

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 6, 2012

MILTON STREET PARK IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT

Project No. 07-058-02
Project Manager: David Hayes

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$300,000 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority to construct a 1.2-acre park along Milton Street, adjacent to the Ballona Creek Bike Path, in the City of Los Angeles.

LOCATION: City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Project Site Map and Features](#)
 - Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
 - Exhibit 4: [Mitigated Negative Declaration](#)
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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 an amount not to exceed three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) for construction of a 1.2-acre park along the Ballona Creek Bike Path on Milton Street, in the City of Los Angeles, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to disbursement of funds, MRCA shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
 - a. Evidence that MRCA has obtained all necessary project permits and approvals.
 - b. A final work plan including project schedule and budget and any contractors to be used to complete the project.
 - c. Evidence that the property owner has entered into a written agreement authorizing the project and agreeing to allow the grantee to maintain the park for at least twenty years.

2. Prior to disbursement of the final 10 percent withheld grant funds, MRCA shall submit for Conservancy review:
 - a. A site management plan and a copy of the Milton Street maintenance contract, and
 - b. A signage program acknowledging Conservancy funding and identifying the project as a gateway to the California Coastal Trail.”

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 authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding coastal public accessways;
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The proposed project serves greater than local needs.
4. As a responsible agency, the Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the mitigated negative declaration for the project, *Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Milton Street Park Project, July 2012* and concludes that the project as mitigated will not have a significant adverse effect on the environment .”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$300,000 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) for construction of Milton Street Park. The proposed park will be constructed by MRCA on a 1.2-acre parcel owned by the Baldwin Hills Regional Conservation Authority (BHRCA) along the Ballona Creek Bike Path, directly across from Marina del Rey Middle School in the City of Los Angeles. (See Exhibit 1.) The BHRCA acquired this parcel in June 2007 because it was identified as an important opportunity to create a park along the Ballona Creek Bike Path. The Ballona Creek Bike Path is a Class I trail (i.e., paved and separated from streets) for bikers and pedestrians that stretches for seven miles along Ballona Creek, serves as an important recreational resource, and links densely populated urban centers with state and county beaches and the California Coastal Trail. There are currently very few parks along the Ballona Creek Bike Path. The Milton Street site offers an opportunity to create a park adjacent to the trail which will serve as a gateway as well as rest area for trail users and as habitat for native species.

Improvements that will be constructed as part of the proposed project include: retaining walls to stabilize the slope; pedestrian pathways including stairs and an ADA-accessible ramp; a new gate in MRCA’s iconic style; native plant landscaping; an outdoor classroom; irrigation; fencing; bike racks; seating; interpretive panels, and a small shade structure. (See site plan in Exhibit 2.)

The interpretive panels will be permanently installed and will highlight the area’s coastal resources, the Best Management Practices in the park and on Milton Street, local wildlife and habitats, and the park’s connection to Ballona Creek and the coast.

At the time that it constructs the proposed project, the MRCA will also construct improvements to the block of Milton Street adjacent to the park. The street improvements are intended to convert this block of Milton Street to a “green street” through installation of “vegetated stormwater curb extensions” that will capture and treat wet and dry weather runoff from the street and park. The street improvements are not part of the project to be funded by this authorization.

MRCA is a joint powers authority established in 1985 between the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Conejo Recreation and Park District and the Rancho Simi Valley Recreation and Park District. The MRCA is dedicated to the preservation and management of local open space and parkland, watershed lands, trails and wildlife habitat. MRCA manages and provides ranger services for more than 50,000 acres of public lands and parks. MRCA also provides education and interpretive programs for the public along the Ballona Creek Path. The Baldwin Hill Conservancy, Los Angeles County and other partners have worked with MRCA to successfully plan and develop numerous parks, including the Ballona Creek Bike Path.

The BHRCA is a joint powers authority established between the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and the County of Los Angeles. The BHRCA and MRCA intends to enter into an agreement pursuant to which MRCA will construct the Milton Street Park.

Site Description: The project site is a 1.2-acre linear parcel located on one block of Milton Street and consisting of the north-facing bank of the Ballona Creek levee. Currently there is no way to access the Ballona Creek Bike Path from the Middle School located across Milton Street. The Ballona Creek Bike Path is paved and is a popular bicycle route that connects employment centers, commercial and recreation destinations including schools, libraries, shopping centers, neighborhood and regional parks and natural resources such as the Creek, beaches, and the Ballona Wetlands.

