

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 20, 2013

SCRIPPS COASTAL TRAIL

Project No. 13-014-01
Project Manager: David Hayes

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$250,000 to Scripps Institution of Oceanography to construct a new segment of the California Coastal Trail on the UC San Diego campus.

LOCATION: University of California, San Diego, San Diego County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Location map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Site Plan](#)

Exhibit 3: [Site Photos](#)

Exhibit 4: [Initial Study](#)

Exhibit 5: [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 \$250,000 (two hundred fifty thousand dollars) to Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO), University of California, San Diego, to prepare final plans and construction drawings and to construct a California Coastal Trail segment on the SIO campus and to install directional and interpretive signage on the trail, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds for construction, SIO shall submit for review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy the following:
 - a. A work program, including budget and schedule.
-

- b. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed for these tasks.
 - c. Evidence that SIO has obtained all necessary permits and approvals, and all other funds necessary to complete the project.
 - d. A signage plan for the project, including acknowledgment of Conservancy participation, and designation of the project as a segment of the California Coastal Trail.
2. To the extent appropriate, the grantee shall ensure that the project improvements are consistent with the Conservancy's 'Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development' and with all applicable federal or state laws governing barrier-free access for persons with disabilities."

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 public access.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The proposed project meets greater-than-local needs.
4. The environmental effects associated with the project and the measures to reduce or avoid those effects were fully identified and considered in the "University of California, San Diego (UCSD) 2004 Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) Environmental Impact Report (EIR), as updated by the East Campus Bed Tower (ECBT) EIR certified by UCSD in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act in July 2010. (See Exhibit 4 to the accompanying staff recommendation) and all measures required by EIR to avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts have been incorporated into the project. Accordingly, no additional environmental documentation is required under the California Environmental Quality Act."

PROJECT SUMMARY: The proposed project would provide funding to Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO) for final plans, construction drawings, and construction for a Coastal Trail (CT) segment on SIO's portion of the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) campus. The added CT segment would provide sweeping ocean views from a coastal terrace 145-200 feet above the beach. It will also connect two coastal overlook sites at either end of the proposed CT segment, one of which is already developed, the other of which will be constructed in 2014. (Exhibit 2) The project also includes procurement and installation of directional and interpretive signage on the portion of the CT that passes through the SIO campus.

Currently, the CT that crosses the SIO campus from north to south is mapped along the La Jolla beaches and tide pools. However, that portion of the currently-mapped CT is not always accessible because of high tides and steep bluffs. (Exhibits 2 and 3). In order to route the CT around these inaccessible points, SIO has proposed using the existing UCSD "Campus Meander Trail", which, as its name denotes, currently meanders across the campus generally from north

to the south, providing public access to various coastal bluff viewing areas to the north and the south of the proposed project construction area. However, there exists a 350-foot gap in this existing trail.

The proposed trail construction portion of the project will eliminate this gap, resulting in a continuous CT trail running across the SIO campus. (Exhibit 2). The trail segment that will be constructed will be six feet wide and approximately 350 feet long, connecting two coastal overlook sites already developed at SIO. It will provide the missing link between these coastal overlooks and connect the Campus Meander Trail to the north with the Meander Trail to the south part of campus. The existing road (Biological Grade) that parallels this segment is without pedestrian sidewalks and the overlook sites at either end of this segment are separated by steep grade changes. (See Exhibits 2 and 3.)

The project work will include final construction plans, engineering, permits, and construction of a trail and boardwalk. Interpretive and directional signage will be included in the project. The interpretive signs will provide information about coastal resources, the Coastal Trail, the California system of Marine Preserves, and the Scripps Shoreline Underwater Reserve.

The proposed project is designed to minimize impacts to native habitat to the extent feasible by following the canyon rim adjacent to the existing road, and by using piers for much of the alignment. Removal of non-native vegetation and replanting with native plants will also occur.

When completed, this project will enable pedestrian access to the existing system of other SIO and UCSD campus trails and, in turn, to UCSD beaches and tide pools and to trails to Torrey Pines City Beach.

SIO is a department within UCSD, and in consultation with Central Campus Planning, has the capacity and authority to develop improvement projects that further the principals of the campus Long Range Development Plan (LRDP). University of California owns the project site and SIO as the grant applicant, is the appropriate grantee.

