

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

January 17, 2007

**AVILA BEACH MARINE RESEARCH  
AND EDUCATION CENTER DISPLAYS**

File No. 05-003-02

Project Manager: Timothy Duff

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorize disbursement of up to \$100,000 to the Port San Luis Marine Institute to augment a previous Conservancy grant to fabricate and install additional marine education displays in the Avila Beach Marine Research and Education Center, San Luis Obispo County.

**LOCATION:** Avila Beach waterfront, northern end of San Luis Bay near Point San Luis, San Luis Obispo County (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Project Location](#)

Exhibit 2: [Photos of Center and Displays](#)

Exhibit 3: [March 10, 2005 Staff Recommendation](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

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

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an additional amount not to exceed one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to the Port San Luis Marine Institute (the “Institute”) to fabricate and install marine education displays in its education center in Avila Beach, subject to the following conditions:

Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the Association shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

1. A revised work program, including project schedule and budget, and the names of any contractors and/or subcontractors to be employed on the project.

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2. Evidence that all permits and approvals necessary to implement the project have been obtained.
3. A signing plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy funding for the project.”

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 authorization and findings made in the Conservancy’s March 10, 2005 authorization (File No. 05-033), attached as Exhibit 3 to the accompanying staff recommendation.”

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

In March 2005, the Conservancy approved a \$120,000 grant to the Port San Luis Marine Institute (Institute) to fabricate and install marine education displays in its new Avila Beach Marine Research and Education Center which opened to the public in the fall of 2006 (Exhibit 2). The proposed additional funds will enable the Institute to install additional marine education displays, including shark and bat ray tanks, to bolster the Center's growing stature as a first-class community-based marine science research and education facility.

In addition to visitor use of the Center's interpretive displays, aquariums, and public meeting facilities, the Center intends to provide laboratory space for research while educating both local and out of area students about the value of protecting marine resources. The research and laboratory facilities will also be made available to students and faculty from Cal Poly State University, local community colleges, high schools and grade schools (e.g. Cuesta College, Calpoly High School). Government agencies, including the California Department of Fish and Game and the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board are also expected to utilize the center’s facilities in the future, along with community and nonprofit groups such as Central Coast Salmon Enhancement.

The Institute continues to demonstrate the capacity required to raise and manage the funds needed to construct and operate the new visitor center (See Project Financing Section below). Since 1998, the Institute has offered interactive learning programs in the fields of marine biology and oceanography to school groups throughout San Luis Obispo and northern Santa Barbara Counties, and has developed strong relationships with local officials, nonprofits, school districts and businesses throughout the region that have become actively involved in supporting the Institute’s ongoing marine education programs (Exhibit 4).

**Site Description:** The Center is located on a 3,000 square foot site situated within a 40,000 square foot community park developed on the Avila Beach waterfront that features parking, playgrounds, landscaped grounds, and a variety of public access amenities including picnic tables, benches, and bathrooms. The site has direct access to the beach and the immediate ocean area, and is within walking distance to the San Luis

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Obispo Creek estuary, Avila Beach Pier and the town's adjacent commercial district.

**Project History:** The town of Avila Beach was dramatically impacted by Unocal Oil Company's operations as a result of oil leaking into the town's soil and groundwater that forced closure of its beaches, the evacuation of many of its residents, and an abrupt halt to nearly all of its tourism and real estate market activities between 1998 and 2002. When Unocal's clean up efforts were completed in 2003, the beach was re-opened to the public and a variety of redevelopment projects have since served to restore the area's attraction as a popular tourist destination, as well as a pleasant place to live and work. Today, the Avila Beach Marine Research and Education Center represents a continuation of this revitalization effort. Situated within a large community park completed in 2003 on the Avila Beach waterfront, the Center is another key component in a redevelopment plan aimed at encouraging the return of visitors to this once-popular beach community.

In March of 2000, the Conservancy authorized \$55,000 to the Institute for the preparation of final construction drawings and bid specifications and for processing of permits to construct the new center. By the summer of 2004, the Institute had completed the planning and design phase, and obtained all the required construction permits. In March 2005, the Conservancy authorized \$120,000 to the Institute for the fabrication and installation of the Center's marine education displays, and in the fall of 2006 the new center was open to the public and school groups (Exhibit 2).

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

2000-2005:

Coastal Conservancy	\$175,000
California Department of Fish and Game	555,000
Institute (in-kind and cash contribution)	<u>380,000</u>

2008-2009

Coastal Conservancy	\$100,000
State Department of Fish and Game	11,000 (pending)
Institute (in-kind and cash contribution)	340,000
PG&E	<u>80,000</u> (pending)

**Total Project Cost** **\$1,641,000**

The expected source of Conservancy funds for this augmentation is the FY 05/06 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 50). Proposition 50 authorizes the use of funds for development of facilities to promote public access to and participation in the conservation of land, water, and wildlife resources (Water Code, Section 79571(b)), and requires that ten percent of the amount appropriated to the Coastal Conservancy be directed to facilities such as research and/or nature centers. Eligible projects under §

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79571 include both research facilities for watershed protection and conservation and nature centers that are in or adjacent to watersheds and wetlands and provide wildlife viewing, outdoor experiences, and conservation education programs. Funding priority is to be given to nature center projects operated by nonprofit organizations that provide educational opportunities to children from urban areas that lack access to such opportunities.

Consistent with these requirements, the Avila Beach Marine Research and Education Center will provide facilities for research and education, focusing on marine habitat, water quality, and related issues on the central coast. It will provide educational opportunities for the public and students from inland urban areas that lack access to such opportunities (e.g. Paso Robles), and for Cal Poly State University, local community colleges, high schools and grade schools.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The project remains consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation as described in the March 10, 2005 Staff Recommendation, attached as Exhibit 3.

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

Consistent with **Goal 3 Objective C**, the proposed project entails the installation of interpretive or educational displays, including shark and bat ray tanks, emphasizing coastal, watershed, ocean resource education, maritime history, and climate change impacts.

Consistent with **Goal 3 Objective D**, the project will serve to increase education of the public about environmental issues affecting the coast and inland watersheds.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES AND LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The project remains consistent with the Conservancy's findings as described in the March 10, 2005 Staff Recommendation (File No. 05-033), attached as Exhibit 3.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The project remains exempt as described in the March 10, 2005 Staff Recommendation, attached as Exhibit 3.