

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
March 29, 2012

**ALBANY BEACH
DESIGN**

File No. 03-028-04
Project Manager: Tom Gandesbery

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$150,000 to the East Bay Regional Park District to undertake design, permit applications, and environmental analysis for improvements to parking, bay trail access and restoration at the Albany Beach of Eastshore State Park, Alameda County.

LOCATION: Eastshore State Park, City of Albany, Alameda County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Project Maps](#)

Exhibit 3: [Memo from Bay Conservation and Development Commission](#)

Exhibit 4: [Letter from Department of State Parks and Recreation](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31111 and 31160-31165, of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of \$150,000 (one hundred fifty thousand dollars) to East Bay Regional Park District (“District”) to complete design, permit applications and environmental analysis for improvements and restoration at Albany Beach, Alameda County, subject to the following condition:

Prior to disbursement of any funds under this authorization, the District shall submit the following for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

1. A detailed work plan for the project components, including a final budget and schedule.
 2. The names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained to carry out the project components.
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3. Evidence that the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission has found that the project qualifies for funding from the California Department of Transportation mitigation fund held by 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 Section 31111, regarding feasibility and planning studies, and 31160-31165 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the enhancement and restoration of wetlands and adjacent uplands in the San Francisco Bay Area.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The East Bay Regional Park District (District) proposes to undertake completion of analysis under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for two phases of the Albany Beach Project (the Project), including development of the San Francisco Bay Trail between Gilman Street. and Buchanan Street, and to develop plans and specifications and permit applications to construct the first phase of the project. The goal of this work is to advance implementation of the *Eastshore State Park General Plan* at Albany Beach and to protect water quality in San Francisco Bay. Albany Beach Phase I construction could begin in 2013 assuming no delays in obtaining permits or funding. Timing for construction of Phase II and the Bay Trail extension could follow thereafter, pending funding availability and acquisition of required property rights from the adjacent landowner Golden Gate Fields. The District is actively seeking to obtain these property rights through an eminent domain proceeding. On April 5, 2011 the District’s Board of Directors approved a resolution of need and necessity for the acquisition of fee interest in a 2.8± acre portion of the adjacent property, as well as a 4.88± acre public trail easement.

Site Description: Albany Beach is located at Eastshore State Park in the City of Albany. The project area is approximately five acres, bounded by the Albany Peninsula, Golden Gate Fields and San Francisco Bay. The Albany Beach is a recently accreted sand beach approximately 580 feet in length and located immediately west of the Golden Gate Fields horse racing track and immediately south of the “Albany Bulb”, a former municipal landfill now open to the public as an open space park (Exhibit 2). The beach is an artifact of man-made fill of the shoreline; however, the dunes located on the beach may be similar to dune systems that once were present along other parts of the San Francisco Bay shoreline. Recent work by scientists at other beach sites has brought to light the scarcity of this bay dune habitat and a recognition that the San Francisco Bay lost virtually all of its original dune habitat as a result of filling and wetland reclamation. These remnant artifact or “pocket” beaches may have importance for native plants, some of which are rare and endangered, for example, sea blight (*Sueda californica*) and could be reestablished at this location, as the District did at the Emeryville location within the Park.

Project Description:

The Albany Beach Restoration and Public Access Feasibility Study (Feasibility Study) was completed in April 2011 with assistance from the Conservancy which funded \$100,000 of the \$200,000 study using mitigation funds from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). The Feasibility Study analyzed the feasibility of implementing restoration and public access improvements identified in the *Eastshore State Park General Plan* (2002). As part of the Feasibility Study for the beach, the District held seven public meetings, including two community workshops. A project description for implementation was developed in the implementation approach section of the Feasibility Study.

Due to the immediate need to stabilize the eroding landfill cap along South Albany Neck, and the fact that the District has not yet secured property rights adjacent to the beach, the Project is being developed in two phases. Phasing of improvements is summarized as follows:

Phase I: South Albany Neck

1. Stabilize and enhance South Albany Neck shoreline.
2. Repair surface of existing lower trail at South Albany Neck for proper drainage and accessibility.
3. Re-vegetate slope below lower trail with appropriate native vegetation.
4. Provide structures for sub-tidal habitat enhancement.
5. Improve trail access to north end of Albany Beach.
6. Grade area near Eucalyptus grove for future picnic area.
7. Thin and remove hazardous trees and control weeds.