Site Description: The project is located on the campus of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UCSD. The proposed trail segment is located on the eastern edge of a sloped coastal terrace 150-200 feet above the beach, and offers expansive views of the La Jolla coastline and the Pacific Ocean. The .85 acre site lies adjacent to Biological Grade, an internal road on the Scripps campus that was once part of the original coast highway built in 1912.

Project History: Nearly two years ago SIO proposed constructing a trail segment with a signing program linking La Jolla Beach with an existing trail system on the Scripps campus. Over the past year, SIO has completed the design and preliminary engineering.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$250,000
SIO	\$100,000
Project Total	\$350,000

The source of Conservancy funds is expected to be from an appropriation of the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, Public Resources Code Sections 75001 *et seq.* (Proposition 84). Proposition 84 authorizes the Conservancy's use of these funds for projects that promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state pursuant to the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The proposed project will create greater access to coastal views, beaches and tide pools by providing a continuous Coastal Trail that links to existing coastal accessways and viewing platforms. In addition, as discussed below, the project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21.

In addition to Conservancy funds, there are contributions from UCSD toward engineering, biological resources analysis, construction, operational and management costs from SIO.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400 *et seq.*). Chapter 9 provides that it is the intent of the Legislature 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) and that the Conservancy coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail (Section 31408(a)).

In order to carry out that mandate, the Conservancy is authorized by section 31400.1 to provide grants to public entities or non-profit organizations to develop lands for access to and along the coast and by Section 31400.3 to "provide such assistance as is required to aid public agencies . . . in establishing a system of public coastal accessways". The proposed project is entirely consistent with this authority: Conservancy funds will be used for final design, engineering, and construction of a segment of the Coastal Trail and placement of Coastal Trail signage on the UCSD campus.

Section 31400.1 restricts the Conservancy to providing grants to local agencies only for accessways that serve more than local needs. The goal of the proposed project is to provide public access along the coast as part of the California Coastal Trail. The construction of the Coastal Trail segment on the SIO campus and the sign program will provide access to the multitude of visitors to UCSD who come from near and far and to users of the Coastal Trail, who, likewise, come from around the state, and beyond.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2013 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective D**, the proposed project will construct a new Coastal Trail segment to increase and enhance coastal 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:** The SIO project has support from the La Jolla Shores Association, SANDAG, Supervisor Cox and Coast Walk. (Exhibit
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the Coastal Zone of San Diego County.
5. **Need:** Without Conservancy funding, the SIO would defer planning and construction for the proposed project indefinitely. SIO, though engaged in capital improvements, has insufficient funds budgeted for connecting the two overlooks are being developed by SIO. The proposed project will add a trail connection between the two overlooks and year-round Coastal Trail access, as an alternative to the current beach alignment that is not accessible during high tides. Assistance from the Conservancy will ensure timely completion of the project.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** SIO receives thousands of visitors annually from outside the immediate community. With development of the Coastal Trail segment and installation of directional and interpretive signage, these visitors from outside the area will be made aware of and utilize the Coastal Trail
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project site is more than 100 feet above the shoreline and not susceptible to sea level rise.

Additional Criteria:

8. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
9. **Readiness:** SIO is prepared to start the project as soon as September 2013.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** "See "Project History" above."
18. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The short-term green house gas emissions would be associated with minor construction activities required to build the trail over a 10 to 12 week period. The long-term GHG emissions would be associated with vehicle operations (visitors to the site by automobile), such as pass-by trips. Substantial numbers of new trips to the site are not anticipated.. The implementation of the proposed project would not be expected to generate enough greenhouse gas emissions to individually influence global climate change or to add materially to the cumulative effect. Construction of the proposed project would result in temporary minor additions of pollutants to the local airshed, caused by soil disturbance, dust emissions, and combustion from on-site construction equipment. Trail construction will use mostly small power tools and hand tools whenever feasible, though some mechanized construction will be necessary, UCSD 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. However, the minor nature of the project would not require substantial hauling or heavy equipment.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE COASTAL CONSERVANCY’S STANDARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCESSWAY LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s Standards for Accessway Location and Development as follows:

Standard No. 1: Protect the Public and Coastal Resources

Consistent with this standard, the proposed trail improvements (and other access facilities proposed in the UCSD’s campus-wide trail plan system) would be located and designed in a manner that would: minimize alteration of natural landforms and be subordinate to the setting’s character; prevent unwarranted hazards to the land and public safety; and protect environmentally sensitive habitats.

