

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 22, 2011

PRESIDIO COASTAL AND RIDGE TRAIL

Project No. 11-049-01
Project Manager: Matthew Gerhart

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$650,000 to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy to construct improvements to segments of the California Coastal Trail and San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail in the Presidio of San Francisco.

LOCATION: Northwestern corner of the City and County of San Francisco

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Maps](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Project Illustrations and Photos](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [Presidio Trails and Bikeways Master Plan and Environmental Assessment](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy) hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed sixty hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$650,000) to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (GGNPC) to construct segments of the California Coastal Trail and San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail in the Presidio of San Francisco.

Prior to the disbursement of Conservancy funds for construction, GGNPC shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

1. Evidence that the GGNPC has obtained all necessary permits and approvals.
2. A signing plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy participation and identifying the trail segments as part of the California Coastal Trail and Bay Area Ridge Trail systems, as applicable.

3. A final work plan (including the names of any contractors to be used in the completion of the project), and a project schedule and budget.
4. Evidence that sufficient funds are available to complete the project.

Also prior to the disbursement of funds, the GGNPC, landowners, and the Conservancy shall enter into an agreement or agreements sufficient to protect the public interest in the project and to provide public access to the project site.”

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 resource and recreation goals of the San Francisco Bay Area.
3. The GGNPC 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 Public Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a grant of up to \$650,000 to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (GGNPC) to construct improvements to two segments of the California Coastal Trail (Coastal Trail) and San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail (Ridge Trail) within the Presidio of San Francisco, in coordination with the National Park Service (NPS) and the Presidio Trust. The trails are located near the oceanfront just south of the Golden Gate Bridge in the Presidio, on federal lands within the City and County of San Francisco.

The proposed segments will significantly improve public access through an area that, despite currently being in largely an unimproved or degraded state, attracts millions of visitors a year. The Coastal Trail in the Presidio is a popular route connecting visitors from the Golden Gate Bridge to Baker Beach and destinations south. The Ridge Trail runs concurrently with the Coastal Trail from the bridge south, and via the connector trail proposed here will access the new Rob Hill Campground and serve the Ridge Trail beyond. See Exhibit 1 for depictions of both trail alignments.

When complete, each trail segment would allow for greater park visitation while reducing the need for vehicular travel. The Coastal Trail portion of the project would improve 0.85 miles of trail to federal Accessibility Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas (AGODA) standards, 0.40 miles of which are shared with the Bay Area Ridge Trail. The Ridge Trail portion of the project would provide 0.30 miles of new accessible multi-use (bicycle and pedestrian) access.

Presidio Coastal Trail. The planned improvements include upgrading the existing social trail on the west side of the guardrail along Lincoln Boulevard to a new multi-use (hiking/bicycling) route and constructing a new trail to connect to the Merchant Road trailhead. The trail will vary from 8 to 14 feet in width. Trail surfacing materials are a natural shale material that will be

compressed and/or hardened by an enzymatic material to meet federal AGODA criteria. Portions of the trail will be on retaining walls with an outboard railing along the steeper sections of coastal bluff. In the next phase of this project, the Coastal Trail segment to the north will be upgraded to provide a multi-use trail connection to the west side of the Golden Gate Bridge. This trail also links two new scenic overlooks and an expanded trailhead parking area that will be served by shuttle service for park visitors. See Exhibit 2 for design concept illustrations.

Rob Hill Ridge Trail Connector. The planned trail improvements include constructing a new, accessible pedestrian trail paralleling Washington Boulevard to connect the rehabilitated Rob Hill Campground with the Coastal Trail corridor. This trail will be 5 to 6 feet in width and is approximately 0.3 mile in length. The trail will be surfaced similarly to the Coastal Trail and will also meet AGODA criteria. Four striped crosswalks over side streets will be provided for pedestrian safety. Bicyclists will be served by new in-road bicycle lanes immediately adjacent on Washington Boulevard (also a U.S. Regional Bike Route).

The Presidio Coastal and Ridge Trail project will help complete the GGNPC's Trails Forever vision, a park-wide initiative sponsored by the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) and Presidio Trust to establish a world-class trail system, protect park resources and engage the community in the stewardship of these important resources. Both trail segments will contribute to the overall goal of creating an accessible loop of trails within the Presidio, providing all visitors with the opportunity to explore the Presidio forest, historic districts, the Bay shore, Golden Gate Bridge, and the Pacific Ocean. Several Presidio trails are already part of this accessible loop, and current priorities include a project to renovate the Bay Trail at the Golden Gate Bridge. In the next few years, plans also call for the renovation of the stretch of Ridge Trail between Rob Hill Campground and the Park Trail, which makes up the eastern half of the accessible loop trail in the Presidio.

