

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
January 20, 2011

**REDWOOD HOSTEL PHASE I: PLANNING AND DESIGN**

Project No. 10-041-01  
Project Manager: Peter Jarausch

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$144,500 to the National Park Service to complete site selection, environmental review, and preliminary design of a new hostel to be located within the Redwood National and State Parks in Del Norte County.

**LOCATION:** Redwood National and State Parks, Del Norte County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

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

Exhibit 2: [Project Letters](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400-31410 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred forty four thousand five hundred dollars (\$144,500) to the National Park Service (“NPS”) to complete site selection, environmental review and preliminary design of a new hostel to be located within Redwood National and State Parks subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, the NPS shall submit a work program, schedule and budget, and the names and qualifications of any subcontractors, for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy.”

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 most recently updated on June 4, 2009.

2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the implementation of a system of public accessways.
  3. The proposed project will serve greater than local needs.”
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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to \$144,500 dollars to the National Park Service (“NPS”) to complete site selection, environmental review, and preliminary design for a new hostel facility to be located within Redwood National and State Parks. This project will be the first phase in the replacement of an existing hostel that had to close on January 18, 2010 due to safety issues after more than two decades of successful operation in Redwood National Park.

The now-closed Redwood Hostel provided important low cost lodging and access to Redwood National Park and the California coast. The hostel, the only lodging within Redwood National and State Parks, provided over 115,000 nights of accommodation to visitors of all ages since its opening in 1987. Demand for low cost lodging has been increasing and over its last three years of operation the hostel experienced a growth of 10% a year in overnights. Room rates for the hostel were \$59 per night for a private room, and \$21 per night for dormitory room accommodations. In fiscal year 2009 the average occupancy rate for the hostel was 76% or 5,849 overnight stays.

Despite regular maintenance, and the popularity of the hostel, it was closed due to concerns over the building’s seismic safety and its overall deterioration. The structure was built in 1877, modified many times over the years, and was slowly succumbing to the elements. A portion of the structure failed in 2009 causing the Park Service to intensify its examination of the cost of renovations and to develop a strategy to increase the safety of the structure in this earthquake prone region. In order to re-open at its current location the building would need to meet modern seismic safety standards, building codes, and comply with the American’s with Disabilities Act. The National Park Service analyzed the structure and determined that the cost of these renovations would exceed 200% of the cost of replacement. NPS is therefore recommending the construction of a new building.

A new location for the hostel is also needed to protect existing cultural resources. The closed hostel is on top of an archeological site which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1977 and is significant to both the Tolowa and Yurok people. During meetings with the NPS, members of the Yurok Tribe, Elk Valley Rancheria, and Smith River Rancheria have expressed their concerns about protecting these highly sensitive cultural resources. They would like to see the hostel moved to a new location because they feel that it is inappropriate to operate a hostel on top of this culturally significant site.

The scarcity of low-cost accommodations is a problem along much of the California coast. Out of more than 1,600 hotels, RV parks and campgrounds in California’s coastal counties, only 134, or 7.9%, offer low cost accommodations, i.e., accommodations under \$100 per night. (National Ocean Economics Program; California Coastal Access Guide). The 134 facilities offering low cost accommodations include RV parks, campsites, lower cost hotels, and hostels. The project therefore addresses a regional and statewide problem.

The proposed authorization would enable the NPS to select a new location for the hostel, complete environmental compliance, and develop preliminary designs for the new building. By completing these three actions together, which are described in more detail below, NPS will be able to select and design a hostel that minimizes impacts to the environment while providing the access to the coast that made the closed hostel popular.

**Site Analysis and Selection-** The site selection process will allow NPS and State Parks to choose an appropriate, cost effective, and desirable location with Redwood National and State Parks that provides access to park resources, Highway 101, the Coastal Trail, and takes into consideration the need to provide low-cost accommodations while protecting significant cultural and natural resources. An attractive location for the hostel is important to continue the hostel's popularity with guests and to promote its long term financial stability.

