

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 27, 2010

BAY AREA RIDGE TRAIL PLANNING

Project No.: 04-085-02
Project Manager: Moira McEnespy

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,200,000 to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council for planning for future Bay Area Ridge Trail projects.

LOCATION: Various locations along the Bay Area Ridge Trail alignment within the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area (see Exhibits 1 and 2)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Site Map \(Ridge Trail Alignment\)](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31165 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council of an amount not to exceed one million two hundred thousand dollars (\$1,200,000) to conduct planning and feasibility studies, data collection and resource evaluation activities to support future development and construction of, and/or acquisition of interests in real property for, new Bay Area Ridge Trail segments. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, schedule and budget, and the names and qualifications of any subcontractors that it intends to employ for this planning 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 current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.

2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay Area, including public access to, within and around the bay and ridgetops.
 3. The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c) 3 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$1,200,000 to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (BARTC) to conduct planning and feasibility studies, data collection and resource evaluation activities to support future development and construction of, and/or acquisition of interests in real property for, new Bay Area Ridge Trail segments.

The BARTC is working towards the goal of creating a 500-mile multi-use (serving hikers, mountain bicyclists and equestrians), continuous trail that rings San Francisco Bay high on the ridgeline. To date, over 320 miles of the Ridge Trail are open and dedicated for public use. The Ridge Trail serves all nine Bay Area counties and helps to create an interconnected system of open space and trails to provide recreation and scenic views to the public. The BARTC is effectively assisting the Conservancy in meeting its statutory and strategic goals of improving access around the San Francisco Bay Area ridgetops.

Since its inception in 1987, the primary purpose of BARTC, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has been to plan, promote, acquire, build and maintain the Ridge Trail. The BARTC’s governing structure was designed to ensure an ongoing public-private partnership with public agencies and trail enthusiasts. The BARTC has a membership base of approximately 3,000 people and over 100 volunteer workers who regularly participate in its work. These aspects of the BARTC make them uniquely qualified to carry out activities necessary to develop or make accessible new segments of the Ridge Trail.

This authorization would advance the future completion of Ridge Trail segments by continuing identification and refinement of the trail route, negotiating and developing agreements for the acquisition of property (including through fee title and trail easements) from willing sellers, designing and engineering trail segments, addressing needed Ridge Trail signage, and preparing environmental review documents, maps and permit applications.

Site Description: The proposed project will support development of a regional trail along the Bay Area Ridge Trail alignment, which includes ridgetops throughout the nine-county San Francisco Bay area (see Exhibits 1 and 2).

Project History: The vision for the Bay Area Ridge Trail is a 500-mile multi-use (serving hikers, mountain bicyclists and equestrians), continuous trail that rings San Francisco Bay high on the ridgeline. Under the leadership of the Conservancy and the BARTC, and supported by a diverse group of project participants, the Ridge Trail creates an interconnected system of open space and trails that provides recreational opportunities and scenic views to the public. Begun almost 20 years ago, over 320 miles of trail are now dedicated and/or open to the public in all nine Bay Area counties.

This authorization will further the Conservancy's statutory and strategic goals of improving access around San Francisco Bay, and is consistent with previous Conservancy authorizations to negotiate and acquire trail easements, prepare trail construction plans and designs, and construct and open trail segments to the public. Specifically, in August 1998, following the first appropriation of funds for the San Francisco Bay Area Program, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$300,000 to the BARTC to prepare trail construction plans and negotiate trail easements to make eight specific Ridge Trail segments open to the public. In December 2000, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$3,427,800 to the BARTC, \$1,527,800 of which was used for planning and other work to support projects, and \$1,900,000 of which was authorized for construction and acquisition grants for individual projects. As a result of this grant, approximately 100 miles of trail were planned along 60 segments, 66 miles of trail were constructed as part of 14 projects, and 16.8 miles of the trail alignment were secured. In December 2004, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$1,200,000 to the BARTC to perform planning activities for future Ridge Trail projects. As a result of this grant, approximately 78 miles of trail were planned along 70 segments, 52 miles of trail were dedicated and opened along 13 segments, about 74 miles of the trail alignment were secured, interpretive signs were installed, and database and mapping work was conducted. Since this last planning grant, the Conservancy has also awarded funds for specific projects, authorizing \$2,287,140 to plan and construct approximately 23 and 11 miles of Ridge Trail, respectively.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$1,200,000
Other Sources (public and private)	<u>3,600,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$4,800,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is the “Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006” (Proposition 84). These funds are available for all the purposes of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program and are thus appropriate for the funding planning of the Bay Area Ridge Trail. The BARTC anticipates matching Conservancy funds at at least a 1:3 ratio.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Pursuant to Section 31162(a) of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy may award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area that will help to improve public access to, within, and around the ridgetops, consistent with the rights of private property owners, and without having a significant adverse impact on agricultural operations and environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife. Consistent with Section 31162(a), the proposed project will enable a nonprofit grantee to plan for development and implementation of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, a regional ridgetop trail system located entirely within the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. As required by 31162(a), the project is consistent with the rights of private property owners because Ridge Trail segments are only built with the permission of owners of property over which the trail is located. In addition, Ridge Trail projects will be designed to not have a significant impact on agricultural operations, environmentally sensitive areas, or wildlife, which will be confirmed through subsequent CEQA review of individual projects developed pursuant to this authorization.