The GGNPC (formerly Golden Gate National Parks Association) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting historical and scientific work and educational and interpretive activities of the National Park Service (NPS), principally in the GGNRA. GGNPC staff have had expertise in developing and managing projects of this size and scope since 1981, and have been the recipients of previous Conservancy grants.

Site Description: The lands subject to this project are the near-shore bluffs and forests of the Presidio of San Francisco, lying just south of the Golden Gate. The project area provides expansive views of the Pacific Ocean, with the Golden Gate Bridge and Marin Headlands visible to the north; Baker Beach, Land's End and Mile Rock visible to the southwest; and the interior hills and valleys of San Francisco lying to the east. The area supports a diversity of native coastal habitats and species, along with a historic forest planted by the Army in the 19th century. The Presidio, which served as an army post for three nations over a period of 218 years, is a world-class recreational and tourist destination currently serving approximately 7 million visitors a year. Standing as one of the region's most significant historic, scenic and cultural resources, it was transferred to the National Park Service in 1994 and is now owned and operated jointly by the GGNRA and the Presidio Trust.

Project History: The Coastal Conservancy has supported trail development in the Presidio for many years, having approved a \$100,000 planning grant to the GGNPC for Crissy Field in 1993. The proposed project also generally builds on a Conservancy grant of \$527,060 (2004) for

GGNPC's Trails Forever initiative for Coastal Trail signage and a \$60,000 Hands On grant (2007) for Presidio Trails Projects. Additionally, the Conservancy has supported the development of the Coastal Trail throughout the GGNRA, with grants in 2003 to plan and construct the Coastal Trail at Mori Point, and a grant in 2007 to complete the Land's End Coastal Trail.

The vision for the Bay Area Ridge Trail is a 550-mile trail that rings San Francisco Bay high on the ridgeline and serves hikers, mountain bicyclists and equestrians. Under the leadership of the Conservancy and the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (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. Previously, the Conservancy has supported the development of the Ridge Trail in the GGNRA through a 2008 grant for improvements along Dias Ridge in Marin County.

Finally, as part of Bay Trail and other Bay Area authorizations, the Conservancy has provided funding for trail and visitor improvements near the Golden Gate Bridge, including trail work at Battery East in 2004 and landscape improvements at the Bridge visitor plaza in 2008.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$650,000
Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy	401,500
S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation	300,000
Trails Forever – Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund and private donor matching funds	3,277,500
Federal Highway Administration	<u>775,000</u>
Total Project Costs	\$5,404,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for this grant is the fiscal year 2009/10 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). Proposition 84 funds may be used for the purposes of promoting access to and enjoyment of the urban open space resources in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation. (Pub. Res. Code §§ 75060(c), 31162(a)). Consistent with the purposes of Proposition 84, the proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program (Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code), as described below.

Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 provides that the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program give priority to projects with matching funds. (Pub. Res. Code §31163(c)). The GGNPC has raised very significant levels of private and federal matching funds, and expects to contribute approximately \$135,000 in additional in-kind staff services through its partnerships with National Parks Service and Presidio Trust staff and volunteers.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program enabling legislation codified at Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31160 to 31165). That chapter directs the Conservancy to address the resource and recreational goals of the nine Bay Area counties in a "coordinated, comprehensive, and effective way."

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 bay, coast, ridgetops, and urban open spaces, 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 further the development of the Coastal Trail and Ridge Trail within the GGNRA in San Francisco, one of the nine Bay Area counties.

Consistent with Section 31163(a), the Conservancy cooperates with nonprofit and other organizations in identifying and adopting long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay Area. *Completing the California Coastal Trail*, developed by the Conservancy in 2003 with the participation of regional partners, lays out priorities for completion of the trail along the San Francisco shoreline. Completion of the Ridge Trail is identified in (1) *The San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program Regional Needs Briefing Book* (Bay Area Open Space Council, July 1999) and (2) *400 Miles and Beyond: A Strategic Plan for Completing the Bay Area Ridge Trail* (BARTC, Draft 2006).