Phase II: Beach Area

1. Construct a small parking lot with a non-motorized watercraft staging area near the south end of Albany Beach.
2. Provide a beach access ramp for pedestrians and non-motorized water craft access at the south end of Albany Beach.
3. Provide a vault-type restroom, bicycle racks, park signage, interpretive exhibits and landscaping near the new parking lot.
4. Construct a trail adjacent to Albany Beach for future extension of the Bay Trail.
5. Place sand on the beach and dunes to help support a broad low-profile beach, support existing and expanded dune features and adapt to anticipated sea level rise.
6. Plant dunes and wetlands with appropriate native vegetation.
7. Install a picnic facility near Eucalyptus Grove.

The District is well qualified to undertake the Project as it has experience restoring a broad range of different habitat types within its extensive park system. The District manages over 110,000 acres of land in 65 parks in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, and has been the recipient of numerous Conservancy grants, for work in Eastshore State Park as well as at other parks it manages.

The *Eastshore State Park General Plan*, completed in 2002, identifies a number of habitat restoration and public access improvements for Albany Beach. Restoration of the beach would

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include enhancement of the existing beach and sand dunes. Debris would be removed from the beach and native dune vegetation would be planted to stabilize the upper beach and dunes. Public access to the beach and water would be provided by installation of new walkways and fencing that would provide access to the beach, including access for persons with disabilities, while minimizing impacts to the dunes. Interpretive exhibits, picnic facilities, restrooms and a staging area could also be provided.

The Albany Beach project will be implemented in phases as funds become available. Possible sources of implementation funding are Caltrans mitigation funds, District funds and potentially Cosco-Busan (oil spill) funds.

Project History:

On September 24, 2009, the Conservancy granted \$100,000 of Caltrans mitigation funds to the District for developing a Feasibility Study for Albany Beach area, completed in April 2011 and analyzed the feasibility of implementing restoration and public access improvements identified in the *Eastshore State Park General Plan*. A project description for implementation was developed in the implementation approach section of the Feasibility Study.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$150,000
District	<u>265,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$415,000

The Conservancy holds, in its Coastal Trust Fund, mitigation funding set aside for the Eastshore State Park and other east shore areas. The funding for this project is from a permit condition in approvals issued by the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) for work undertaken by Caltrans on the nearby Interstate 80 freeway under BCDC Permit 11-93. This project would likely utilize funds identified in BCDC permits for habitat restoration and access improvements within the Park. These funds were deposited with the Conservancy pursuant to Interagency Agreement No. SFBC 05-14 with BCDC. BCDC staff has determined that this proposed project is consistent with the terms of the BCDC permit (Exhibit 3).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding resource enhancement because the District will prepare an environmental analysis of the Project, plans and permit applications for protecting and restoring habitat and making public access improvements.

Under §31162(a), the Conservancy may award grants that will “improve public access to and around the bay, coast, ridge tops, and urban open spaces . . . through completion . . . of regional bay, coast, and ridge trail systems. . .”. The proposed project, as part of the Park, will enhance public access to and along San Francisco Bay. Under §31162(b), the Conservancy may act to "protect, restore, and enhance natural habitats and connecting corridors, watersheds, scenic areas and other open-space resources of regional importance.” The proposed planning will further

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develop the eight miles of shoreline within the Park for public access as well as habitat preservation. The Park serves residents of at least five cities as well as visitors to the region. Thus, the Project will help protect and enhance the existing regionally significant open space that is within the Park. Furthermore, under §31162(d), the Conservancy may “promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes.” Located in five highly urbanized cities and next to a major interstate freeway and the San Francisco Bay Trail, this Park is one of the most accessible urban state parks.

The proposed project also satisfies each of the five criteria for determining project priority under §31163(c) in the following respects: (1) the planning and restoration is consistent with the Eastshore State Park General Plan, East Bay Regional Park District’s 1997 Master Plan, the San Francisco Bay Plan, and the City of Albany’s land use plans; (2) the project serves a regional need; (3) the project will be implemented in a timely manner; (4) not restoring Albany Beach would result in the loss of a significant conservation and public recreational opportunity; and (5) matching funds from the District, as the grantee, are approved.

