Conservancy bought and subsequently resold lots for private development of no more than 13 homes at the Whiskey Shoals site. Through this process, the Conservancy retained several conservation and trail easements in addition to the fee ownership of the Moat Creek beach access area and several lots with significant visual and archeological resources.

In 1989, the Conservancy provided a grant of \$48,500 to the MCMA, with Surfrider Foundation as a fiscal sponsor, to develop, manage and maintain public access at Moat Creek. MCMA became an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 1993, with a purpose of restoring and preserving the Moat Creek watershed as a model for scientific and educational studies of similar watersheds and to promote and manage public accessways to the coastal areas and other sites.

In 1993, MCMA conducted field studies in Moat Creek with a \$5,000 grant from the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District to assess the property's native flora and fauna. MCMA began planning and construction of a half-mile loop trail along the coastal bluff between Ross Creek and Moat Creek with a grant from the Conservancy in 1998. The project was augmented in 2001 to complete the construction of a single unit bathroom adjacent to the existing 15-space gravel parking lot and the Moat Creek beach access trail. The project was successfully completed in 2002 and the Moat Creek to Ross Creek bluff top trail is now a part of the California Coastal Trail.

The proposed project will enable MCMA to prepare a feasibility study for coastal trail access, including outreach to the community, potential partners and property owners, for potential implementation of a three and a half mile addition of Coastal Trail from Moat Creek north to Arena Cove and the town of Point Arena.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$30,000
Moat Creek Managing Agency (in-kind)	<u>\$ 3,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$33,000

Conservancy funds for this project are expected to derive from the Conservancy's FY05/06 appropriation from Proposition 12 (the "Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000") for public access projects north of the Gualala River. Proposition 12 authorizes the Conservancy's use of bond funds for the acquisition of real property interests in coastal areas and for the development of public use facilities in accordance with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Public Resources Code Section 5096.352). The proposed project will provide planning leading to public access and a link of the Coastal Trail and, as discussed below, is consistent with Division 21.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

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The Moat Creek to Arena Cove trail feasibility study will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 (Section 31400 et seq.) of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the implementation of a system of public access ways to and along the state's coastline.

Pursuant to Section 31400.1, the Conservancy is authorized to award grants to a nonprofit organization to acquire, develop and manage lands for public access to and along the coast. The feasibility project is the first necessary step in acquiring and developing easements on property between Moat Creek and Arena Cove for public access.

Under Section 31400.3, the Conservancy may provide such assistance as is required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public access ways, and related functions necessary to meet coastal access objectives. The proposed project will meet these goals by providing the nonprofit MCMA with funding to complete feasibility planning for future public access over the coastal bluffs from Moat Creek to Arena Cove safely off of Highway 1.

Pursuant to Section 31401, the Conservancy has developed "Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development". In order to ensure that the proposed access study is consistent with these standards, as a condition of the grant, MCMA will be required to incorporate the Conservancy guidelines into the design planning process, as appropriate

Section 31408 directs the Conservancy, in consultation with the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the California Coastal Commission, to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail. The proposed project will meet this goal by providing MCMA with funding to complete a feasibility study for developing a section of the California Coastal Trail from Moat Creek to Arena Cove.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES:

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective C** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project will fund plans for new trails within public and private ownership.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project will provide for acquisition planning and support development of a project to open for public access an area currently inaccessible to the public.

Consistent with **Goal 4, Objective A** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan the proposed project will enable outreach for potential access trail easements over significant coastal resource properties with scenic vistas and open space values.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and

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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:** Coastwalk, a nonprofit volunteer based organization supporting completion of the California Coastal Trail, has been involved with discussions on this coastal area and is enthusiastic about the potential for this trail link. Local legislators and representatives from the town of Point Arena have also expressed support for the project (For letters of support, see Exhibit 5).
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the Coastal Zone from Moat Creek north to the town of Point Arena at Arena Cove in the Mendocino Coastal watershed.
5. **Need:** Conservancy funding is necessary to provide initial planning work for the proposed public access project and the project could not go forward without this support.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed project will provide planning leading to public access from the cove beach of Moat Creek up to the Arena Cove. The town of Point Arena, Arena Cove harbor and nearby Point Arena Lighthouse attract travelers from the San Francisco Bay Area as well as national and international tourists seeking the best of coastal Northern California.

Additional Criteria

7. **Leverage:** Moat Creek Managing Agency will provide a 10% match of Conservancy funds through volunteer hours contributed to the project.
8. **Readiness:** Moat Creek Managing Agency is prepared to move forward immediately with the outreach and planning for the potential trail between Moat Creek and Arena Cove.
9. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is consistent with the County of Mendocino’s County General Plan Coastal Element (Certified by the Coastal Commission November 20, 1985). The Coastal Element’s Land Use Plan includes policies concerning public access and a system of trails/bikeways for the County.

The project will enable MCMA to seek trail easements between Arena Cove and Moat Creek consistent with Coastal Element Section 3.6-5, “Acquisition methods such as bequests, gifts, and outright purchases are preferred by the County when obtaining public access from private

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landowners. Other suitable voluntary methods such as a non-profit land trust may be helpful and should be explored in the future.”

Consistent with Section 3.5-6, “Shoreline access points shall be at frequent rather than infrequent intervals for the convenience of both residents and visitors and to minimize the impacts on marine resources at any one point”, the project will seek to link two offers to dedicate and bluff top trail to provide multiple access points along the coast.

The proposed project will provide planning for a link in the Coastal Trail and is consistent with Section 3.6-21, which provides: “The County of Mendocino coastal trail shall be integrated with the coastal trails in the cities of Fort Bragg and Point Arena, and with Humboldt County to the north and Sonoma County to the south so as to provide a continuously identifiable trail along the Mendocino County coast.”

The Mendocino plan recognizes the coast from Point Arena to Iverson Road (including the area of Moat Creek) west of Highway 1 as a ‘highly scenic area’ in which development shall be subordinate to the character of the setting. In addition, Section 4.11-14 identifies Point Arena to Whiskey Shoals as having potential for development of a bluff and shoreline trail.

The proposed project will plan for the acquisition of access easements and implementation of additional miles of Coastal Trail for public access consistent with the policies of the County of Mendocino’s Local Coastal Program.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The Moat Creek to Arena Cove Trail Feasibility Study project involves only planning studies for actions the Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted or funded, and is therefore statutorily exempt from CEQA review pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262. As required by Section 15262, the feasibility study will include consideration of environmental factors related to potential public access.

Upon Conservancy approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.