The proposed project satisfies the criteria for determining project priorities under Section 31163(c) in the following respects:

- 1) The project is consistent with approved plans including:
 - a) *Completing the California Coastal Trail*, the Conservancy's guiding document for the Coastal Trail, prepared in 2003;
 - b) The NPS and Presidio Trust's *Presidio Trails and Bikeways Master Plan and Environmental Assessment*, adopted in July 2003, as well as the Presidio's General Plan Amendment and Presidio Trust Management Plan;
 - c) The Ridge Trail alignment that has been adopted by the BARTC; and
 - d) Plans by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials for the U.S. Bicycle Route System.
- 2) The Coastal Trail and Ridge Trail are each multijurisdictional resources that serve a regional constituency;
- 3) The project can be implemented in a timely way as the grantee is prepared to begin work upon project approval;
- 4) The construction of the Coastal Trail and Ridge Trail through lands managed by the NPS and Presidio Trust provides an opportunity for benefits that could be lost if recreational uses of the properties were developed without Conservancy funding; and
- 5) The project includes significant matching contributions from GGNPC and its partners.

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

Consistent with **Goal #1, Objective D** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, which seeks to construct approximately 93 miles of the Coastal Trail within public and private ownerships, the proposed project will create .85 miles of the Coastal Trail.

Consistent with **Goal #11, Objective G** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, which seeks to develop an additional 30 miles of the Ridge Trail, the proposed project will create .7 miles of the Ridge Trail.

Consistent with **Goal #11, Objective L** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, which seeks to include ADA-compliant elements into approximately 25 projects, the proposed project will improve both the Coastal Trail and Ridge Trail to federal AGODA standards.

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:** In addition to project partners at the NPS and Presidio Trust, the project is supported by a number of agencies and elected officials, including Fiona Ma (12th Assembly District), Leland Yee (8th Senate District), and Nancy Pelosi (8th Congressional District), the San Francisco Bay Trail Project/Association of Bay Area Governments, BARTC, the San Francisco and Marin Bicycle Coalitions and the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District. The project is also supported by a number of private philanthropic organizations including the Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, and the 14,000 members of the GGNPC. Residents and visitors alike support the project's public benefits, including enhanced opportunities for active recreation and trail system connections to some of American's most iconic features and urban parks, including the Golden Gate Bridge. See Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is in the City and County of San Francisco, within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
5. **Need:** Conservancy funding is needed to enable GGNPC to implement this trail construction project in a timely manner. No other source of funding currently available can allow the project to move forward quickly.

6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Coastal Trail and Ridge Trail are truly regional attractions. The Coastal Trail, when complete, will stretch nearly 1,300 miles along the length of California from Mexico to the Oregon border. The 550-mile Ridge Trail network offers spectacular views of the Bay Area and links many parklands and open space preserves. In addition, the linkages in this area between the Coastal, Ridge and San Francisco Bay Trails will result in an extensive trail network of regional importance, and the connection of the Ridge Trail to the Rob Hill Campground will allow access to the coast for nearly 4,000 underserved youth who camp there annually through programs sponsored by the Presidio.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project is located at elevations well above predicted sea level rise over the next century; however small areas of the proposed Presidio Coastal Trail alignment do run near the current edge of coastal bluffs that may be subject to future coastal erosion as a result of sea level rise. GGNPC and the NPS have engaged in extensive coastal geological reconnaissance and performed robust engineering of these areas to ensure the longevity of these improvements. GGNPC will complete the revegetation of the project area with the appropriate native plant palette, which will serve to help mitigate the severity of any such coastal erosion in the vicinity of the project site. Ongoing maintenance of the project area will be accomplished by the park's ongoing, active stewardship program in cooperation with the Presidio Trust, the NPS and volunteers from the broader community. In the event that significant bluff erosion does occur in these areas in the future, it would necessitate relocation inland of adjacent Lincoln Boulevard; relocation of the Coastal Trail would likely occur in concert with this work.

Additional Criteria

8. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
9. **Readiness:** The GGNPC is prepared to start construction immediately upon approval.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See "Project History" above.
11. **Cooperation:** The San Francisco Bay Area Program of the Conservancy has been working cooperatively with BARTC, GGNPC, NPS and the Presidio Trust to identify trail improvements will best serve the regional constituency for the Coastal and Ridge Trails. The GGNPC's extensive network of private partners has been instrumental in advancing the project to this point.
12. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The GGNRA's Climate Change Action Plan (2006) notes that the majority of the Park's emissions are due to visitors and the vehicle miles they travel. Enhancing trail and bicycle access to park destinations and transit connections is an important part of the strategy to reduce these emissions. The proposed project provides improved pedestrian and bicycle access within the Presidio, centralizes parking in the area, directly links to the PresidiGo transit system, and is in close proximity to the transit center at the Golden Gate Bridge Toll Plaza. The proposed project supports the sustainability goals of a host of regional, local and agency climate change and transportation plans, including: City and County of San Francisco's "Transit First Policy" (2005); San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency's 2001-2012 Strategic Plan; the Climate Action Plan for San Francisco (2004), the Presidio Trust Management Plan (2002); Metropolitan Transportation Commission's Regional Bicycle Plan (2009) and Long-Range Plan

“Transportation 2035” (2009); GGNRA’s Climate Change Action Plan (2008); and the NPS Pacific West Region Vision for Climate Change.

