

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 25, 2008

**HUMBOLDT COUNTY COASTAL TRAIL
IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM – PHASE I**

File No. 08-092-01
Project Manager: Liza Riddle

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$900,000 to the Redwood Community Action Agency to complete the Humboldt County Coastal Trail Implementation Program – Phase I.

LOCATION: Primarily west of Highway 101, Humboldt County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Conceptual Humboldt Coastal Trail](#)

Exhibit 3: [Photos](#)

Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)

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 disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$900,000 (nine hundred thousand dollars) to the Redwood Community Action Agency to complete the Humboldt County Coastal Trail Implementation Program – Phase I. Prior to disbursement of any funds, the Executive Officer shall approve in writing a work plan, budget and schedule, and any contractors to be retained for project work.”

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 Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines last updated by the Conservancy on September 20, 2007.

2. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and criteria set forth in Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access to the coast.
 3. The Redwood Community Action Agency is a private nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

The proposed authorization would enable the Redwood Community Action Agency (“the RCAA”) to complete Phase I of the Humboldt County Coastal Trail Implementation Program, furthering the State of California’s goal to establish a continuous trail stretching the full length of coastal Humboldt County. The RCAA will assess the currently proposed alignment of the California Coastal Trail (“the CCT”) in Humboldt County; prioritize potential projects to close existing gaps, most of which have been identified in previous studies; provide technical assistance; coordinate multi-jurisdictional efforts; and prepare acquisition plans (if needed) and final construction designs and environmental documentation for the most critical, “ready to implement” trail linkages.

The proposed Humboldt County Coastal Trail Implementation Program would advance the State of California’s long-held goal of establishing a continuous Coastal Trail within Humboldt County. The Conservancy’s report, *Completing the California Coastal Trail* (2003), prepared at the behest of Senate Bill 908, identified a 154 mile route for the trail in Humboldt County. The proposed trail would cross spectacular but rugged terrain including miles of sandy beaches bracketed by rocky cliffs and promontories, pass through majestic redwood forests and verdant agricultural lands, and provide access to bays and lagoons teeming with wildlife. Once completed, the CCT in Humboldt County would offer unparalleled public access opportunities, link rural communities via multiple use trails, serve as a magnet for visitors from around the world, and provide a catalyst for economic growth in this economically distressed region.

The *Completing the California Coastal Trail* report noted that approximately 90 linear trail miles currently exist and are “adequate” for trail users, although much of the identified trail route is informal or only generally described, and includes stretches of sandy beach not accessible to handicapped users or complementary modes of non-motorized transportation, such as bicycles. Improving the remaining 64 linear miles will be a formidable task. The report proposes routing approximately 50 linear miles across privately held lands which will require either acquisition or legally binding agreements with private landowners. Caltrans and the North Coast Railroad Authority will need to be closely involved in the design and location of the trail as several trail segments would be located in rights-of-way or closely parallel to State Highway 101 and, where highway and roads span the Eel and Mattole Rivers, improvements to highway bridges would be required. A number of segments of trail would need to be constructed on lands held by public entities, including California Department of Parks and Recreation, the County of Humboldt, Cities of Arcata and Eureka, and possibly the North Coast Railroad Authority.

The RCAA, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Humboldt County, is ideally suited to spearhead this ambitious program. Since 1982, the Natural Resources Division of RCAA has planned, designed and constructed public access trails and resource enhancement projects, developed interpretive and educational programs, and completed region-wide conservation and access studies. The RCAA is highly respected in Humboldt County and has worked extensively with Humboldt County, local jurisdictions, state and federal entities, the North Coast Railroad Authority, and local stakeholders.

The proposed Humboldt County Coastal Trail Implementation Program – Phase I would be a two year effort and would include the following components:

Humboldt County Coastal Trail Master Plan. Under this first of two principal project components, RCAA will assess the trail alignment mapped in the Conservancy’s *Completing the California Coastal Trail* report and described in other relevant studies, and recommend priority segments for acquisition (as needed) and development within a five-year timeframe. To initiate this component, RCAA will invite key trail planning and management stakeholders to a workshop to identify research needs, critical issues and partnerships necessary to make completion of the CCT a success. Based on this workshop, the RCAA will establish a Regional Coastal Trail Technical Advisory Team and work closely with that team to identify those priority segments ready for planning and construction design based on current opportunities and constraints. For trail segments identified as “second priority,” RCAA will clarify remaining impediments and recommend actions for their resolution.

Coastal Trail Segment Priority I Implementation Plans. Under this second principal project component, RCAA will coordinate with the appropriate lead agency to develop plans, designs and environmental documentation for constructing trail, trailheads, road and highway interfaces. Priority I implementation plans will also address access to and from local communities, any necessary amenities, appropriate signage plans, and acquisition plans, as needed. Prior to initiating work under this component, RCAA will notify nearby landowners for any trail segments falling between the ocean and the nearest public road. RCAA will accomplish this component in close coordination with the Regional Coastal Trail Technical Advisory Team, and all other relevant agency and public stakeholders.