Consistent with Section 31163(a), the Conservancy cooperates with nonprofit land trusts and other organizations in identifying and adopting long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay Area. Completion of the Ridge Trail is identified in (1) *The San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program Regional Needs Briefing Book (Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, July 1999)* and (2) *400 Miles and Beyond: A Strategic Plan for Completing the Bay Area Ridge Trail (BARTC, Draft 2006)*.

Finally, the proposed project is appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in Section 31163(c) for the following reasons:

- (1) The project is supported by adopted local and regional plans. The Ridge Trail is specifically recognized in the California Recreational Trail Plan, the San Francisco Bay Area's regional Priority Conservation Area Plan, by the East Bay Regional Park District, by all nine Bay Area County General or Master Trail Plans, in all relevant regional park and open space district plans, and in countless local plans and policies.
- (2) The project is multi-jurisdictional and serves a regional constituency by contributing toward the completion of a regional trail system that links ridgetops throughout the nine counties of the San Francisco Bay Area.
- (3) The project can be implemented in a timely manner, given that the authorization will support BARTC in continuing to perform work that is already on-going and funded partially by previous Conservancy authorizations.
- (4) The project provides benefits that could be lost if the project is not quickly implemented, as there is momentum that has been built from the work supported by the previous Conservancy grants and many of the remaining gaps in the Ridge Trail are located on private lands which are subject to competing development projects inconsistent with the Ridge Trail.
- (5) The proposed project leverages matching funds from several sources, both public and private.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective F** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will plan for or support approximately 130 miles of the Bay Area Ridge 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 June 4, 2009, 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 California State Legislature passed a resolution in 1990 to “recognize the value of the Bay Area Ridge Trail to the people of the Bay Area, and encourage the creation of trails in the San Francisco Bay Area.” The Ridge Trail enjoys widespread recognition and support among State, regional and local governments, stakeholders, advocacy groups and the public. The Ridge Trail is specifically recognized in the California Recreational Trail Plan, the San Francisco Bay Area’s regional Priority Conservation Area Plan, all nine Bay Area County General or Master Trail Plans, all relevant regional park and open space district plans, and countless local plans and policies. County committees are actively working on implementation and the Ridge Trail Council has a membership base of 3,500 and hundreds of volunteers who participate in trail advocacy, building, stewardship and public trail events and outings. See letters of support in Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The Bay Area Ridge Trail is located exclusively in the nine counties that make up the San Francisco Bay Area (Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma), and is thus entirely within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
5. **Need:** The Conservancy has played a major role in supporting completion of the Bay Area Ridge Trail; without Conservancy participation, the majority of BARTC’s work could not occur. In addition, the BARTC has suffered major financial setbacks due to the State freeze on new bond-funded projects that was instituted in December 2008.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Bay Area Ridge Trail is regional trail running through all nine Bay Area counties. In addition, the spectacular scenic views, opportunities for extended trips and connectivity to other trail systems, parks and natural areas enhance the appeal of the Ridge Trail as a destination for visitors from outside the Bay Area.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The Bay Area Ridge Trail is by definition to be aligned high on the ridgetops encircling San Francisco Bay. The proposed project will therefore not be vulnerable to the sea level rise scenarios of 16 inches by year 2050 or 55 inches by year 2100 (or likely any other sea level rise scenarios).

Additional Criteria

8. **Urgency:** The BARTC has suffered significant financial setbacks due to the State freeze on new bond-funded projects that was ordered in December 2008. There is thus urgent need to pick up work that has been losing momentum or has been put on hold.
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
10. **Readiness:** The BARTC has been successfully working towards completion of the Ridge Trail for over 20 years and is prepared to continue this work under a new authorization.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** “See “Project History” above.”
12. **Return to Conservancy:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
13. **Cooperation:** Completion of the Ridge Trail is one of the goals identified in the Bay Area Open Space Council’s *The San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program Regional Needs Briefing Book (July 1999)*. In addition, the proposed project is consistent with the BARTC’s adopted alignment and the report entitled *400 Miles and Beyond: A Strategic Plan for Completing the Bay Area Ridge Trail (Draft 2006)*.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed authorization is to fund the preliminary planning work necessary to advance Bay Area Ridge Trail projects, including identifying and refining the trail route, negotiating and developing agreements for the acquisition of property, planning and designing specific segments, and preparing environmental review documents, maps and permit applications.

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to California Code of Regulations Section 15262 (“Feasibility and Planning Studies”) because it is for possible future actions which the Conservancy has not approved, adopted, or funded.

The proposed project is also categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CCR Section 15306 (“Information Collection”) in that it will include basic data collection and resource evaluation activities, including those necessary for planning, designing, and preparing environmental review documents for Ridge Trail projects.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the proposed project upon approval.