In addition, construction contract language for the Presidio Coastal Trail and Rob Hill Ridge Trail Connector include provisions to encourage the contractor to reduce vehicle miles traveled by employees and in hauling materials and waste, use low carbon fuels, maintain engines, and strictly limit unnecessary idling. Effort has gone into securing project materials re-used from other nearby projects (such as sand excavated for the Doyle Drive tunnel) or from local suppliers and to using recycled content whenever feasible. In addition, the pairing of the Rob Hill Ridge Trail Connector with the Coastal Trail will help minimize the need for equipment mobilization and demobilization, thereby reducing emissions.

CONSISTENCY WITH SAN FRANCISCO BAY PLAN:

The San Francisco Bay Plan’s policies (as last amended in June 2006 and reprinted in February 2008) regarding the GGNRA and the Presidio (while not directly addressing the Coastal Trail, which is generally outside the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission), support the development of networks of recreational trails in concert with the natural and historic elements of the parks. In particular, the recreation policies of Part IV of the plan designate completion of the Bay Area Ridge Trail as a priority for the region, noting “in a few locations, such as The Presidio of San Francisco and Fort Baker, shoreline parks can include links in the Bay Area Ridge Trail system.” (Finding 1. on page 51.) In addition, the Central Bay North plan map notes concerning the Presidio emphasize the management of the area for open space and water-oriented recreation in concert with the GGNRA and Presidio Trust’s general management plans.

COMPLIANCE WITH NEPA AND CEQA:

The Conservancy is the first state agency to be involved with the project, therefore the first to consider the project’s impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). However, the federal agencies have given careful consideration to the project under the National Environmental Policy Act, finding no significant impacts. In 2003 the NPS and Presidio Trust completed the *Presidio Trails and Bikeways Master Plan and Environmental Assessment* (Master Plan/EA) to both lay out a comprehensive vision for future recreational use of the former military site and to assess the environmental effects of potential alternatives pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Through detailed technical analysis, public input and revision, the Master Plan/EA selected a comprehensive plan that emphasized a mix of urban and natural visitor experiences, providing the widest range of trail types and connections for visitors. The Master Plan/EA both identified environmental benefits to implementing the plan in the realms of native revegetation, reduction of social trail use impacts, reductions in vehicle use and scenic improvements, and identified only temporary or limited long-term impacts to hydrologic, biological, and cultural resources, and only temporary traffic, visual, air quality and noise impacts as a result of the plan (Exhibit 4). It therefore determined that none of the alternatives would impair NPS resources or values. The document also incorporated trail design guidelines, best management practices, vegetation management strategies, and minimization and compensatory measures that frame implementation of projects under the plan.

Plan concepts were vetted by the public at numerous public forums in late 2002 and early 2003, and the Master Plan/EA was circulated for public input from November 2002 to February 2003. Modifications as a result of public comment were made at GGNRA and Presidio Trust public meetings in May and June 2003, resulting in the adoption of a Finding of No Significant Impact for the plan.

In the subsequent development of the Coastal Trail and Ridge Trail projects considered here, the National Park Service and Presidio Trust have evaluated the specific elements of each project and determined their consistency with the Master Plan/EA. Categorical Exclusions were developed and approved for the roadway and overlook improvements associated with the project in September 2010 and April 2011, respectively; for the northern and central sections of the Coastal Trail (including the specific improvements proposed for funding here) in May 2011; and for the Rob Hill Ridge Trail Connector in early September 2011. All elements of the work considered for Conservancy funding have therefore been determined to be consistent with the Master Plan/EA, and to result in no significant impacts to the resources considered in the plan.

CEQA requires consideration of potential environmental effects of state agency actions and approvals, unless exempt. The new trail alignment portions of the Presidio Coastal Trail and Rob Hill Ridge Trail Connector proposed for funding by the Conservancy (specifically, along the length of Lincoln Blvd. and from the intersection of Washington and Kobbe to the Rob Hill Campground) are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15304, as they involve only minor alterations to land.

The portions of the Presidio Coastal Trail and Rob Hill Ridge Trail Connector that are upgrades to existing road bed or trail alignments (specifically, those running along the Batteries past Langdon Court to the "Triangle," and the stretch along Washington Boulevard from Lincoln to Kobbe) are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15301 as they involve minor alteration of existing structures, facilities and topographical features involving negligible or no expansion of use.

Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.