

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
November 10, 2011

**PEDRO POINT COASTAL TRAIL ACQUISITION**

Project No. 11-053-01  
Project Manager: Janet Diehl

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Disbursement of up to \$250,000 to the City of Pacifica to acquire the six-acre Tronoff parcel at the Pedro Point Headlands just south of Pacifica in San Mateo County, for the California Coastal Trail.

**LOCATION:** Just south of the City of Pacifica, San Mateo County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

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

Exhibit 2: [Site Photographs](#)

Exhibit 3: [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 disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) to the City of Pacifica (“the City”) for the purpose of acquiring real property known as the “Tronoff Property” (San Mateo County Assessor Parcel Number 023-074-030), consisting of approximately six acres, for open space protection and public access. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of Conservancy funds for acquisition of the Tronoff Property (“property”), the City shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (“the Executive Officer”):
  - a. All relevant acquisition documents, including, without limitation, the appraisal, purchase agreement, escrow instructions, environmental assessment, and title report.
  - b. Evidence that sufficient funds are available to complete the acquisition.
2. The City shall pay no more than fair market value for the property, as approved by the Conservancy, based on an appraisal of the property.

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3. The City shall permanently dedicate the property for open space protection and public access through an instrument approved by the Executive Officer.
4. Conservancy funding shall be acknowledged by erecting and maintaining a sign on the property or in a nearby public staging area, the design and location of which to be approved by the Executive Officer.
5. Within one year of acquisition of the property, the City shall install California Coastal Trail emblems provided by the Conservancy on all properties within its jurisdiction that are deemed by the Conservancy to be existing segments of the California Coastal Trail. Emblem locations shall be determined by the City in consultation with 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.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21(Sections 31400-31410) of the Public Resources Code, regarding the establishment of a system of public accessways to and along the California Coast.
3. The proposed project serves more than local needs.”

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The proposed project will provide a \$250,000 grant to the City of Pacifica (“the City”) to purchase and preserve the six-acre Tronoff property at the Pedro Point Headlands, just south of Pacifica (Exhibits 1 and 2). This purchase will take the City one step closer to closing the gap between the existing California Coastal Trail in Pacifica and publicly owned land at the Pedro Point Headlands, which was acquired by the Conservancy. The ultimate goal is to acquire the underlying property to enable the construction of more than a mile of the Coastal Trail on the Headlands property.

This trail will provide two benefits to the public:

- access to the spectacular 246-acre Pedro Point Headlands property owned by the Coastal Conservancy and the City of Pacifica; and
- direct connection to the cliff-hugging section of Coastal Trail that will be created from Highway One when the Devil’s Slide tunnel project is completed in 2013.

Protection of the Pedro Point Headlands has been a priority of residents, nonprofit organizations and agencies for decades. The Conservancy joined other agencies in granting acquisition funds twenty years ago, resulting in the permanent protection of much of the Headlands. Public enjoyment of this protected land has been limited, however, by the fact that there is no safe and legal way for the public to get there. The Tronoff Property and an adjacent private parcel at the Headlands have presented a barrier to building the safest and most logical public entryway to a trail that would connect the City to the portion of the publicly preserved Headlands.

This past summer, the City began to negotiate separate purchase agreements with the owners of

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these two private parcels. At the same time, the City applied for and received a grant from the San Mateo County Transportation Authority of \$360,000 for these acquisitions. The City successfully concluded negotiations with the Tronoff family, on the condition that the City would buy the Tronoff property by the end of the year. Negotiations with the second landowner are ongoing and the City has secured the funding to complete the acquisition as soon as agreement is reached.

With the proposed Conservancy grant plus \$50,000 from its own funds, the City will be able to acquire the Tronoff property in a matter of months. Conservancy funds will go toward the acquisition of the Tronoff Property, which was appraised at \$300,000. Conservancy staff has reviewed and approved this appraisal.