Project History: In 2000, the Conservancy helped fund a regional plan for creation of a “Park to Playa” river parkway from Baldwin Hills to Marina Del Rey. The plan envisioned creation of a parkway and trail along Ballona Creek to link expanded parks at the Baldwin Hills to the beaches and the Coastal Trail. In 2001, the Conservancy helped fund the Ballona Creek and Bike Path Focused Special Study which identified potential improvements to the creek and trail. Consistent with that study, the Conservancy authorized funds for planning and design of Milton Street Park. In 2004 the project site was identified as a priority project in the Ballona Creek Watershed Management Master Plan, as a site for source control of pollutants, habitat restoration, and to demonstrate BMPs that are most cost-effective for achieving watershed water quality goals.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$300,000	
Baldwin Hills Conservancy	\$2,000,000	
Los Angeles County Prop. A park Bond funds	\$500,000	
State Water Resources Control Board	\$200,000	
Total Project Cost	\$3,000,000	

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for this grant is the fiscal year 2010-11 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. Public Resources Code § 75001 et seq.). Proposition 84 funds can be used 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. Public Resources Code § 75060(b). The proposed project will promote access to the coast by enhancing use of the Ballona Creek Bike Path, which leads to the ocean, through provision of a passive recreational park along the trail. The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, i.e., Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, as discussed below. Accordingly, the proposed project is an appropriate use of Proposition 84 funds.

The total project cost identified above includes the cost of constructing the Milton Street improvements. However, the Conservancy funding will be used solely for construction of the proposed park.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Division 21, Chapter 9, of the Public Resources Code, directs the Coastal Conservancy to take a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state’s coastline (Section 31400) and to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail (Section 31408). In connection with these mandates, Chapter 9 provides specific authorization for the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies to develop lands for public access purposes to and along the coast and “to establish and expand those inland trail systems that may be linked to the California Coastal trail” (Sections 31400.1 and 31409). Although the proposed project is situated outside of the Coastal Zone, it will develop a park that will enhance an inland trail system that provides a public accessway to the coast and to the Coastal Trail. Consistent with Section 31400.1, the Milton Street Park Project will serve more than just local residents because it will enhance the Ballona Creek Bike Path, which serves residents from many communities including Baldwin Hills, Windsor Hills Ladera Heights, Crenshaw District, Leimert Park, Blair Hills, Hyde Park, Westchester, Palms, Mar Vista, Del Rey, and Marina Del Rey.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective F** the proposed project will provide a park along an inland creek, thereby enhancing the creek-side trail that connects inland populations to the coast and expanding recreational opportunities.

**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:** This project is supported by the Baldwin Hills Conservancy, a State agency; County of Los Angeles Supervisor and Chair of the Baldwin Hills Regional Authority, Mark Ridley-Thomas; the Watershed Protection Division and the Watershed Management Division of the City of Los Angeles; the Ballona Creek Renaissance, a local nonprofit organization; and the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission. All are volunteer members of the Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force, which focuses on the Ballona Creek Watershed Plan. (see Exhibit 3, Letters of support)
4. **Location:** The project site is located outside of the Coastal Zone in Los Angeles County, however, the project will benefit public access to the coast by enhancing a trail that links inland communities to coastal resources, as authorized by the Conservancy's enabling legislation.
5. **Need:** Other entities have funded the project site acquisition and have committed funds towards construction; however, these entities lack sufficient funds to complete the construction of Milton Street Park. Conservancy funding is needed to complete the construction. Without Conservancy funding project construction would be delayed indefinitely while other funding sources are sought.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Ballona Creek Bike Path is a link between inland urban areas, home to nearly three million people, and the coast, including Marina Del Rey, the Coastal Trail, and the Pacific Ocean beaches. This bike path is the only off-street inland walking and bicycle trail that exists in this part of Los Angeles County. This project will enhance the bike path, which is used by visitors as well as residents from many surrounding communities including Baldwin Hills, Windsor Hills, Ladera Heights, Crenshaw District,

Leimert Park, Blair Hills, Hyde Park, Westchester, Palms, Mar Vista, Del Rey, and Marina Del Rey.

