

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 20, 2013

ABALONE COVE RESERVE RESTORATION PROJECT

Project No: 13-023-01
Project Manager: Ariadne Reynolds

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Consideration and authorization to disburse up to \$68,180 to the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy for the Abalone Cove Reserve Restoration Project in Palos Verdes, Los Angeles County, California.

LOCATION: Abalone Cove Reserve, Palos Verdes, Los Angeles County, California

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Letters of Support](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$68,180 (sixty eight thousand, one hundred and eighty dollars) to the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy to restore and enhance 5 acres of native coastal scrub habitat in the Abalone Cove Reserve in Palos Verdes, Los Angeles County, to implement the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan approved by the Conservancy on August 2, 2001. Prior to the disbursement of any funds, the grantee shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

- a. A work program, budget, schedule, and the names of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.
- b. Evidence that all permits and approvals necessary to the completion of the project have been obtained.

- c. A proposed signing plan acknowledging the Conservancy's assistance, and consistent with Proposition 12 requirements and the related guidelines developed by the California Natural Resources Agency."

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 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (sections 31251 *et seq.*), regarding coastal resource enhancement projects.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy is a nonprofit organization existing under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of up to \$68,180 to the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy to restore 5 acres of California coastal scrub habitat in Abalone Cove Reserve. The proposed project will remove invasive species and restore ecologically important native coastal plants, which serve as habitat for threatened species and minimize cliff side erosion and sediment loss. The project is consistent with the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan, as discussed in the "Project History" section below. The project area as a whole also supports recreational and educational opportunities for the greater community.

The proposed project is located in the 64-acre Abalone Cove Reserve, one of ten reserves covering a total of 1,400 acres managed by the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy (PVPLC). Located on the Palos Verdes Peninsula in Santa Monica Bay, Abalone Cove is a State Ecological Reserve, and an important coastal ecological resource for the Los Angeles Region (*Exhibit 1*). The land is owned by the City of Rancho Palos Verdes and managed by the Palos Verdes Land Conservancy. In January 2006, The Palos Verdes Land Conservancy entered into a contract to manage and monitor all of the conserved land within Abalone Cove Reserve. PVPLC therefore maintains the authority to manage lands within the project site.

Southern coastal bluff scrub is listed as a rare vegetation community in the California Natural Communities Database, and is composed of several rare coastal plants (*Suaeda taxifolia*, *Dudleya virens*, *Aphanisma blittoides*, *Atriplex pacifica*, *Lycium brevipes* var *hassei*). Coastal sage scrub is an ecologically significant vegetation type in southern California, with a high level of diversity, endemism, and rare species. It is habitat for the coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*), federally listed as Threatened and a California Species of Special Concern, and the coastal cactus wren (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*), whose numbers are currently in decline.

Encroachment by several species of non-native plants is threatening the ecological health of the

native vegetation on the bluffs. Most notable are crystalline iceplant (*Mesembryanthemum crystallinum*), black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), and acacia (*Acacia cyclops*). The PVPLC seeks funding for restoration and enhancement of 5 acres at Abalone Cove Reserve, in order to provide habitat for the coastal California gnatcatcher, and the coastal cactus wren; increase numbers of sensitive plant species (*Suaeda taxifolia*, *Atriplex pacifica*, *Lycium brevipes* var *hassei*; *Dudleya virens*, *Aphanisma blittoides*), remove invasive plant species; and decrease erosion and sediment movement along bluffs. Restoration and enhancement of native coastal bluff scrub and coastal sage scrub with container plants and seeds will provide contiguous native habitat that is resistant to the invasion of invasive weed species and will provide increased nesting, cover and foraging opportunities for wildlife. PVPLC will install rare plants (*Suaeda taxifolia*, *Dudleya virens*, *Aphanisma blittoides*, *Atriplex pacifica*, *Lycium brevipes* var *hassei*) to expand their populations in the Reserve.

The Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy was founded in 1988 to preserve open space land on the Palos Verdes Peninsula. Its mission is to preserve open space and restore habitat for the education and enjoyment of all. Since its founding, PVPLC has successfully preserved 1,600 acres of open space on the Peninsula, and now maintains 42 miles of recreational trails, manages two nature centers, and operates a native plant nursery. To date, PVPLC has successfully restored 173 acres of habitat in local preserves. To facilitate its restoration activities, PVPLC propagates more than 60 different species in its native plant nursery, and annually plants nearly 23,000 seedlings.

Site Description:

The project site is located on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, completely within the coastal zone at the southernmost point of the Santa Monica Bay. The Santa Monica Bay watershed encompasses 400 square miles, subdivided into separate sub-watershed drainages. Abalone Cove Reserve is located in the Dominguez Watershed, and is owned by and located within the City of Rancho Palos Verdes. The project site is located on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, atop a coastal bluff and adjacent to the beach. The 5 acre restoration area is divided into three restoration sites which all lie within Abalone Cove Reserve (*Exhibit 1*). Patches of native habitat can be found within the restoration sites, but invasive species such as mustard, fennel, and ice plant are steadily encroaching (*Exhibit 2*). A portion of the California Coastal Trail traverses the Reserve and restoration sites.

Project History:

In 1988, the State of California and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) established the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project (SMBRP) as a National Estuary Program (NEP) under the provisions of Section 320 of the federal Clean Water Act. The NEP is designed to “promote collaborative watershed-based partnerships in order to develop and implement a comprehensive conservation and management plan that addresses the range of environmental problems facing the estuary, while recognizing and balancing the needs of the local community.”

As a NEP, the SMBRP is charged with producing and overseeing implementation of the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan (Bay Plan) to serve as the blueprint for the Bay’s long term recovery. In 1995, the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan was approved by the State of

California and the US EPA. The Bay Plan includes specific actions focused on habitat conservation, enhancement and restoration, pollution prevention and treatment control, and assessment, education, and monitoring.

The SMBRP was later renamed as the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission, codified at California Public Resources Code Sections 30988-30988.3. Implementation of the Bay Plan is a primary mission of the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission. The Commission is authorized in statute to: “Request and receive federal, state, local, and private funds from any source and to expend those moneys for the restoration and enhancement of Santa Monica Bay and its watershed.” The Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission passed a resolution on October 18, 2012 recommending that the State Coastal Conservancy fund the proposed Abalone Cove Reserve Restoration Project.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$68, 180
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	\$25,200
Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy	\$5,000
City of Rancho Palos Verdes	\$1,000
California Trails and Greenways Foundation	<u>\$1,000</u>
Project Total	\$100,380

The source of Conservancy funds is an appropriation to the Conservancy from The Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000 (Proposition 12), which enables the Conservancy to “fund grants to public entities and nonprofit organizations to implement storm water and urban runoff pollution prevention programs, habitat restoration, and other priority actions specified in the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan.”

The Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000 (Proposition 12) earmarked \$25,000,000 to the Coastal Conservancy for restoration of Santa Monica Bay in accordance with the goals and priorities of the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan.

The project is consistent with the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan, as detailed below. The project has been approved by the Governing Board and the Watershed Advisory Council of the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-31270) provides for the Conservancy’s participation in a program of coastal resource enhancement. Consistent with section 31251, the proposed authorization would award a grant to a nonprofit organization to enhance coastal resources that have become degraded due to invasive exotic plants and human-induced events impacting habitat quality. The proposed project would restore native California coastal scrub habitat within the coastal zone. Therefore, the project would contribute to the

enhancement of the natural and scenic character of the Palos Verdes Peninsula and the ability for the project site to support the federally listed California gnatcatcher and other wildlife species.

Consistent with Section 31252, the site of the proposed project is identified in the local coastal program for the City of Rancho Palos Verdes (the City of Rancho Palos Verdes Coastal Specific Plan), as requiring public action to resolve existing or potential resource protection problems, as detailed in the “Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies” section below.