When both properties are in public ownership, the network of private organizations and public agencies that work in the area will pursue various funding sources for construction of the trail. The acquisition of these two private parcels is the cornerstone to the future recreational opportunities that will evolve as the Devil's Slide tunnel is completed and the current Highway 1 alignment becomes a major bike and hiking attraction. Closing this gap in the trail corridor will greatly expand the public recreational opportunities on the properties owned by the Conservancy and the City at Pedro Point Headlands. The City and the Conservancy are working with the National Park Service (NPS) to transfer the properties to NPS ownership to become part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA). In anticipation of this future transfer, the GGRNA boundaries were expanded in 2005 to include Pedro Point. When completed, the project is likely to draw visitors from all over the world.

**Site Description:** The Pedro Point Headlands is a large promontory located at the southern edge of the City of Pacifica, 15 miles south of San Francisco. While a small portion of Pedro Point is developed with houses, the Conservancy owns approximately 98 acres as permanently protected open space, and the City of Pacifica owns another 148 acres.

The land rises almost vertically from the ocean to a height of 625 feet, where the bluff-tops provide a spectacular view of the coastline north to Point Reyes, south to Devil's Slide, and east to Montara Mountain and the Santa Cruz Mountains. The only level land on the 246 acres owned by the Conservancy and the City is found at the top of the ridgelines and the floor of the main valley. Informal trails run along these level areas and down through the valley, connecting to the trail that runs parallel to Highway One and leads to the Tronoff Property.

The Tronoff Property is bordered by the Conservancy's property to the south and west and by Highway 1 to the east. To the north lies the other "gap in the trail" private property.

An existing informal six-foot-wide trail runs through the Tronoff Property and connects this property to the properties owned by the Conservancy and the other private party. The Coastal Trail alignment would utilize this existing informal trail. The trail would require little if any improvement where it traverses the Tronoff Property.

When the Coastal Trail is completed through the Tronoff property and the remaining private property, it will connect seven miles of existing Coastal Trail segments in Pacifica to 1.2 miles of Coastal Trail to be opened in 2013 at Devil's Slide (see "Project Description," above). Other protected lands nearby include the Sweeney Ridge and Mori Point units of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the 18-hole public Sharp Park Golf Course owned by the City of San Francisco, and Pacifica State Beach.

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Covered with eucalyptus trees, pine trees and shrubs, the 6.14-acre Tronoff Property slopes upward from Highway 1, and is quite steep in some areas. Under the jurisdiction of the County of San Mateo, the area's zoning generally allows for single family residences on properties of this size.

The Pedro Point residential neighborhood climbs the slopes of San Pedro Mountain on the west side of Highway 1. One-of-a-kind homes have been built there on impossibly narrow and steep streets. Twisted cypress and Monterey pine cling to the hillsides. At the foot of the coastal side of the mountain, hidden from view to all but walkers, is a tiny village called Shelter Cove. Civilization is not far, however. Just north of the Tronoff Property, San Pedro Terrace Road supports some mixed commercial uses, and the Linda Mar Boulevard shopping mall is just a half mile to the north, across Highway One.

Aside from its recreational value, the Tronoff Property provides habitat that supports the health of local coastal plant and animal species. Its usefulness as wildlife habitat is enhanced by its proximity to other open spaces and protected lands. The Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals Project rates the Pedro Point Headlands as an "area essential to the Conservation Goals" of the Santa Cruz Mountains North landscape unit. The lands owned by the Conservancy and the City host healthy communities of native vegetation, including areas of reed-grass prairie, which has been identified by the California Department of Fish and Game as a rare plant community type. The proposed Coastal Trail segment on the Tronoff Property is not near this plant community.

**Project History:** Ever since the Conservancy and the City acquired 246 acres at the Pedro Point Headlands in the early 1990s, the need to connect these public lands to the Coastal Trail to the north has been obvious. Although several efforts were made over the years to acquire trail easements over the two private "gap" properties, they were unsuccessful. Recently, the City resumed negotiations with both owners, offering to purchase fee title to their properties. The Tronoffs agreed, on the condition that the sale will be completed by year's end.

