

## COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

November 8, 2007

### **HUMBOLDT BOTANICAL GARDENS PUBLIC ACCESS - AUGMENTATION**

File No. 02-007-02

Project Manager: Su Corbaley

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to augment the Conservancy's August 8, 2002 authorization by disbursing up to \$40,000 in additional funds to the Humboldt Botanical Gardens Foundation to complete the access improvements within the Natural Riparian Area of the Humboldt Botanical Gardens.

**LOCATION:** The garden is located four miles south of Eureka on the east side of Highway 101 adjacent to the College of the Redwoods campus in Humboldt County (Exhibit 1).

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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#### **EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Gardens Plan/Map](#)

Exhibit 3: [August 8, 2002 Staff Recommendation](#)

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#### **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 additional funds in an amount not to exceed forty thousand dollars (\$40,000) to augment the August 8, 2002 authorization to the Humboldt Botanical Gardens Foundation to complete the access improvements within the Natural Riparian Area of the Humboldt Botanical Gardens. Prior to the disbursement of any additional Conservancy funds, the Humboldt Botanical Gardens Foundation shall submit for review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a revised work plan, budget and schedule including the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed to carry out the work 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 the proposed project remains consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400 *et seq.*) regarding

access to the coast, and with the current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy. Except for the new activities described in the accompanying staff recommendation, the project remains consistent with the findings and discussion in the August 8, 2002 authorization and staff recommendation.”

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The proposed authorization to augment the current grant would allow the Humboldt Botanical Gardens Foundation (HBGF) to complete the construction of access pathways and viewpoints with the addition of two features to the Natural Riparian Area project. The added features include a bridge over a chronic sinkhole in the main pathway/roadway at the edge of the Natural Riparian Area and a pedestrian way-point and overlook over the creek that runs through the Natural Riparian area (see Exhibit 2).

In August 2002, the Conservancy authorized a grant of \$100,000 to the HBGF to restore a degraded coastal riparian wetland and install accessible public pathways and viewpoints at the Humboldt Botanical Gardens site, owned by the College of the Redwoods, which has agreed to public use of the property. Work commenced on the project in early 2005, following the Coastal Commission’s December 2004 approval of an amendment to Humboldt County’s Local Coastal Plan to allow for development of foot trails within streamside management areas. Restoration work in the riparian corridor has been carried out and the HBGF has nearly completed the construction and installation of the major access features of the Natural Riparian Area funded under the Conservancy’s 2002 authorization. The access features that would be funded under this proposed project were identified in HBGF’s original project concept and design that was approved and permitted by the County of Humboldt, but were not a part of the Conservancy’s original authorization as it was anticipated that other funds would be sufficient. However, design changes resulted in a budget shortfall.

The proposed project would result in the installation of a Junction Bridge that would link the Moss Family Temperate Woodland Garden trails to the Natural Riparian Area trails, and resolve anticipated long-term chronic maintenance problems by replacing a culvert and bridging the pathway over a sinkhole on the upper NRA. The natural sinkhole is a result of stream flow change as a result of the 1992 earthquake creating a new stream channel where a ‘new stream’ now flows, but leaving the old stream bed to be reclaimed by rains/overland stream flow during the rainy season. Originally, HBGF installed a culvert (with matching funds/volunteer labor) and compacted the soils, hoping to contain the flow under the footpath. However, the ‘old stream’ regains its flow in the rainy season and the culvert has been undermined. Engineers estimate this will be an annual chronic problem unless the culvert is removed and replaced by a bridge.

The second element of the proposed project is the construction of a concrete “Main Corridor Viewing Anex” that would connect the lower Americans with Disabilities Act walkway(s), leading from the main entry of the Botanical Gardens site, with the NRA and create a pause/transition point upon entering the NRA. Currently the transition point is too narrow to accommodate several people and provide adequate turnaround / pullout space for people with limited mobility; the Main Corridor Viewing Anex will be wide enough and large enough to accommodate both. The primary view would be upstream into the NRA riparian canopy as one

enters the NRA, and in the downstream direction as the stream flows away from the NRA before it crosses the Gardens site and the College of the Redwoods before it joins Humboldt Bay. Currently this location has no formal nexus with the rest of the Gardens footprint and the platform would be the gateway into the NRA. The concept is that the main corridor from the Gardens entrance would widen at this point to accommodate a shuttle stop and provide pedestrian pullouts and railings. This location would serve as the first shuttle stop in the Gardens and the last ADA location in the western gardens. The additional ADA locations in/around the NRA are accessed by motorized cart. For those reasons, it is anticipated that this location would be heavily used.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

