

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
October 18, 2012

LITTLE RIVER COASTAL TRAIL CONCEPTUAL PLANS

Project No. 12-042-01
Project Manager: Peter Jarausch

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$90,000 to the Redwood Community Action Agency to prepare conceptual plans for a new section of California Coastal Trail from Little River State Beach to Scenic Drive in Humboldt County, CA.

LOCATION: Humboldt County, CA

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

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 an amount not to exceed ninety thousand dollars (\$90,000) to the Redwood Community Action Agency (RCAA) to prepare conceptual plans for a new section of California Coastal Trail from Little River State Beach to Scenic Drive in Humboldt County subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, the RCAA shall submit a work program, schedule and budget, and the names and qualifications of any contractors, 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 Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on November 10, 2011.

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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. RCAA is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501 (c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to \$90,000 to the Redwood Community Action Agency (RCAA) to prepare conceptual plans for a new section of California Coastal Trail (CCT) from Little River State Beach to Scenic Drive in Humboldt County, CA. Closing this gap in the CCT was identified as a priority project by the Conservancy funded *Humboldt County Coastal Trail Implementation Study (CCT Implementation Strategy)*, a county wide assessment of the CCT route completed in January of 2011 by RCAA. This CCT gap lies between the heavily used public beaches of Clam Beach/Little River State Beach to the south and Moonstone Beach to the north. Dividing those popular access points is the Little River. Bicyclists and pedestrians must use the Highway 101 bridge, which is a 4-lane highway with no specific accommodations for pedestrians or bicyclists. The only other alternative is to ford the Little River which can only be done on a limited basis during the dry season.

The proposed authorization would allow the Redwood Community Action Agency to work with local partners to choose a safe and cost effective route for this section of the CCT. Specifically RCAA will:

- 1) Identify a multi-purpose trail alignment from the south end of Scenic Drive to the Little River. The trail will likely traverse State Parks property, Caltrans right-of-way and a parcel currently owned by Green Diamond Resource Company, all willing partners in this effort.
- 2) Examine and select a preferred non-motorized crossing option for the Little River. Potential options include a cantilevered trail on the current Highway 101 Bridge, redesign of the current Highway 101 Bridge to include a barrier-separated facility, and a new non-motorized bridge.
- 3) Conduct an appraisal and other pre-acquisition activities for a parcel owned by the Green Diamond Resource Company (GDRC). The potential trail is entirely on public property with the exception of one parcel at the end of Scenic Drive. GDRC has been a willing partner in the collaborative effort to establish a trail connection through this area and has expressed willingness to sell the property for conservation and public access.
- 4) Collect public input and conduct additional outreach to interested parties. A public site visit will be conducted to gather comments from user groups, local Native American representatives, and the general public.
- 5) Provide a written feasibility study including costs estimates for the final design, construction, environmental compliance, and permitting of the trail.

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RCAA, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Humboldt County, is ideally suited to spearhead this project. Since 1982, the Natural Resources Division of RCAA has planned, designed and constructed public access trails and resource enhancement projects, developed interpretive and educational programs, and completed region-wide conservation and access studies. The RCAA is highly respected in Humboldt County and has worked extensively with the Conservancy, Humboldt County, local jurisdictions, state and federal entities and local stakeholders.

Site Description: The Little River divides Little River State Beach/Clam Beach on the south side of the river from Moonstone beach on the north side. Both areas are popular coastal access points. Clam Beach County Park and Little River State Beach offer opportunities for hiking and horseback riding, and have an extensive system of dunes. Clam Beach also offers seasonal vehicular access to the beach as well as camping, and is connected to the communities of McKinleyville and Arcata by the Hammond Coastal Trail, an existing section of California Coastal Trail. The California Department of Parks and Recreation also recently completed a section of CCT through Little River State Beach to the southern bank of the Little River.

On the northern bank of the Little River is Moonstone Beach County Park, a highly popular day use area for dog owners, hikers, and surfers who enjoy the dramatic near shore rocks and flat sandy beach. Access to Moonstone Beach from the City of Trinidad is along a low traffic road with stunning views of the coastline and the seastacks of the California Coastal National Monument.

