

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
August 5, 2010

**HUMBOLDT BAY WATER TRAILS IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM – PHASE II
FINAL DESIGN AND PERMITTING**

Project No. 06-073-02
Project Manager: Peter Jarausch

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$92,000 to the Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation and Conservation District to complete final design and permitting for projects identified in the Humboldt Bay Water Trails Implementation Program Phase I.

LOCATION: Humboldt Bay, Humboldt County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Humboldt Bay Water Trail Implementation Program Phase 1](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Support Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31000 *et seq* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of up to ninety-two thousand dollars (\$92,000) to the Humboldt Bay Harbor Recreation and Conservation District, to complete the final design and permitting for Phase II of the Humboldt Bay Water Trails Implementation Program. Prior to disbursement of any funds, the Executive Officer of the Conservancy shall approve in writing a work plan, budget and schedule, and any contractors to be employed in these tasks.”

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 Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.

2. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access to and along the coast.
 3. The proposed project will serve greater than local needs.
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize up to \$92,000 to the Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation and Conservation District (“Harbor District”) to complete final design and permitting for Phase II of the Humboldt Bay Water Trails Implementation Program.

“Water trails” are water-based routes for recreational canoeists and kayakers that are anchored by land access (or ‘put-in’ and ‘take-out’) sites. These routes provide educational and scenic experiences and are designed to accommodate boaters of all ages and abilities. With an integrated system of facilities, ‘trail’ guides and access site informational signage, good water trail programs encourage minimum-impact use and emphasize stewardship of the aquatic ecosystems, historical features and cultural sites. Humboldt Bay presents many opportunities for paddle boaters, including views of wildlife, scenic vistas, observation of maritime activity, exercise, an alternate way to travel to waterfront destinations, and accessible, yet “wild” experiences. However, currently many challenges face the uninformed boater, such as limited public access facilities, rapidly-changing water levels, bay currents and wind, extensive mudflats, sensitive resources and other competing uses.

Though potential paddling opportunities abound, safe, user-friendly access to Humboldt Bay for paddlers is limited. Currently, only two locations on Humboldt Bay are designed specifically for canoe and kayak access: the Hookton Slough dock in the south bay and the Adorni dock on the Eureka waterfront, which has only a short-term modification for paddlers. As a result, many paddlers use a number of unofficial access points, which may involve less desirable practices such as trespassing on private land, use of unsafe or inadequate parking, use of unsafe or inadequate boat-launching facilities, and disturbances to sensitive shorelines.

In 2001, the Conservancy-funded Humboldt Bay Trail Plan recommended that development of a water trail around Humboldt Bay be explored, and subsequently in 2006, the Conservancy provided funding to the Redwood Coast Action Agency for Phase 1 of the water trail program to develop general designs for improvements to water access for nonmotorized boats. Through that design process, five priority projects were identified that would directly improve paddling access to Humboldt Bay (Exhibit 2: Humboldt Bay Water Trail Implementation Phase I). Two of the priority access point improvements will be undertaken by local agencies and the remaining three are addressed by this authorization. Future additions to the Humboldt Bay Water Trail were also identified as in need of additional planning but are not included in this authorization.

During Phase II of the Humboldt Bay Water Trails Implementation Program the Harbor District and relevant stakeholders will complete design and permitting for improved access for small, human-powered boats to Humboldt Bay. Specifically, this project will result in final engineered designs for ramp and/or dock modifications, final plans and specifications for access site improvements (e.g., parking, restrooms, other amenities), completion of environmental review (CEQA), and acquisition of the permits necessary to start construction.

The project will include final design and permitting for the following proposed facilities and water access improvements:

Docks:

- A new dock and restroom at the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary will increase paddleboat access as well as provide improved accessibility for disabled paddlers to Humboldt Bay. Standard boat docks are usually elevated too high from the water surface to facilitate accessible launching of paddleboats.
- A new step-down dock at the Woodley Island Marina will improve paddling access to the central portion of Humboldt Bay and make it safer for paddlers in the area.

Improve Readily-Usable Shoreline:

- Final design will be completed for improved water access at the Samoa Beach County Park including an improved beach access trail to the launch site, modification of the restrooms to accommodate additional use, and a boat wash station to reduce the chance of spreading aquatic invasive species. Final design improvements will be determined in collaboration with the County of Humboldt who manages the site.