Engineering Plans, Environmental Documentation, Construction and Acquisition - Funding Opportunities. In order to ensure on-the-ground implementation of the CCT program, RCAA will identify appropriate funding opportunities to complete the Humboldt County CCT. RCAA will assist in the preparation of grant applications to fund final engineering plans, environmental documentation, trail construction, property acquisition, and trail management and maintenance activities for Priority I Coastal Trail segment.

Coastal Trail System Technical Assistance. To ensure efficient implementation of the CCT, the RCAA will offer technical assistance to agencies and organizations whose support and involvement will be critical to completion of the Humboldt County CCT.

Humboldt County CCT Staffing. Many of the remaining CCT segments are located on unincorporated county lands. The County has made great efforts to acquire properties and construct CCT segments, but needs additional staff dedicated to this effort. Under the proposed program, the RCAA will enter into a contract with the Humboldt County Public Works Department, which will enable the County to provide staff to work in tandem with the RCAA on the CCT implementation program. The County enthusiastically supports this proposal and will contribute additional staff time and in-kind services towards this effort, valued at approximately \$85,000.

Site Description: The program area will consist of the entire coastal zone of Humboldt County and includes five distinct planning areas. The southernmost area includes California’s “Lost Coast,” rugged mountainous country dominated by the Bureau of Land Management’s 60,000 acre King Range National Conservation Area. Here the primary challenge will be connecting this wilderness area with large privately held ranchlands along the coastline to the north, and from the coastal trail corridor to the inland communities of Ferndale, Fortuna and Loleta. Further north, at the Eel River Valley, the CCT will need to swing far inland to skirt the river estuary and mouth and, again, the likely route must cross lands in private ownership. The third major segment is the Arcata-Eureka corridor, skirting the Humboldt Bay shoreline. This proposed segment of the CCT will serve many residents and visitors and has been the primary focus of previous efforts to resolve highway and railroad corridor planning considerations. North of the community of McKinleyville, the recently completed Hammond Coastal Trail needs to be connected through residential developments to lands in public and private non-profit ownership. Finally, the most northern section of the Humboldt County coastal trail corridor presents opportunities to connect the CCT through state and national parks into Del Norte County.

Project History:

Never has the need for and likely success of establishing the California Coastal Trail in Humboldt County been greater. Although there is no regional government entity that has the resources and capacity to lead the multi-jurisdictional planning required to complete the CCT, RCAA, local jurisdictions and other stakeholders have completed numerous studies and on-the-ground projects, proving there is strong community interest in making the trail a reality.

Notable among the completed studies is the work of the multi-jurisdictional Eureka-to-Arcata Trail Planning Team, which has been working for two years to identify a feasible trail corridor, documented in the *Humboldt Bay Trail Feasibility Study: Eureka-Arcata*. The Humboldt County Association of Governments recently completed two relevant studies: the *Bicycle Transportation Plan (2004)* and a *Pedestrian Plan (2008)*. The recently formed *Humboldt People Powered Pathways*, a coalition of governments, tribes and community organizations, is led by the RCAA, Humboldt County Public Works Department and City of Arcata Environmental Services Division. This coalition is actively pursuing federal highway transportation funds for non-motorized transportation infrastructure and improvements, such as trails and bikeways. Caltrans District 1 is actively working to improve the Pacific Coast Bike Route along Highway 101 and is pursuing funds for inland trail master planning efforts.

The RCAA has completed numerous projects identified as priority needs in the Conservancy’s *Completing the California Coastal Trail* report. Among many successful projects RCAA has completed using Conservancy funding, the most pertinent to the proposed project include:

- Hammond Coastal Trail (segments constructed in 2000 and 2007)
- Humboldt Bay Water Trails (implementation currently underway)
- *Linking Land and Sea: A Northern California Coastal Needs Assessment* (2006)
- *Hammond Trail South Phase I Interim Report: Mad River to Arcata* (2005)
- *Annie and Marie Rail- Trail Feasibility Study* (2003)
- *Humboldt Bay Trails Feasibility Study* (2003)

The RCAA was also instrumental in planning for the City of Arcata’s proposed *Rail with Trail Connectivity* project, which will provide an important CCT linkage within and between Arcata and Humboldt Bay, and is the subject of another staff recommendation (September, 2008).

Public support for trail development is at an all-time high; trail issues in the Humboldt Bay area were ranked the second-most important story of 2007 by the North Coast Journal. Finally, there is strong political support for the California Coastal Trail in Humboldt County, as evidenced by the numerous letters of support for the proposed program (see Exhibit 4).

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$ 900,000
Matching contributions:	
County of Humboldt	85,000
Total Project Cost	\$985,000

The anticipated funding source for this authorization would be from Proposition 40, the “California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Fund of 2002.” The project is consistent with this funding source in that it would be carried out consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, specifically with regard to public access and the development of land and water resources along the coast.

