

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
May 19, 2011

**BIG LAGOON ACCESS ENHANCEMENT DESIGN**

Project No. 11-027-01  
Project Manager: Joel Gerwein

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$15,000 to the County of Humboldt to prepare preliminary designs for access enhancements at Big Lagoon County Park, north of the City of Trinidad, Humboldt County.

**LOCATION:** Trinidad, Humboldt County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)  
Exhibit 2: [Big Lagoon County Park Conceptual Enhancement Plan](#)  
Exhibit 3: [Site photographs](#)  
Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)
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**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 the disbursement of up to fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) to the County of Humboldt (“County”) to prepare preliminary designs for access enhancements at Big Lagoon County Park that will improve compliance with ADA access standards and will reduce impacts to the Yurok village site O-puywég, subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds the County shall submit for Executive Officer review and approval a work plan, schedule and budget, and the names and qualifications of any subcontractors.”

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 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding a system of public accessways.
  3. The project serves greater-than-local needs.”
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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to \$15,000 to the County of Humboldt (County) to prepare preliminary designs for access enhancements at Big Lagoon County Park that will improve compliance with ADA access standards and will reduce impacts to the Yurok village site O-púyweg.

Big Lagoon County Park provides public access to the beach and Big Lagoon, and opportunities for a variety of recreational activities including boating, picnicking, beachcombing, camping, and wildlife viewing. The California Coastal Trail passes along the beach through the park. The park is managed by the Parks Division of the Humboldt County Public Works Department. Although the County Park is small, it provides the only camping area adjacent to Big Lagoon and the Harry Merlo State Recreation Area, and is therefore heavily used by those accessing these larger parks (Exhibit 1).

Access enhancements to be designed include improvements to two campsites in the campground to meet ADA access standards, a boat wash station to reduce the potential for recreational boaters to disperse invasive species, replacement of the floating dock at the boat ramp, and improved signage. Currently, the County Park contains no campsites meeting ADA access standards, making it difficult for handicapped campers to use the site. The County is strongly committed to providing handicapped access to its parks, as evidenced by the following Humboldt County General Plan policies:

§4440(4.) Park facilities shall be designed and constructed in such a manner as to not discriminate against the physically handicapped...

§4440(5.) The Parks and Recreation Commission shall develop a program to determine the physical barriers to recreational facilities and establish a schedule to eliminate them.

The boat wash station is important because Big Lagoon contains one of three confirmed occurrences of the invasive New Zealand mud snail on the North Coast. This species can reach densities exceeding 500,000 per square meter. It is thought that such high snail populations probably have a negative effect on populations of other aquatic organisms, especially native snails and the insects and fish that feed on them. It is likely that freshwater ecosystems are adversely affected by such high populations of an invasive snail. There are no known eradication methods for this species, and it is therefore important to contain existing occurrences by preventing recreational boaters and others from inadvertently dispersing them. The California Department of Fish & Game has requested installation of a wash station at Big Lagoon to allow boaters to rinse their boats after use within the lagoon to reduce the risk of spreading the snail to other water bodies.

The project will also consider and design enhancements intended to reduce adverse impacts to culturally sensitive resources associated with the Yurok village site known as O-púyweg, which

is located in the park and adjacent areas. Humboldt County is participating in the Coalition to Protect Cultural Legacies at O-púyweg, a group initially convened in March 2009 to protect, preserve, and ensure respectful management of Yurok cultural legacies at the site. Other stakeholders include Big Lagoon Park Company, Big Lagoon Rancheria, California Department of Parks & Recreation, local professional archeologists, Trinidad Rancheria, Yurok Tribe, and Yurok descendents with direct family ties to Big Lagoon.

A large portion of the remains of the Yurok village site known as O-púyweg is situated beneath the meadow area within the park. Historically, the site suffered looting and unauthorized excavation. Disturbance decreased in the 1970s following legal protections and awareness prompted largely by the Northwest Indian Cemetery Protection Association. However, impacts to the site have continued, both intentionally by individuals with knowledge of the site's history and significance, and inadvertently by park visitors unaware of this background.