7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project site is protected from sea level rise by walls of the Ballona Creek Channel, the top of which is approximately 23 feet above sea level. The Sea Level Rise Task Force Interim Document, Table 1 shows the projected 2050 sea level rise to be a maximum of 17 inches and the 2100 sea level rise to be 69 inches. These increases in water level within the channel would be contained within the Ballona Creek flood channel walls.

Additional Criteria

8. **Urgency:** Part of project funding is in place, and Conservancy funds are needed to begin construction as scheduled for early spring 2013.
9. **Readiness:** Environmental review of the project pursuant to CEQA was completed this past September. Park permits from the City of Los Angeles Building and Safety Department, will be issued in early 2013. If Conservancy funds are granted, MRCA will be ready to begin construction shortly thereafter.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The Conservancy has a long history of funding work in the Ballona Creek watershed including the enhancement of the Ballona Wetlands and work to support the goals of the Baldwin Hills Conservancy. In addition, the Conservancy has previously supported work to enhance the Ballona Creek trail, as discussed under “History” above.
11. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** Los Angeles County will likely be affected by climate change in the following ways: more severe droughts, more intense heat spells, and loss of California local native biodiversity. The project design anticipates these changes. Drought-tolerant, native plant landscaping will cover the majority of the project site. This will serve as new and enhanced habitat and open space for wildlife.
12. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The location of the park along the Ballona Creek Bike Path will encourage people to walk or bicycle to the park and encourage more people to use the Ballona Creek Bike Path to access the coast, thereby reducing GHG emissions from transportation sources. Additionally, though mechanized construction will be necessary, MRCA will encourage in its construction contracts, that construction equipment be maintained and operated at standard efficiency to minimize GHG Emissions, and during construction operations, encourage contractors to avoid vehicular “standby” idling during construction whenever practicable.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN:

This project is consistent with the Ballona Creek Watershed Management Plan, a regional planning document which calls for a comprehensive system of bike and pedestrian paths connected to Ballona Creek and the Ballona Creek Bike Path. The Ballona Creek Watershed Management Plan, is an outgrowth of the efforts of the Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force, a stakeholder group formed in 2001 by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission, the City of Los Angeles, and Ballona Creek Renaissance to collectively set forth a strategy to develop pollution control and habitat restoration

actions that could achieve an ecologically healthy watershed. The Ballona Creek Watershed Plan, is accepted by the Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force as the working planning document and vision for public access, urban run-off water quality, parks and open space and habitat enhancement activities and projects in the Ballona Creek Watershed.

Additionally, the Milton Street Park project is consistent with the Park-to-Playa Trail, which includes pedestrian and bicycle connections between the Exposition Transit Line, the Baldwin Hills area and the Ballona Creek Trail, a product of a multiple agency effort designed to increase pedestrian and bicycle access to the expanding network of trails and recreational parkways and recreational facilities, connecting over 15 miles of trails in and around South Los Angeles County.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

MRCA is the lead agency for the proposed project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). MRCA prepared the *Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration, Milton Street Project, July 2012* (MND), which it adopted September 18, 2012. The MRCA also approved the proposed project on September 18, 2012.

The MND indicates that the only possible significant effects of the proposed project are in the categories of biological resources and noise. The project site does not have any native or sensitive vegetation and is not known to be habitat for any sensitive species. However, there could be native bird nests on the site and therefore, mitigation is necessary to insure any such nests are protected. The MND recommends limiting vegetation clearing activities to outside of the nesting season (which is February 1 to August 31) or, if such clearance must take place after February 1, have a biologist perform a pre-construction survey for active bird nests and take actions to protect any identified active nests. With respect to noise, the project site is near residences that could be impacted by noise from construction equipment. The MND recommends two mitigation measures that call for use of mufflers, lighter and quieter equipment and other management practices that will reduce noise impacts. The MND also identifies the regulatory requirements that apply and will prevent significant effects on the environment.

The MRCA Board adopted the Milton Street Park Project IS/MND and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program on September 18, 2012, to insure compliance with all mitigation measures and applicable regulatory requirements.

As a responsible agency, Conservancy staff has independently reviewed the MRCA's MND and recommends that the Conservancy find that the proposed project as designed and mitigated will not have any significant adverse effects on the environment. Upon Conservancy approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination for this project.