

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 20, 2013

**HAMILTON WETLAND RESTORATION PROJECT
TRAIL ENHANCEMENTS**

Project No 94-003-03
Project Manager: Tom Gandesbery

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$130,000 to the Conservation Corps North Bay to construct trail enhancements on a segment of the San Francisco Bay Trail at the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project.

LOCATION: Hamilton Wetlands (Former Army Airfield), Southeast Novato, adjacent to and between the Bel Marin Keys residential community and Novato Creek to the north and the Gallinas Sanitary District Property to the south, along the western margin of San Pablo Bay, Marin County (Exhibits 1 and 2)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Regional Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Trail Map](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Overlook Design Drawings](#)
- Exhibit 4: [Chronology of Conservancy Board Actions](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

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

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred and thirty thousand dollars (\$130,000) to the Conservation Corps North Bay (CCNB) to construct trail enhancements on the San Francisco Bay Trail at the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project site in the City of Novato, Marin County, in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, subject to the condition that no Conservancy funds shall be disbursed until the Executive Officer of the Conservancy has approved in writing:

1. A final work plan, including a budget and schedule.

2. The name and qualifications of any contractors that CCNB intends to retain to carry out the project.
3. A signing plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy funding.”

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 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31165, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
 3. CCNB is a non-profit organization existing under 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 grant funds to the Conservation Corps North Bay (CCNB) to construct trail enhancements on the San Francisco Bay Trail (Bay Trail) to be built at the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project (HWRP) in Novato, Marin County (Exhibits 1 and 2). The HWRP is a project of the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) for which the Conservancy is the non-federal sponsor. The Conservancy has contributed funding to the Corps for the HWRP for over a decade (Exhibit 3). As part of the HWRP, the Corps will construct a 2.66-mile long segment of the San Francisco Bay Trail, which will provide public access to the HWRP site. The Corps is planning on building the trail this year and it has awarded a contract for the trail construction, which will include grading, paving and fencing. The Corps has agreed to allow the CCNB to construct the trail enhancements, which will consist mainly of three overlooks for viewing the restored wetlands, as well as benches and directional and interpretive signage.

The CCNB is well qualified to do this work as it has constructed trails, viewing platforms, boardwalks and other outdoor recreational structures on public lands throughout Marin and Sonoma Counties. The CCNB was founded as the Marin Conservation Corps. It is a non-profit organization and is not affiliated with the California Conservation Corps, a state agency. The CCNB works mainly in Marin and Sonoma Counties and its mission is to educate and empower young people through work involving natural resource protection and preservation. In addition to constructing and maintaining public trails and facilities, the CCNB operates a recycling center and native plant nursery.

The trail will be constructed in accordance with guidelines for compliance with the American’s with Disabilities Act (ADA). The HWRP Bay Trail segment was planned by the Corps and Conservancy in 2005 and required by the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) as a condition of its approval of the HWRP. The Corp’s goal is to have the Bay Trail segment, including the enhancements, in place prior to breaching the bayside levee

at the former Hamilton Army Airfield portion of the HWRP (Airfield). Breaching the levee will open the Airfield to San Pablo Bay and restore tidal action. Breaching the levee is currently scheduled for the winter of 2014. The work required to breach the site and construct the trail represents that final major construction of the Airfield; future work on the Airfield will consist of installation of native vegetation and ecological monitoring.

Site Description: The Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project (HWRP) site consists of three properties located along the western edge of San Pablo Bay, Marin County totaling nearly 2,600 acres. The HWRP Bay Trail segment is within one of these three, the 650-acre Airfield (Exhibit 2).

The Bay Trail will run along the western perimeter of the Airfield for a distance of 2.66 miles (Exhibit 2). This land is historic bay marshlands that were cut off from the Bay and reclaimed for agriculture in the late 1800s. The land surface has since subsided below sea level necessitating the importation of fill. Currently the Airfield is covered with sediment from dredged material offloaded from 2007 to 2009, most of which came from the Port of Oakland's Minus 50-foot Channel Deepening Project. The Airfield site is currently in the final phase of construction, in which the Corps will be re-grading certain areas and breaching the site to allow full tidal action. The Bay Trail will allow the general public to view the restored wetlands and will serve as a recreational trail for the Hamilton Community. The public will access the trail from several locations along the trail alignment (Exhibit 2).

The City of Novato has installed a pedestrian ramp on the west side of its levee which will allow visitors to access the trail from the commercial office complex located in the former aircraft hangers (Exhibit 2). The City also maintains an open space park on Reservoir Hill that features a public trail with views of the project. And at the southern end of Hanger Avenue the City maintains a sports field and tot-lot that has pedestrian access to the site. The Hanger Avenue park includes a parking lot and kiosk with information about the San Francisco Bay Trail (Exhibit 2).

Project History: A chronology of Conservancy actions is attached (Exhibit 4). In 1996, the Conservancy began its role as the non-federal sponsor by providing input to the Corps on a wetland restoration plan for the Airfield and adjacent properties. BCDC staff has provided input to the implementation of the HWRP since its inception, especially as it relates to dredging projects and public access.