The proposed project includes the design of modifications to the features and public use of the meadow area, which is the most culturally sensitive area in the park. Vehicle access to the meadow area would be eliminated by decommissioning the portion of B Street currently passing through the park meadow (Exhibits 1 and 2). A Street would become the main vehicle access route in and out of the park. Potential effects on traffic circulation due to the decommissioning of B Street through the park meadow will be evaluated. The need for additional traffic signs, or other measures, to direct park-related vehicle traffic onto A Street rather than residential roads will be evaluated. The portion of Big Lagoon Park Road along the top of the bluff at the west side of the park would be converted to a pedestrian trail. The project includes a goal of achieving no net loss of parking through more efficient use of the existing paved surface and potentially a small expansion of the main parking area. The meadow would continue to be managed as open space and be accessible by visitors. The overall approach for managing meadow vegetation will continue to be developed. The option of placing a protective soil layer over portions of the meadow to reduce accessibility for looting and vandalism will be evaluated.

A conceptual enhancement plan has been prepared for the park (Exhibit 2) with the support of participants in the Coalition to Protect Cultural Legacies at O-púyweg. The preliminary design work funded through this grant would develop specific options for elements of the conceptual plan including layout maps, design sections, narrative descriptions, material quantities, and cost estimates. The work will include evaluating the feasibility of a soil protective layer, analyzing traffic impacts due to road closure, developing preliminary designs for the accessibility upgrades to the campground and restrooms, identifying appropriate construction techniques and re-vegetation options, identifying options to enhance public access to the beach, and consulting with tribal sources on sensitive resources. The preliminary design plans will be used to pursue other funding sources for detailed design, complete environmental review and permitting, and construction.

The County is well qualified to oversee this design work. The County is owner and operator of Big Lagoon County Park. As stated above, the County is strongly committed to handicapped access to its parks, and is participating in the Coalition to Protect Cultural Legacies at O-púyweg.

**Site Description:** Big Lagoon County Park is located along the Pacific Ocean at the southwest end of Big Lagoon (Exhibit 1). The park provides public access to the beach and lagoon and offers a variety of recreational opportunities including boating, picnicking, beachcombing, camping, and wildlife viewing. Park facilities include a boat ramp, parking area, campground with 25 designated campsites, two restrooms, and a road and trail network. Natural areas within the park include spruce forest, beach and dunes, coastal prairie (meadow), and wetlands (Exhibits 2 and 3).

Adjacent areas to the park include the Pacific Ocean to the west, Humboldt Lagoons State Park to the north, Big Lagoon Rancheria tribal land and the Harry R. Merlo State Recreation Area to the east, and the Big Lagoon Park Company community to the south. The Big Lagoon Park Company owns an approximately 54-acre parcel which contains 76 cabins owned individually by shareholders of the corporation.

**Project History:** The Conservancy has worked with the County in the past to enhance public access to the coast. In 2002, the Conservancy granted the County \$153,000 for access management planning for Clam and Moonstone Beaches. In 2005, the Conservancy granted the County \$57,500 for access improvements at the Fairhaven “T” Beach on the North Spit of Humboldt Bay.

The Conservancy has also provided grants to protect cultural resources in Humboldt County. For example, in 2003, the Conservancy granted \$50,000 to the Yurok Tribe to prepare a comprehensive management plan for public access, and for scenic, natural, and archeological resources preservation, for the 12.5-acre ancient Tsurai Village Site Study Area in Trinidad. In 2001, the Conservancy granted \$85,000 for enhancement planning at Indian Island in Humboldt Bay, to protect sensitive archaeological resources and restore natural habitats, and an additional \$61,000 in 2005 for implementation of the plan.

The Conservancy has also participated in the protection of Big Lagoon natural resources. In 1999, the Conservancy awarded \$400,000 to Save The Redwoods League to acquire a forested 135-acre property adjacent to the Big Lagoon County Park. That property was subsequently transferred to the California Department of Parks and Recreation for management.