Standard No. 2: Correct Hazards

Consistent with this standard, as appropriate and feasible, the project will be set back from eroding bluff edges and designed and located in a manner that will prevent further bluff erosion and separate pedestrian travel from vehicular traffic.

Standard No. 5: Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Consistent with this standard, the proposed trail segment has been designed so as to avoid impacts to environmentally sensitive areas and all new construction will include extensive restoration of the native coastal plant communities.

Standard No. 8: Trails

Consistent with this standard, the project will connect two overlooks, and with the installation of directional and interpretive signage, establish a continuous trail from the La Jolla Beach area of UCSD, with the coastal bluff ‘Campus Meandering Trail’.

Standard No. 9: Scenic Overlooks

Consistent with this standard, the project will connect Pacific Ocean overlooks that would provide the public with a unique or unusual view of the coast.

Standard No. 12: Support Facilities

Consistent with this standard, the project will retain existing parking areas and existing signs and trash receptacles.

Standard No. 13: Barrier-Free Access

UCSD has determined that the CT segment cannot feasibly be built to meet current standards for full accessibility. The location of the CT segment is too steep and the surrounding, equally steep terrain make it infeasible to create a CT segment in that location that would meet slope and other requirements for access for persons with disabilities. However, consistent with this standard, the two overlooks which the CT segment will connect have been designed by UCSD to meet the requirements of Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations and federal accessibility requirements, and will provide appropriate parking and related facilities so as to enable persons with disabilities to experience the coastal views that are also available on the CT segment.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The La Jolla Community Plan (LJCP), which was adopted by the City of San Diego as its local coastal program and which was certified by the California Coastal Commission in 2004, is the relevant local coastal program for the proposed project. The project is consistent with LJCP policies for “Public Access to Beaches and Coastline” (LJCP, page 21) which recommend a comprehensive sign program to identify existing locations where public shoreline exists. The project serves to carry out the LJCP policies for “Visual Resources”, (LJCP page 23). The LJCP provides that “public views from identified vantage points, to and from La Jolla Beach, [and] scenic vistas of the ocean, beach, and bluff areas, hillsides and canyons shall be retained and enhanced for public use” and identifies public access resources between Scripps Pier at La Jolla Beach, and scenic ocean overlooks on the Scripps campus. This project is likewise consistent with the LJCP objectives related to “Physical Access”, which seek to retain and enhance public access to and along the coastline. The proposed project will improve public awareness and public access, by establishing a permanent coastal trail alignment, alternative to the intermittent La Jolla Beach trail. It will establish a continuous trail, with uniform signage, identifying it as the Coastal Trail, connecting the La Jolla Beach with the existing system of Meander Trails on the Scripps campus.

The University of California, San Diego as a unit of the State of California has as its guiding land use document the 2004 Long Range Development Plan (LRDP). The LRDP policies are consistent with LJCP concerning coastal access, habitat conservation, and visual resources.

This project also advances the goals and objectives of UCSD’s Master Plan study and 1997 planning proposal entitled “A Grand Park and A Campus Meander for UCSD”, in that it meets the dual-purpose objectives of “enabling [the public] to traverse the campus while allowing them to experience the natural habitat areas at their edges without disturbance of ecologically sensitive areas”. Further, the project is consistent with the LRDP, which includes pedestrian circulation goals and articulates the need for “connections” for pedestrians between the various areas of the UCSD campus.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

As noted above, the LRDP is the adopted land use plan for the UCSD campus, including the SIO portion of it. The LRDP identified the “Connections planning principle” which called for campus pedestrian circulation through the development or improvement of the “campus

meander”, a campus-wide trail system. The proposed project seeks to close a gap in the campus’ existing campus meander trail system. Pursuant to the LRDP, the trail is proposed to be sited along the perimeter of the UCSD Park land use designation, adjacent to Biological Grade (Exhibit 2).