In April 1999 the Conservancy adopted the Hamilton Wetlands Restoration plan and certified the EIR/EIS for the Project. The HWRP was authorized by Congress in 1999. The adjacent Bel Marin Keys Property (BMKV) was acquired by the Conservancy in 2001 for \$16 million. In 2003, the Conservancy and Corps finalized a restoration plan for the BMKV property. Congress authorized expansion of the HWRP to include BMKV in 2007. The design and construction of BMKV is on hold until fiscal and policy issues can be resolved.

The Corps first accepted dredged sediment onto the Airfield in 2006 and placed about 5.8 million cubic yards of dredged material to finish filling of the subsided land. The dredged material came from Corps and non-Corps dredging projects throughout the Bay Area, primarily from the Port of Oakland and was needed in order to fill the site up to average tidal elevations. In 2010 the Corps began final grading and levee completion. This year the Corps is planning to: complete final grading of the fill; construct a trail which will be a segment of the SF Bay Trail; continue

native plant propagation; and begin work to breach the site to the bay. The Corps will most likely breach the Airfield site in the winter of 2014.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$130,000
<u>Project Total</u>	<u>\$130,000</u>

The Conservancy is funding 100% of the trail enhancements however, construction of the trail is part of a larger Corps wetland restoration project for which the costs are shared at 75 (federal): 25 (state), with the exception of the trail construction which is estimated at \$1.3 million and is cost shared at a 50:50 ratio.

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is the fiscal year 2012 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 Resource Code Sections 75001 *et seq.*). These funds are available for San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program projects that promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state. (Public Resources Code Section 75060(c).) The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code establishing the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, as discussed below, and it will promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state by providing trail amenities that will not only enhance the public’s enjoyment of the Bay Trail but enable the public to view, learn and enjoy the HWRP. Accordingly, the proposed project is an appropriate use of Proposition 84 funds.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is a component of the HWRP, which is being undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (sections 31160-31165), which established the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. The Conservancy has previously found the HWRP to be consistent with Chapter 4.5 (See Exhibit 3). Further, a grant to CCNB for constructing the trail enhancements of the HWRP Bay Trail segment is consistent with Section 31165 of Chapter 4.5. That section authorizes the Conservancy to award grants for activities that facilitate environmental education related to the ocean, coastal, bay or watershed resources. The CCNB would carry out the proposed project using young adults in the San Francisco Bay Area in order to educate these young adults on environmental resources.

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

The proposed project is consistent with **Goal 12, Objective 12E** of the Conservancy’s 2013-2118 Strategic Plan, in that it will help complete a 2.66 mile long segment of San Francisco Bay Trail.

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 HWRP has the support of the partnering public agencies, the Corps, City of Novato, and Marin County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, as well as local environmental and conservation groups..
4. **Location:** The proposed project is in Marin County, which is within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
5. **Need:** Conservancy funds are required by the project cooperation agreement between the Corps and Conservancy for implementation of the HWRP. Providing the funds through a grant to the CCNB will enable the construction of the trail enhancements in a manner that facilitates environmental education for youth.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The HWRP is the largest wetland restoration project in the United States to beneficially reuse dredged sediment and is contributing to a regional goal of more than doubling the amount of tidal marsh in San Francisco Bay. This grant will engage young adults in finishing the public access at this large-scale restoration project and the proposed project will provide amenities for the Hamilton community and the Bay Area public at large.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The HWRP involves restoration of tidal marshes, which are known to buffer wave action adding an additional measure of protection to inland communities. It is assumed that the tidal wetlands will adjust and respond to changing sea level, though this phenomenon is dependent on the supply of suspended sediment in San Pablo Bay and the rate of sea level rise. About half of the proposed Bay Trail described above will be located on the side slope of the newly constructed levees and the other half will be on a bench graded on dredged sediment fill located along the western perimeter of the site, and as such will be situated at elevations above extreme tide elevations forecasted within adopted sea level rise scenarios.

Additional Criteria

8. **Urgency:** The proposed project is urgent because the Corps has contracted for construction work to be carried out this calendar year; including an option to pave and fence the subject trail and the trail work needs to be completed before the Corps can breach the bayside levee, which is anticipated for January of 2014.
10. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
13. **Readiness:** The Corps is nearing the end of construction of the Airfield and the trail is one of just a few remaining construction activities to be completed this calendar year.
14. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** “See “Project History” above.”

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

On April 22, 1999, the Conservancy certified the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Plan Final EIR/EIS (EIR/EIS) and approved the HWRP. On June 16, 2005, the Conservancy certified the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report / Environmental Impact Statement for the Bel Marin Keys Unit V Expansion of the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project and approved modifications to the HWRP to incorporate Bel Marin Keys Unit V. The construction of a trail on the Airfield is a component of the HWRP as analyzed in the SEIR/EIS. Accordingly, no additional environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is necessary.