County staff approached the Conservancy about the Big Lagoon Access Enhancement Project in Fall 2010.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	\$15,000
<b>County of Humboldt</b>	\$5,000
<b>Total Project Costs</b>	\$20,000

The expected source of Conservancy funds for this project is the FY 08/09 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). See Public Resources Code section 75001 et seq. Proposition 84 authorizes the use of funds for projects that promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state and that are consistent with the Conservancy’s

enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The project is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation as discussed below. The County of Humboldt will provide \$5,000 to match Conservancy funding, as well as in-kind staff services. In addition, the Yurok Tribe, Big Lagoon Rancheria, and Trinidad Rancheria will provide staff time valued at approximately \$2,500, and Big Lagoon Park Company cabin owners and other stakeholders will provide approximately 80 hours in volunteer time to provide input on the designs.

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

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400 et seq.) relating to the provision of public access to the coast. Section 31400 states that the Conservancy shall have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline.

In particular, by assisting the County with enhancement of public access at Big Lagoon, this project is consistent with Public Resources Code Sections 31400.1, which allows the Conservancy to provide grants to public agencies to develop lands for public access purposes and 31400.3, which authorizes the Conservancy to provide such assistance as is required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public accessways.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project would develop a plan to improve a waterfront park located along 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 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 enjoys broad support, including from the County Board of Supervisors, Big Lagoon Park Company, Big Lagoon Rancheria, California Department of Parks & Recreation, California Department of Fish and Game, the Trinidad Rancheria, and the Yurok Tribe.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the coastal zone of Humboldt County.
5. **Need:** The County does not have the funds needed for this preliminary design work. While other funding sources, such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the California Department of

Boating and Waterways, are expected to be available for final design and implementation, Conservancy funds are needed to prepare the preliminary designs.

6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Big Lagoon County Park is a popular destination for locals and tourists who enjoy access to the beach, Big Lagoon, and to the California Coastal Trail. The natural resources and cultural histories of the north coast of California attract local, regional, national, and international visitors. The park is within an Important Bird Area designated by Audubon California. This IBA was designated because it supports more than 10% of the state population of Marbled Murrelet and, seasonally, more than 5,000 waterfowl.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project area is located directly adjacent to Big Lagoon and in close proximity to the ocean and is therefore vulnerable to sea level rise. Enhancement planning will consider sea level rise. However, the improvements to be designed consist of relatively inexpensive infrastructure, some of which can be moved (e.g. floating dock). Over the 20 year lifetime of the project, sea level rise impacts are expected to primarily consist of inundation during winter storms. Because there would be few users of the facilities during inclement winter weather, such impacts are expected to have a minimal effect on the project's benefits. Also, project will take into account the need to design the improvements, for durability and resistance to deterioration in order to minimize their vulnerability to storm damage.

#### **Additional Criteria**

8. **Urgency:** Ongoing degradation and inappropriate use of the O-púyweg village site make it important that the project proceed expeditiously.
9. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The project will enhance public access, protect cultural resources, and protect natural resources by reducing the spread of invasive species.
10. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
11. **Conflict resolution:** The project will facilitate the resolution of conflicts between recreational use of the park and preservation of Native American cultural resources in the park. .
12. **Readiness:** The grantee has already obtained the approval of the conceptual enhancement plan (Exhibit 2) from all participants in the Coalition to Protect Cultural Legacies at O-púyweg and is ready to proceed to the design stage.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See "Project History" above.
14. **Cooperation:** The County's partners will contribute their review of the design work through participation in the Coalition to Protect Cultural Legacies at O-púyweg.

#### **CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The project is consistent with Humboldt County's Local Coastal Program (LCP) for the North Coast Area. The North Coast Area LCP identifies Big Lagoon County Park as an important coastal resource site and point of public access (Section 4.71.13). Consistent with the LCP, this project would enhance public access at the park.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The project involves only planning, and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been authorized or approved by the Conservancy or another agency and is thus statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262. Planning carried out as part of the project will, however, consider environmental factors, as required by Section 15262. In addition, to the extent that data collection and resource evaluation activities are conducted for this project, they are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15306. This categorical exemption applies to activities that consist of basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon Conservancy approval.