**Environmental Review** – The NPS will complete environmental compliance for the hostel. This will consist of environmental review under the National Environmental Protection Act (“NEPA”) and/or the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) depending on the sites identified during the site selection process as well as any needed permits and consultations.

**Design** – NPS will complete preliminary designs for a hostel that accommodates approximately the same number of visitors as the closed hostel. Green building practices will be included in the designs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from construction and operation of the hostel.

The NPS is well qualified to carry out this project using Redwood National and State Parks staff. NPS staff has experience with site selection and environmental compliance work for many construction projects. They have been working closely with the Golden Gate Council of Hostelling International to develop criteria for selecting a new site.

**Site Description:** Redwood National and State Parks consist of Redwood National Park, Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park and Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park. Together the parks include 105,516 acres of federal and state lands in Del Norte and Humboldt counties, situated in northwestern California. NPS and the California Department of Parks and Recreation manage all four parks as a single unit under a joint management plan. Together the parks contain the largest remaining contiguous section of ancient coast redwood forest and 37 miles of pristine coastline. They are recognized as a World Heritage Site and an International Biosphere Reserve.

Three locations have been tentatively identified as potential locations for the hostel: Endert's Beach, located approximately two miles south of Crescent City and within Redwood National Park, the Mill Creek Addition to Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park, and the existing location at Wilson Creek within Redwood National Park. The Endert's Beach area is approximately 140 acres of former prairie and coastal scrub adjacent to salt marsh and coastal strand habitat. It provides quick access to the coast and was recently ranked atop Yahoo! Travel's "Top 10 Secluded U.S. Beaches." Historically the area was used for ranching. The area is currently characterized by intense stands of exotic invasive plants interspersed with intact stands of native coastal scrub and herbaceous species. The area is still habitat for Wolf's Evening Primrose, a species rated very rare by the California Native Plant Society, as well as Roosevelt Elk.

The Mill Creek Addition to Del Norte Coast Redwood State Park is a 25,000 acre property that was acquired in part with Conservancy funds in 2002. It encompasses large portions of the Mill Creek and Rock Creek watersheds and has a history of timber harvesting dating back to the 1850s. The property was acquired to restore its ecological values, enhance critical habitat

connectivity between state and federal conservation areas and to provide opportunities for appropriate and compatible public recreational use. It is currently characterized by mostly young coast redwood and Douglas-fir that were planted after timber harvesting, as well as isolated stands of old-growth redwood forest. The site is accessible off Highway 101 and would provide access to day use activities such as hiking, mountain biking, fishing, horseback riding, and interpretive programs. State Parks has recently adopted a general plan amendment to include the Mill Creek Unit, which identifies an area within the property for lodging development.

**Project History:** The Conservancy has a long history of supporting the development of hostels to facilitate low-cost accommodations in the Coastal Zone. In 1985 the Conservancy developed a program to develop a string of hostels along the California Coast and targeted the North Coast as a high priority area because this area of the coast, away from major population centers, requires most visitors to seek overnight accommodations. In December 1985, the Conservancy authorized \$118,737 to the Golden Gate Chapter of American Youth Hostels for development of a Hostel at Redwood National Park. The DeMartin house was successfully renovated and opened its doors as the Redwood Hostel in 1987. The same year the Conservancy authorized a grant for the development of a hostel in Santa Cruz and in 1997 the Conservancy authorized a grant for the development of a hostel in Monterey. Most recently, the Conservancy authorized funds for the improvement of the Point Reyes Hostel, which will be completed January of 2011.

The executive director of the Golden Gate Council of Hostelling International initially contacted Conservancy staff in 2009 when it became apparent the existing Redwood Hostel building would be in need of renovation or replacement. Conservancy staff has worked with staff from Redwood National Park and Hostelling International to develop the goals, objectives, and terms of the proposed grant.

## PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$144,500
National Park Service (in-kind)	\$ 30,500
Hostelling International (in-kind)	\$ 7,000

**Total Project Costs** **\$182,000**

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 project will promote access to and enjoyment of the coast by facilitating development of low-cost accommodations in Redwood National and State Parks. It 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.

NPS expects to provide in-kind services valued at approximately \$34,500. These services include NPS staff time dedicated to each project task as well as project management. The Golden Gate

Chapter of Hostelling International also expects to provide in-kind services valued at \$7,000. Services will include assisting with scoping, site selection, and design.

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

This project is consistent with Chapter 9 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31400-31409.

Pursuant to Section 31400, the Conservancy has a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state’s coastline. To carry out this role, the legislature has authorized the Conservancy, under Section 31400.1, to provide grants to public agencies, such as NPS, to develop lands for public access purposes. Consistent with this section, the proposed project will provide funding to NPS to develop low-cost lodgings. Once completed the new facility will serve those utilizing the many trails, beaches and other coastal resources within Redwood National and State Parks and contribute to the availability of public access to the coast. Over 480,000 people from around the world visit Redwood National and State Parks to enjoy the redwoods and coastal access that the parks provide. In FY 2009 5,849 overnight stays were provided by the Redwood Hostel.

Section 31400.2 requires that the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy be determined by assessing the total amount of funding available for coastal public accessway projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible projects, and the application of other factors prescribed by the Conservancy. Consistent with this section, the amount of the Conservancy funding for this project was determined based on the availability of other funds and the urgency and importance of this project and subject to the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines” section, below. The Conservancy grant would provide only 75% of the total project cost; NPS would provide the remaining in staff time.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective E** of the Conservancy’s 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will lead to the construction of new facilities to increase and enhance coastal recreational opportunities for 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 project is broadly supported. See Exhibit 2.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located in coastal Del Norte County.
5. **Need:** While NPS is devoting significant staff time to the project it has not been able to secure all of the funding necessary to proceed with the project. Conservancy staff has determined that revenues from the low cost accommodations will not generate sufficient funds to cover the cost of planning and constructing a new facility. Therefore, Conservancy funds are needed to proceed with the project site selection, design and environmental review.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Over 480,000 people from around the world visit Redwood National and State Parks annually and the Redwood Hostel was the only low cost accommodation within the Parks aside from camping. Replacing this low-cost accommodation near the coast would continue to enable a broad spectrum of Californians access to Redwood National and State Parks.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** Site selection for the new hostel facility will include an assessment of the vulnerability of each location to sea level rise. Both scenarios for the years 2050 and 2100 will be used to estimate sea level rise and the new location will, to the extent feasible, be chosen to avoid the impacts of sea level rise. Neither the possible location at Endert's Beach or at Mill Creek will be directly impacted by sea level rise and both are out of the Tsunami run-up zone.

#### **Additional Criteria**

8. **Urgency:** Closure of the existing hostel building in January of 2010 has significantly reduced the availability of low cost lodging in the area.
9. **Resolution of more than one issue:** In addition to improving coastal access a new location for the Hostel can alleviate a long term concern held by both the Yurok and Tolowa that the existing hostel is constructed on top of an important cultural site.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See "Project History" above.
11. **Cooperation:** The Golden Gate Council of Hostelling International will be actively involved in the project to provide guidance on the building and its location.
12. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The design and location for the new hostel building will include measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Site selection criteria will include easy access for visitors traveling to the hostel using non-motorized transportation. Green building techniques will be incorporated into the design and best management practices will be used to minimize emissions during construction.

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The project is consistent with the intent of Del Norte County Local Coastal Program's policies on Access and on Recreation. Both emphasize the importance of providing "all people the benefits of recreation resources" (Del Norte Local Coastal Program page 15). The LCP further mentions that access points and visitor serving facilities that provide access to the general public over a wide range of income levels and social groups shall have priority over other private development (pages 17 and 83). This project would provide an enhanced low-cost visitor serving facility allowing for a larger range of income groups access to the California coast.

**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.