The successful conclusion of both acquisitions will conclude decades of effort on the part of the local community, regional land trusts, state agencies and the National Park Service to preserve the Pedro Point Headlands and make the lands accessible to the public. The effort began in 1989, when the Conservancy, the Trust for Public Land and the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) provided technical assistance to Pacifica residents in establishing a local land conservation organization, the Pacifica Land Trust. The Land Trust immediately turned its attention to the 246-acre Pedro Point Headlands property, which was threatened at the time with a subdivision plan for 217 units.

With the assistance of POST, the Pacifica Land Trust reached agreement with the owners of the Pedro Point property on a phased acquisition plan. In August 1992, the Conservancy granted the City of Pacifica funds for the acquisition of Parcel 1 for the purpose of public access, and authorized the Conservancy to act as co-optionee with the Land Trust for a purchase option for Parcel 2. In 1995, the Conservancy provided funds to match a federal grant, and acquired Parcel 2 for the same purpose – public access.

Since then, two obstacles have faced the development of a public park at Pedro Point: How will the public safely access the property, and who will manage it? Access to the Conservancy's and City's land is currently gained through a dirt road that turns off of Highway One with unsafe sightlines – clearly a better way had to be developed. As for management, the words that were written in a staff report to the Conservancy in 1995 ring true 16 years later: "While there is

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almost universal consensus that the property is of great significance for its great beauty, resource and open space value and location near a major metropolitan area, it has been difficult in a period of economic stagnation and government revenue decline to secure a government entity that is willing and able to accept new management responsibilities.”

When the boundaries of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) were expanded in 2005 to include Pedro Point, the National Park Service became able to consider accepting the Conservancy- and City-owned parcels as an addition to its spectacular holdings. Since then, National Park Service staff has expressed interest in accepting the properties, but only after the issue of safe public access is resolved. The acquisition of the “gap” properties will solve this problem, and will open the path to inclusion of the Headlands in the GGNRA.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

Tronoff Property:

Coastal Conservancy	\$250,000.00
City of Pacifica	<u>50,000.00</u>

Total Tronoff Property Costs:	\$300,000.00
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Grant funds secured for final “gap” property:

San Mateo County Transportation Authority	\$360,000.00
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<b>Total Project Costs</b>	<b>\$660,000.00</b>
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The anticipated source of funds for this acquisition project of the Tronoff Property is the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, Public Resources Code section 75001 *et seq.* (“Proposition 84”) for state-wide acquisitions, which can be used for the acquisition and protection of land and water resources consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Section 75060(c) of the Public Resources Code specifically allocates Conservancy funding for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program (SFBAC) pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of Division 21, and specifies that at least 20% of that funding be expended on projects in watersheds draining directly to the Pacific Ocean. The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, as discussed in the “Consistency with Conservancy’s enabling legislation” section below and is within an ocean draining watershed within the region of the SFBAC. The proposed authorization is thus consistent with the funding requirements of Proposition 84.

Consistent with Proposition 84 requirements, in evaluating proposed projects that involve acquisition for the purpose of natural resource protection, Conservancy staff gave priority to this project because it demonstrates the following characteristics: (1) The property is adjacent to an existing protected area owned by the state on behalf of the Conservancy, and will provide a link ensuring habitat, open space, scenic and recreation connections on the San Mateo County coast

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(see Public Resources Code Section 75071(a)); and (2) The project includes a non-state matching contribution toward the acquisition costs (see Public Resources Code Section 75071(e)).

As required by Section 75071(f), Conservancy staff has submitted to the Natural Resources Agency and has posted on the Conservancy's website an explanation as to how the proposed acquisition meets the criteria for Proposition 84 funding.

**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 31400-31410), regarding public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. 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. Consistent with this section, the Conservancy's grant will help to fill a gap in the Coastal Trail.

Section 31400.1 allows the Conservancy to award grants to a public agency for acquisition and development of lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. The proposed grant is consistent with this section because it would improve access along the coast to an area that is visited by a large number of people from the region and beyond.