Matching funds and in-kind services provided by the County of Humboldt will be used to support County staff involved in trail planning, LCP amendments (as needed), implementation plans, and funding applications. Staff from the Cities of Eureka and Arcata and from many other agencies and local entities will also be available to this project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 (Sections 31400 *et seq.*) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Section 31400 states the Legislature’s intent that the Conservancy has the principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to

and along the state's coastline. The goal of the proposed program is to connect existing portions of the California Coastal Trail, ultimately resulting in 154 miles of continuous California Coastal Trail in Humboldt County. The proposed funding authorization is thus consistent with §31400.

Section 31400.3 allows the Conservancy to aid nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways. RCAA, which will carry out the proposed project, is a private nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, having among its principal charitable purposes the conservation of land for scientific, educational, scenic, or open space opportunities. The proposed funding authorization thus meets the requirement of §31400.3 to aid nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and is consistent with this section.

The proposed project is also consistent with §31408(a), which directs the Conservancy to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail, and §31409, which authorizes the Conservancy to award grants and provide assistance to establish and expand inland trail systems that may be linked to the California Coastal Trail.

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

Development of the California Coastal Trail is a key coastal access mandate for the Conservancy, as identified in the Strategic Plan. Consistent with **Goal 1**, the proposed project would develop the California Coastal Trail in Humboldt County as a major new recreational amenity, tourist attraction, and alternative transportation system, and would result in the development of a network of inland trails that connect to the coast and parks and provide other recreational opportunities.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective A**, the proposed project will support efforts to obtain a consensus and refine the alignment of the Coastal Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective B**, Coastal Trail signs would be planned for existing trails within public and private ownerships.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective C**, the proposed project will include the design of new trails within public and private ownerships.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective D**, the proposed project will identify opportunities to construct new trails within public and private ownerships.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective E and F**, the proposed project will design regional trails and river parkways along rivers and creeks to connect inland populations to the coast and expand recreational opportunities.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective G**, the proposed project will assist to secure real property or property interests to facilitate the development of the Coastal Trail.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on September 20, 2007, 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:** This project has broad public support and is endorsed by Senator Patricia Wiggins, Assemblywoman Patty Berg, Department of Parks and Recreation, Bureau of Land Management, the County of Humboldt, Cities of Arcata and Eureka, Coastwalk, the Redwood Region Economic Development Commission, Trails Trust of Humboldt Bay, Humboldt Bay Bicycle Commuters Association, and individual members of the public. See letters of support in Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the coastal zone of the County of Humboldt, extending from Del Norte County at the northern border, between the Cities of Arcata and Eureka along the Humboldt Bay shoreline, south along Cape Mendocino and Punta Gorda, to Mendocino County at Shelter Cove.
5. **Need:** The State of California has identified completion of the California Coastal Trail as a statewide priority. The proposed project would provide leadership in the long-standing efforts to complete the trail in Humboldt County by coordinating multi-jurisdictional efforts, providing technical assistance, and preparing designs, permits and proposals for trail segments that would fill critical gaps. These opportunities could be lost without Conservancy support.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Humboldt County is a state-wide and national scenic and recreational destination, particularly because of its State and National parks and recreation areas. Once completed, the California Coastal Trail will provide an unparalleled recreational opportunity for visitors from around the world.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** Numerous studies have been completed, public agencies are keenly interested, public support is at an all-time high, and public financing is available to construct major segments of the California Coastal Trail.
8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The proposed program will resolve multiple issues, including finalizing the Coastal Trail alignment, creating new recreational and multi-modal access opportunities, resolving private property concerns, and identifying funding for construction, acquisition and management.
9. **Leverage:** Staff from the County of Humboldt and Cities of Eureka and Arcata will be actively engaged in this project. Once the program is completed, the Conservancy will be

poised to leverage its funds with other federal, state and local funding sources for land acquisition and trail construction and management costs.

10. **Conflict resolution:** This project will resolve outstanding conflicts regarding final trail alignment.
11. **Innovation:** Completion of the California Coastal Trail will require close coordination among local, state and federal agencies, balancing the needs of various interest groups and ensuring the protection of sensitive natural resources, while respecting private property rights. Allowing the RCAA, a community based non-profit organization to spearhead these efforts would be an innovative approach to resolving these issues.
12. **Readiness:** The RCAA is ready to proceed with the proposed project immediately, and has garnered widespread support and promised participation by all relevant parties (see the “Project Support” section above).
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** Completion of the California Coastal Trail in Humboldt County is a principal goal of the Conservancy and is mandated by Senate Bill 908.
14. **Cooperation:** Numerous federal, state, local and private interests are poised to cooperate with RCAA to develop the Humboldt County Coastal Trail.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The certified Humboldt County Local Coastal Program (certified October 14, 1982) states: “Consistent with the requirements of the California Constitution and the Coastal Act of 1976, maximum access and recreational opportunities shall be provided for all the people,” and it has numerous specific provisions regarding where access is appropriate. Development of the Humboldt County Coastal Trail Master Plan will be the first component of the proposed project, and will be prepared with assistance by County staff. This will ensure that preferred trail recommendations are consistent with the County’s adopted LCP.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262, in that it involves only planning studies and feasibility analysis for possible future actions which the Conservancy has not approved, adopted, or funded. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon Conservancy approval of the project.