Dividing those popular access points is the Little River. Bicyclists and pedestrians must use the Highway 101 bridge which is a 4-lane, highway with no specific accommodations for pedestrians or bicyclists. The only alternative is to ford the Little River which is done on a limited basis by experienced hikers during the dry season. The area is constrained by steep topography on the east side of the highway and wetlands to the west. There is no other public road that crosses the Little River.

Project History: The Little River Coastal Trail connection was identified as a priority project by previous planning efforts including the *CCT Implementation Strategy* funded by the Conservancy. The *CCT Implementation Strategy*, a collaboration between RCAA and local governments, recommended CCT alignments throughout Humboldt County, prioritized recommended trail segments, and provided assistance to local jurisdictions and organizations planning the CCT. The 2001 *Hammond Coastal Trail Extension Analysis: From Trinidad to Fortuna* (funded by the Conservancy and written by RCAA with input from local governments) also identified the need for a crossing, as did public comment for the *Humboldt County Regional Trails Master Plan* conducted by the Humboldt County Association of Governments in 2011.

In April 2012 an ad hoc ‘Little River Task Force’ comprised of State Parks, Green Diamond Redwood Company, Trinidad Coastal Land Trust, RCAA, Madrone Enterprises, County of Humboldt, Caltrans, and the Conservancy, began meeting again to determine the next steps for completing this section of CCT. Three objectives came out of that meeting that would move the project forward: 1) develop conceptual plans for the alignment; 2) assesses options for the crossing over the Little River; and 3) acquisition of the parcel owned by Green Diamond Resource Company. This proposed project addresses those three objectives.

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PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$90,000.00
Total Project Costs	\$90,000.00

The proposed source of Conservancy funds for this authorization is a 2010 appropriation to the Conservancy from Proposition 84, i.e., the “Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006,” Public Resources Code § 75001 et seq. These funds are available for Conservancy projects that promote access to and enjoyment of coastal resources and that are consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation at Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.

The project will promote access to and enjoyment of the coast by facilitating development of a new section of Coastal Trail. 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.

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the County of Humboldt, and Green Diamond Resource Company will be providing in-kind services valued at approximately \$23,000. Those services will include staff time dedicated to participating in the project and review of the proposed river crossing and trail alignment by all agencies. The proposed trail alignment will involve both the Caltrans right-of-way and property owned by State Parks.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 (Sections 31400 et seq.) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Section 31400 states the Legislature’s intent that the Conservancy have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state’s coastline. Section 31400.3 allows the Conservancy to provide such assistance as is required to aid nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of Division 21.

RCAA, which will carry out the proposed project, is a private non-profit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, having among its principal charitable purposes the conservation of land for scientific, educational, scenic, or open space opportunities. The proposed project is necessary to facilitate development of a new section of the CCT in Humboldt County. RCAA is unable to carry out the project without Conservancy funding. Accordingly, Conservancy funding of the proposed project is consistent with sections 31400 and 31400.3.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective A** this project will identify a specific alignment for a gap in the Coastal Trail for pedestrians and bicyclists.

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Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective C** of the Conservancy's 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will design a new section of Coastal Trail within public and private ownerships.

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 November 10, 2011, 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 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the coastal zone of Humboldt County, CA
5. **Need:** Conservancy funding is needed to do the initial planning and establish a preferred route for the CCT across the Little River. Without funding from the Conservancy, the proposed project will not be implemented, or will be delayed by several years.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed project will develop conceptual plans for a new section of CCT, a statewide objective. The proposed trail, when constructed, will benefit not only pedestrians but also cyclists traveling down the Pacific Coast Bicycle Route by providing a safer alternative to riding on the highway.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The conceptual plans will consider a range of sea level rise scenarios for the years 2050 and 2100 in order to assess vulnerability of the trail and proposed bridge and to increase their resiliency to sea level rise. Portions of the project area will be impacted by sea level rise, particularly during winter storm events combined with a high tide. However, sufficient area exists at about 14' in elevation on both sides of the Little River that any proposed bridge footings should be able to be constructed outside of the area impacted by even the 43 to 69 inch sea level rise predicted for the year 2100.