UCSD, as the lead agency for the LRDP for purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), has previously completed CEQA environmental documentation and review for projects proposed under the LRDP, including the campus meander trail system. That environmental documentation consists of the “University of California, San Diego (UCSD) 2004 Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) Environmental Impact Report (EIR), as updated by the East Campus Bed Tower (ECBT) EIR certified in July 2010 (collectively, the LRDP EIR). Under the EIR, certain principles were provided for siting a trail in the campus meander trail system, including: designing trails so as to minimize impacts to sensitive vegetation communities and to sensitive habitat types to the extent feasible. These principles have been carried forward into the proposed project.

The LRDP EIR was a programmatic environmental impact report, intended to cover the potential effects of the entire LRDP program, including all future development projects proposed under the LRDP. A subsequent activity that follows under a program EIR that has been assessed pursuant to CEQA must be examined in the light of the program EIR to determine whether an additional environmental document must be prepared. If the agency proposing the later activity finds that its effects and required mitigation to reduce those effects were already identified and considered under the program EIR, the activity can be approved with no further environmental documentation (CEQA Guidelines, Section 151168 (c)).

The Guidelines suggest the use of a written checklist or similar device to document the evaluation of the activity to determine whether the environmental effects of the operation were covered in the program EIR. UCSD utilized such a checklist to assess the nature of impacts associate with the proposed project. See Exhibit 4, accompanying this staff recommendation. The checklist used by UCSD utilized the “Environmental Checklist form”, which is attached as Appendix G to the CEQA Guidelines, and which, with the project description added, is considered under the CEQA Guidelines (Section 15063(f)), and entitled here, an “Initial Study”.

The UCSD Initial Study (IS) analyzed all of the potential impacts of the project in light of the attributes that were incorporated into the project as a result of the LRDP EIR requirements and determined that, as described, the proposed project would have no potential for environmental effects. Accordingly, no additional environmental documentation beyond the LRDP EIR is required.

Conservancy staff concurs with the analysis contained in the IS. In doing so staff notes the analysis contained in the IS, summarized below, which is particularly relevant to the proposed project and potential environmental effects:

Air Quality

Construction of the proposed project would result in a temporary minor addition of pollutants to the local airshed caused by soil disturbance, dust emissions, and combustion pollutants from on-site construction equipment. However, the minor nature of the project would not require substantial hauling activities. The proposed project is a pedestrian trail connection and no measurable emissions impacts would result from use of the trail. Vehicle trips are

anticipated to be primarily pass-by in nature. Therefore the proposed project would have no significant operational impacts. On a cumulative basis, the project's emissions do not exceed identified significance SMAQMD thresholds, and thus do not result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to the significant cumulative impact.

The project would employ standard UCSD dust control measures (such as watering down soil during construction).

Biological Resources

In order to assess such impacts, UCSD commissioned a field survey and habitat/sensitive species mapping performed by DUDEK in 2012 (see Appendix A to Exhibit 4). Sensitive plants were identified in the project area and mapped. These include the California box thorn and Woolly seabite. In order to avoid impacts to these plants, the placement of piers of the accessway will be carefully placed. No sensitive birds or animal species were observed. While there are no historical records of the California gnatcatcher in the area and none were seen during DUDEK survey work in 2012, in an abundance of caution, no construction and the removal of less than 0.1 acres of diegan coastal sage scrub habitat would not occur during the gnatcatcher breeding season (February 15 through August 30).

In order to further minimize impacts to native habitat to the extent feasible the project follows the canyon rim adjacent to Biological Grade, and uses footings/piers for much of the alignment. Minor grading of approximately 3,000 square-feet is limited to the south end of the path where ADA requirements could be met no other way. The project avoids the southern coastal bluff scrub vegetation community completely. In addition, the project construction methods have been restricted by a number of measures to limit potential erosion effects on natural habitats.

Given the conclusion that there is no potential for significant environmental effects associated with the project, as described, staff concludes that there is no additional environmental documentation required under CEQA and recommends that the Conservancy made the proposed finding to that effect.

Upon Conservancy approval, staff will file a Notice of Determination for this project.