<i>This authorization</i>	
Coastal Conservancy	\$40,000
 <i>Previous authorization</i>	
Coastal Conservancy	\$100,000
<u>Humboldt Botanical Gardens Foundation</u>	<u>95,000*</u>
 Total	 \$235,000

The Conservancy’s contribution to this project is expected to come from the FY 2005 appropriation from the Safe Neighborhoods, Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Fund (Proposition 12) allocated for projects north of the Gualala River. Consistent with Proposition 12 requirements, the project will incorporate required signage.

\* The Humboldt Botanical Gardens Foundation committed to \$66,650 in matching contributions to the initial Conservancy grant of \$100,000. As of March 2007, the HBGF has contributed nearly \$95,000 in in-kind volunteer hours and / or donated heavy equipment and materials toward the project.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective 2C**, the proposed project will result in the opening of a coastal area that is currently inaccessible or closed while minimizing impacts to sensitive natural resources.

**Consistency With Conservancy Standards And Recommendations For Accessway Location And Development**

The Conservancy-adopted "Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development" is relevant to the proposed project. The proposed project is consistent with several of the applicable standards, including Standard 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, and 13.

Consistent with Standard No. 1, the trail will be located to safely accommodate public use and protect against misuse of coastal resources. The trail meanders adjacent to a riparian corridor;

the bridge and the stream viewing platform are being installed in order to carry pedestrian over a coastal stream and protect the natural resources.

Consistent with Standard No. 2, the trail will follow the natural and gentle slopes of the hillside, thereby reducing fall hazards.

Consistent with Standard No. 3, the trail will be constructed no wider than necessary to accommodate public access, including ample room for those with limited mobility to maneuver safely.

Consistent with Standard No. 5, while the trail will cross the stream within the Natural Riparian Area, the bridge and viewing platform will completely traverse the stream to avoid contact.

Consistent with Standard No. 9, the trail system of the Natural Riparian Area carries the visitor up the hillside to established overlooks to provide an expansive view of the southern extent of southern Humboldt Bay.

Consistent with Standard No. 13, the trail system of the Natural Riparian Area was designed to accommodate individuals with limited mobility and will be wheelchair-accessible.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION; PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES; THE COASTAL ACT; LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES; AND COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The change in the project proposed by this authorization does not alter the nature of the project and does not affect the conclusions reached in the August 8, 2002 staff recommendation (Exhibit 3) regarding its compliance with the California Environmental Protection Act ("CEQA"). The project remains consistent with the Conservancy's selection criteria and guidelines, updated in September 2007. There are no new effects on the environment, and the surrounding circumstances have not changed.

Humboldt County, as the lead agency for the HBGF project under the California Environmental Quality Act, prepared a CEQA Initial Study and proposed Negative Declaration. The State Clearinghouse circulated the document for a 30-day public comment on May 1, 2002. The state received no comments during the comment period that ended on May 31, 2002. On July 18, 2002, the Humboldt County Planning Department adopted the negative declaration and the garden master plan.

The initial study identified some potential environmental impacts, all considered to be of less than significant impact, and consisting of dust and noise from the initial site grading, and potential sedimentation impact to surface drainage water bodies. It was determined that, based on the short duration of the activities, and the ultimate re-vegetation of the property, the impacts were not expected to be cumulative nor significant. Mitigation measures that are consistent with generally acceptable construction practices were proposed to control the impacts of these activities. Conservancy staff reviewed the Initial Study, Negative Declaration and at its August 8, 2002 meeting, staff recommended that the Conservancy, as a responsible agency under CEQA, concur that there is no substantial evidence that the project would have a significant effect on the environment.

The Conservancy concurred with the County of Humboldt's determination, and staff filed a Notice of Determination upon approval of the project.