The project area is within a Tsunami Hazard Zone on maps provided by the California Emergency Management Agency and based on modeling which done by the University of Southern California. For more populated areas in Humboldt County the Redwood Coast Tsunami Work Group developed detailed maps based on paleohistoric seismic and historic data on northern coast of California, and historic records in Japan. The range of run-up on the open coast used by the Redwood Coast Tsunami Working Group was predicted to be between 3 and 35 meters depending on the event causing the tsunami. The smaller tsunamis have historically been more frequent, while the worst case 35 meter run up event, triggered by an earthquake on the Cascadia Subduction Zone with associated submarine landslide, would occur less frequently. Geologic evidence indicates that the largest tsunamis have occurred every 200 to 1,000 years with an average of about every 500 years. The most recent large event was in 1700 and it is difficult to predict exactly when the next one will occur.

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The project will be designed to account for the more frequent smaller tsunamis and if constructed, will provide an additional important evacuation route for visitors to Little River State Beach in the case of a larger event.

Additional Criteria

8. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
9. **Readiness:** The grantee and project partners are prepared to undertake this project. RCAA has an excellent record of completing projects in a timely fashion.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** “See “Project History” above.
11. **Cooperation:** Green Diamond Resource Company, the County of Humboldt, Caltrans, and State Parks are all committed to working on this project and moving it forward. See “Exhibit 4, Project Letters.”
12. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The proposed project involves feasibility and conceptual planning and design work. The designs completed through this grant will include measures to avoid or minimize greenhouse gas emissions to the extent feasible and consistent with the project objectives.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The Little River forms the boundary between two area plans within Humboldt County’s Local Coastal Program, the *Trinidad Area Plan* (1995) and the *McKinleyville Area Plan* (1995). The area is also divided east/west between direct jurisdiction by the Coastal Commission and land falling under the jurisdiction of Humboldt County’s Local Coastal Program. Access to and along the coast is promoted in both the Coastal Act, as well as Humboldt County’s Local Coastal Program.

Coastal Act Sections 30210, 30211, and 30212 require the provision of maximum public access opportunities, with limited exceptions. Coastal Act Section 30210 requires, in applicable part, that maximum public access and recreational opportunities be provided when consistent with public safety, private property rights, and natural resource protection. Section 30211 requires, in applicable part, that development not interfere with the public’s right of access to the sea where acquired through use (i.e., potential prescriptive rights or rights of implied dedication). Section 30212 requires, in applicable part, that public access from the nearest public roadway to the shoreline and along the coast be provided in new development projects, except in certain instances, such as when adequate access exists nearby or when the provision of public access would be inconsistent with public safety.

The *McKinleyville Area Plan* recognizes coastal access as an existing use for lands immediately south of the Little River (Sections 4.22, 4.52). It also recommends improving public access through this portion of the project area (Section 4.52 B). North of the Little River, Moonstone Beach is included in the inventory of existing access points in the *Trinidad Area Plan* (Section 3.50 B 5).

The proposed project will also need to balance the preservation of habitat with public access as the south bank of the Little River was considered to be environmentally sensitive habitat by the Commission in their 2010 permit for work being conducted at Little River State Beach

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(Application Number 1-10-004) and by Section 3.41.A of the *McKinleyville Area Plan*. The *McKinleyville Area Plan* also allows for trails within riparian corridors and encourages them to cross the corridor in as little distance as possible (section 3.41F.5.h).

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Sections 15262 (which provides an exemption from the requirement to prepare an Environmental Impact Report or negative declaration) and 15306, because it involves only feasibility studies, planning studies, basic data collection and research, none of which will impact any environmental resource(s) and all of which will be undertaken as part of a study leading to possible future action that the Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted, or funded. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of this project.