Interpretive Kiosks

- Each of the launch sites will include kiosks addressing paddleboat safety and appropriate wildlife viewing behavior. Interpretive materials have already been developed that address boating hazards including, tides, weather, and commercial traffic. In addition emphasis is placed on how to minimize disturbances to wildlife.

The Harbor District is a county-wide special district with permit jurisdiction over all tide, submerged and other lands granted to the District including all of Humboldt Bay. It was created by the legislature in 1970, and approved by the Humboldt County electorate in 1973 to oversee development of harbors in Humboldt Bay for benefit of the public. The Conservancy has worked with the Harbor District on the Humboldt Bay Management Plan and most relevant to this project, the District worked with the Redwood Community Action Agency in developing “Humboldt Bay Water Trails Implementation Program, Phase I.”

Site Description: One of the largest and most pristine bays on the west coast, a significant avian stopover on the Pacific Flyway, the “front yard” of the north coast’s population centers and a desirable resting area for US 101 travelers, Humboldt Bay offers an exceptional paddling experience - for those with information about where and when to go. This unique and scenic bay consists of three parts, namely Arcata Bay in the north, Entrance Bay in the middle and South Bay. Arcata Bay, the largest, is wide and shallow like the South Bay – both areas experience relatively light boat traffic. The central portion of the bay is a narrow, deeper channel – with most of the boating traffic – that connects the northern and southern bays and leads to the mouth of the bay. In addition, Mad River, Freshwater, Elk River and Hookton (Salmon Creek) Sloughs offer some of the best paddling experiences.

Humboldt Bay is a recreational resource used increasingly by both local and visiting recreational boaters. At lower tides, the bay and its sloughs are intimate places of sinuous, narrow channels

teeming with wildlife and views of exposed mudflats. At high tides, the bay is an expansive and relatively wild place for its proximity to two of the region’s largest cities. In addition to the natural beauty of the bay, there are also many historical, cultural and biological features to be discovered from the water.

Project History:

The Humboldt Bay Water Trails Implementation Program is being implemented in three phases. *Humboldt Bay Water Trails Implementation Program, Phase I (2008)* was funded by the Conservancy and resulted in conceptual plans and designs for site amenities and ramp/dock improvements for a number of existing water access facilities. In addition a map & guide for the Humboldt Bay Water Trail was created, and will be published using local funds. Phase II will result in development of final construction plans and full permitting for the three high priority access sites discussed in the “Project Summary” section above. Phase III will be the construction of the access improvements.

The proposed project is consistent with the Humboldt Bay Management Plan (May 2007; Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation and Conservation District, prepared with Coastal Conservancy funding), specifically, the proposed project is consistent with Policy RFA-9, which supports a water trails program, Policy, RFA-3, which supports provision of improved water-oriented recreation facilities, RFA-10, which supports clear signage for all public recreation and access projects, and Policy RSA-1, which supports provision and improvement of boat launch sites throughout the Bay, including facilities for water-oriented recreational craft such as kayaks and canoes.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$92,000
Total Project Cost	\$92,000

The proposed source of Conservancy funds for this authorization is a 2008 appropriation to the Conservancy from Proposition 84, “Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006.” These funds are allocated to the Conservancy for development, restoration and protection of land and water resources, and promotion of access to and enjoyment of coastal resources, in accordance with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation (Division 21 of the Public Resources Code).

The proposed project will help develop land and water resources (namely design and engineer a water trails program) and promote recreational access along the coast, and is consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, as discussed in the “Consistency with Conservancy’s enabling legislation” section of this report, below. The proposed authorization is thus consistent with Proposition 84.

The next phase of this project, the construction of the improvements, is estimated to cost \$460,000. The grantee will be seeking funding for construction from the Wildlife Conservation Board, the Department of Boating and Waterways as well as the Conservancy.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is undertaken pursuant to Sections 31400 et seq. (Chapter 9) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, pertaining to public access to and along the coast.

Consistent with Section 31400, the proposed project will further the Conservancy’s principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state’s coastline, specifically by participating in design and engineering of access to water trails within and around Humboldt Bay.

Under Public Resources Code Section 31400.1 the Conservancy may award grants to a public agency to develop lands for public access to and along the coast if the accessway will serve more than local needs. In the proposed project, the Conservancy will aid a public agency (the Harbor District) in design and engineering of water access sites in and around Humboldt Bay, a resource of regional, state and even international importance.

Under Public Resources Code Section 31400.2, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of the initial development of public accessways by any public agency or nonprofit organization. In the proposed project, the Conservancy will aid a public agency (the Harbor District) by providing 100% of the cost to design and engineer water trails and access sites in and around Humboldt Bay.