The proposed project is also consistent with Section 31111 regarding grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies for planning and feasibility studies to achieve the purposes of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.

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

Consistent with **Goal 10, Objective 10B** of the Conservancy’s 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in a design and permits for a project that restores and enhances an acre or less of wetlands including tidal and sub-tidal habitats.

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective 11A**, of the Conservancy’s 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in design and permits of new recreational facilities, in this case a new picnic and staging area for non motorized boating, an enlarged parking area and interpretive signs.

Consistent with **Goal 11 Objective 11D**, of the Conservancy’s 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in design and permits for approximately 5,000 linear feet of new Bay Trail.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines 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.

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3. **Support of the public:** The creation and enhancement of the Eastshore State Park had the support of many park planning participants as well as groups such as the Citizens for Eastshore Parks. The District has worked closely with many citizens groups to implement habitat restoration at the Albany Beach site. On May 4, 2011, the City of Albany City Council passed a resolution in support of the project. See “History” section above. The State Department of Parks and Recreation submitted a letter supporting the proposed project (Exhibit 4).
4. **Location:** The Project lies within the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay and within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, Alameda County.
5. **Need:** The existing funding stream for many District lands (local Measure CC) does not provide funds for Albany Beach. Measure WW, which was passed in 2008, does provide funds for acquisition and restoration but implementation of the Eastshore State Park General plan is expensive and beyond the District’s ability to solely fund. The District is also seeking funding for this project through the Cosco-Busan Natural Resource Damage Assessment. However, these funds will not be available for at least one to two years. Completion of this work will make the Project more competitive for Cosco-Busan funds and other funding sources.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** This planning and restoration effort will enhance a State Park that spans approximately eight miles of the San Francisco Bay shoreline and includes the cities of Oakland, Emeryville, Berkeley, Albany, and Richmond with an estimated combined population of well over 600,000. The Project will enable this Park to better serve local residents as well as potential millions of visitors per year. Located near major freeways and other transportation routes, this Park is one of the most accessible places in the Bay Area. In addition, the restoration techniques learned at this site could be used at other Bay beach and shoreline sites.
7. **Sea Level Rise Vulnerability:** Under this Project, the District will analyze the vulnerability of the site to rising sea levels. Those findings will be made public in the environmental document public review process under CEQA and also when that final environmental document is adopted for implementation of the project. In general, however, proposed improvements in this project have a life span of over 30 years and will be able to withstand and adjust to rising waters during this timeframe.

Additional Criteria

8. **Urgency:** Albany Beach is adjacent to the privately owned Albany Race Track. The District has been negotiating for some time to acquire a portion of the race track that would allow for expansion of Albany Beach and development of new public access facilities. Moving forward with the Project now will allow the District to implement the project in two phases, the second being contingent on the outcome of these negotiations.
9. **Resolution of more than one issue:** In this Project, the District plans to explore the potential to restore sensitive dune habitat in a way that integrates of public use of the beach.
10. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.

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11. **Innovation:** This project is likely to involve restoration in the shallow near-shore subsurface of San Francisco Bay. The District will consider constructing a “living shoreline” feature off shore in order to enhance rocky sub-tidal habitats. This feature has only been carried out in a few other places on the west coast, so, if successful, it could inform future projects.
12. **Readiness:** The District has allocated matching funds and is ready to proceed.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy Goals** See “Project History” above.

CONSISTENCY WITH SAN FRANCISCO BAY PLAN:

The proposed project is consistent with the policies contained in the San Francisco Bay Plan, adopted by BCDC in January 2006, and the policies of BCDC in that the Project will include the enhancement of intertidal and subtidal habitats (Fish, Other Aquatic Organisms and Wildlife Policy 1 and 2, Tidal Marshes and Tidal Flats Policy 4, Subtidal Areas Policy 3) and improvement of public access and recreational opportunities while minimizing potential impacts on wildlife (Public Access Policies 2, 4, and 12).

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The Project consists of planning and design work to be undertaken by the District and as such, is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262. The proposed authorization involves only planning and environmental review for possible future actions not yet authorized or funded and the planning will include consideration of environmental factors. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon Conservancy approval of this project.