Section 31400.2 allows the Conservancy to provide up to the total cost of an acquisition by a public agency. Consistent with this section, Conservancy staff has considered a number of factors in determining the amount of funding for the proposed project. The proposed level of funding was evaluated relative to the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal public accessway projects, the limited fiscal resources of the applicant, and the project selection criteria discussed below. The proposed grant is consistent with this section because a significant match to Conservancy funds would be provided by the San Mateo County Transportation Authority in addition to funds provided by the City.

Section 31400.3 states that the Conservancy may assist public agencies in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The proposed project will further these goals by acquiring property that ultimately will enable the construction of more than a mile of the California Coastal Trail.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective G**, the proposed project will result in the acquisition and permanent protection by a public agency of a six-acre coastal parcel to facilitate the development of the Coastal Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective C**, the proposed project will result in the opening of a coastal area that is currently inaccessible to the public.

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective C**, the proposed project will result in the acquisition and permanent protection of property that will increase lands accessible to the public.

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### **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 has broad public support, as shown by the letters attached to this recommendation as Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of unincorporated San Mateo County.
5. **Need:** Without funding from the Conservancy, the City would not be able to acquire and permanently protect this property, and construction of a mile-long segment of the Coastal Trail linking Pacifica to Devil's Slide would not be possible.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed project has exceptional regional significance, as it could lead to the addition of the Pedro Point Headlands to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. It is a cornerstone to the future recreational opportunities that will evolve as the Devil's Slide tunnel is completed and the current Highway One alignment becomes an attraction of national renown.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The property proposed for acquisition is not vulnerable to sea level rise, as it is located on the inland side of the Pedro Point Headlands, which rise to 625 feet above sea level.

#### **Additional Criteria**

8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** This project will offer opportunities to fill a gap in the Coastal Trail and will make possible future inclusion of the Pedro Point Headlands in the GGNRA.
9. **Leverage:** Conservancy funds will be leveraged with local funding sources. See the "Project Financing" section above.
10. **Readiness:** If the Conservancy approves the proposed grant, the City will be ready to close the acquisition by year-end.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** Acquisition of the Tronoff Property will help to meet the Conservancy's state-wide goal of filling the gaps in the California Coastal Trail. By helping to close a gap in the Coastal Trail in the City of Pacifica, the proposed project also will realize the public access goals of the grants made by the Conservancy in 1992 and 1995 for public acquisition of the bulk of the Headlands property.
12. **Cooperation:** This project is the result of cooperation among the private sector, local and federal agencies and the Conservancy. The local nonprofit Pacifica Land

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Trust has provided volunteer stewardship of the adjacent publicly owned properties on Pedro Point Headlands. The City will assume management responsibilities once the property is acquired.

13. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The proposed acquisition project will not result in the production of greenhouse gas emissions. Because the property is near its current holdings at Pedro Point, City staff will not have to make additional vehicle trips to manage and maintain the property.

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

The proposed project is consistent with the Local Coastal Land Use Section of the City of Pacifica's Local Coastal Program, which specifically addresses the Pedro Point Headlands on pages C-49-53: "Because of its value as a vista point, importance to coastal views, value as a recreation area and susceptibility to erosion, this area is designated as a Special Area and is a high priority for public acquisition. This acquisition should be actively pursued." The Plan also makes special note of the importance of the City's north-south pedestrian and bicycle pathway systems and proposes that the pedestrian pathway be separated from Highway 1. The proposed project will facilitate the construction of a trail that will separate pedestrians from Highway 1 and will allow them access to protected lands at Pedro Point.

The proposed project also is consistent with the San Mateo County 2001 Trails Plan, which identifies the California Coastal Trail as a Regional Trail route to connect numerous state and county parks and beaches along the coast.

### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed acquisition of the Tronoff Property is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15316 as a transfer of land in order to establish a park and Section 15325 as a transfer of ownership of interests in land in order to preserve open space for park purposes. The proposed use of the Tronoff Property after acquisition for a public access trail is categorically exempt under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Sections 15302, operation or minor alteration of existing public or private facilities including existing pedestrian trails, 15304 minor alterations in the condition of land not involving removal of mature trees, and 15311, accessory structures, providing for on-premise signs for public access and/or designation of the coastal trail. Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the proposed project.