Under Public Resources Code Section 31400.3, the Conservancy may assist public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public accessways. In the proposed project, the Conservancy will aid a public agency (the Harbor District) in design and engineering of water trails and access sites in and around Humboldt Bay.

Consistent with Public Resources Code Section 31408(a), the proposed project entails the Conservancy coordinating development of water trails and access sites in and around Humboldt Bay. Consistent with the definition of the California Coastal Trail, these water trails will support a continuous public right-of-way along the California coastline, and will foster appreciation and stewardship of the scenic and natural resources of the coast through a mode of nonmotorized transportation.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective B** of the Conservancy’s 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will enhance waterfront parks by redesigning three park facilities on Humboldt Bay to better accommodate non motorized boaters and increase accessibility. Further consistent with this goal and objective, the proposed project will be in coordination with other state and local agencies and non-profit partners.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective E** of the Conservancy’s 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will upgrade existing facilities, namely ramp and dock infrastructure, to increase and enhance coastal recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

**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 proposed project has the support of the public. Please see letters of support in Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located entirely within the coastal zone of County of Humboldt.
5. **Need:** It is difficult to find funding absent the Conservancy to conduct the design and permitting work that constitutes this phase of the Humboldt Bay Water Trails Implementation Program. It is anticipated that additional funders will help with the construction projects designed and permitted through this grant. Potential funders include the California Department of Boating and Waterways which has a grants program for boating facilities and the Wildlife Conservation Board which owns the Samoa Boat Ramp County Park.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Humboldt Bay is one of the largest and most pristine bays on the west coast, a significant avian stopover on the Pacific Flyway, the “front yard” of the north coast’s population centers and a desirable resting area for US 101 travelers. Humboldt Bay is a recreational destination for many visitors from within the State and the nation, particularly given its proximity to several State and National parks and recreation areas (e.g., Humboldt Redwoods State Park, Redwood National Park). Humboldt Bay also serves the student population drawn to Humboldt State University. The proposed project thus has regional, state, and national interest.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed water access improvements are not expected to be significantly impacted by sea level rise over the lifespan (20years) of the project. The dock improvements in Arcata and Woodley Island are proposed as floating docks that will partially adapt to rising water levels because one end of the dock floats on the surface. The shoreline where they are anchored is above the 16-inch rise (predicted 50-year increase) although there is a chance they may be inundated during winter storm events that combine a high tide with a significant rainfall. At Samoa Beach Park the shoreline will slowly retreat although the access point is expected to be usable for the next 50 years.

All of the sites, along with major portions of the shoreline in Humboldt Bay, will be inundated with a predicted increase of 55 inches by 2100. Water trail access points are inherently vulnerable to sea level rise because they are sited to provide access to the water. If the facilities are constructed to accommodate the currently predicted 100 year sea level rise access to the water becomes more difficult. Either the access point has to be moved back from the shoreline at which access to the water is no longer possible, or the elevation of the anchor point is raised at which the length of the dock needed may no longer be feasible. As the height of the shore increases the length of the dock has to be increased so that slope of the dock does not become excessively steep at low tide.

Additional Criteria

8. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” section, above.
9. **Cooperation:** The Harbor District will develop the “Humboldt Bay Water Trails Implementation Program Phase II” in collaboration with many other agencies and organizations such as the Cities of Eureka and Arcata, the County of Humboldt, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Explore North Coast paddling club, and others.
10. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** Designs for the docks will take into account the potential for more frequent and stronger winter storms due to climate change. Docks can be subject to significant waves during winter storms and therefore will be designed to withstand these events.
11. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** Final designs will include best management practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions during the future construction phase of the project.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is consistent with the intent of Section 3.50, “Access,” of the Humboldt County General Plan, Volume II, Humboldt Bay Area Plan of the Humboldt County Local Coastal Program (“LCP,” certified October 14, 1982) in that it seeks to provide for “recreational opportunities around the Bay area that add to the local economy, and enhance the quality of life for local residents.”

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is statutorily and categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to (1) 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262 in that it involves only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions which the Conservancy has not approved, adopted or funded; and (2) 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15306 in that it involves basic data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities which will not result in any disturbance to an environmental resource, and which will be undertaken as part of a study leading to an action which the Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted, or funded. Staff will file a “Notice of Exemption” upon approval of the project.