Public Resources Code Section 31253 provides that the Conservancy “may provide up to the total cost of any coastal resource enhancement project including the state or local share of federally supported projects.”

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2013- 2018 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective 5B**, the proposed project would restore and enhance coastal habitats, including coastal sage scrub, and coastal terraces.

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective 5D**, the proposed project would implement a project that enhances a coastal watershed.

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:** Contributions for land acquisition to create the Palos Verdes Nature Preserve came from the Palos Verdes Peninsula, neighboring cities, and across the state and the nation. More than 1400 individuals, families, foundations, organizations and businesses donated to the Campaign. Contributors included the Annenberg Foundation, Wildlife Conservation Board, California Coastal Conservancy, County of Los Angeles, City of RPV, CSU Dominguez Hills. The Palos Verdes Nature Preserve now covers 1,400 acres, and is managed by the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy. The Preserve is supported by a strong base of community volunteers that are active in monitoring, restoration, and trail improvements. PVPLC engages volunteers of all ages to work on the Preserve to maintain the miles of trails, protect habitat for rare and threatened wildlife, and enhance the outstanding recreational and educational opportunities for many user groups. Students from local schools, scout troops, and other groups attend the Saturday workdays on a regular basis.
- 4. Location:** **The proposed** project would be located within the coastal zone of the Santa Monica Bay, in Rancho Palos Verdes, Los Angeles County, California.

5. **Need:** Although several organizations have committed to participating in the proposed project, the proposed project could not move forward without Conservancy participation, due to inadequate funding. It is important to address the removal of exotic plants as soon as possible, since they are displacing natives and creating erosion problems that will only become more difficult to restore as time goes on.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The project will provide habitat for the federally threatened coastal California gnatcatcher, and decrease habitat fragmentation and edge effects (predation, habitat degradation, weed encroachment). Removal of invasive plants and restoration of native habitat will increase water infiltration and decrease storm run-off and erosion, and reduce soil run-off into the Santa Monica Bay. Visitors come to the Palos Verdes Preserve from the entire southern California region and this project will protect and enhance Abalone Cove in the Preserve.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** According to the NOAA Sea level rise viewer tool, the project site will not be affected by sea level rise in the years 2050 or 2100. The topography of the Palos Verdes Peninsula results in a large gain in elevation along the coast, protecting the project site from the impacts of sea level rise.

Additional Criteria

8. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
11. **Readiness:** The grantee is ready to begin site preparation in December 2013 after planning and permitting are completed, and expect to complete the project in June 2015.
13. **Return to Conservancy:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
14. **Cooperation:** see “Support of the Public” section above.
15. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** A principal threat of climate change in California is increased habitat fragmentation. This project strives to reconnect habitats. The proposed project will decrease stressors (invasive plants), restore natural processes, improve wildlife habitat connectivity, and provide a diversity of habitats and niches for species movement. PVPLC will monitor vegetation and wildlife and manage habitat if degradation occurs due to climate change.
16. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The restored habitat will sequester carbon, helping to reduce the concentration of greenhouse gas emissions.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project complements protections mandated by the City of Rancho Palos Verdes Coastal Specific Plan, certified as a local coastal program by the California Coastal Commission in 1978 and last updated in 2010, for sensitive wildlife habitat, natural vegetation, and preservation corridors in the Coastal Zone. Policy CRM-10 of the Plan specifies that “the existing natural vegetation of Rancho Palos Verdes is a major component of the environmental character of the City. The retention of wild flowers, low coastal sage scrub, chaparral, and grassland communities is desirable as is revegetation with native material wherever clearing of vegetation is required.” The Plan also states that “the coastal sage scrub vegetation provides critical habitat . . . and if these habitats continue to be impacted, the locally rare animal species

will soon be completely lost.” The proposed project will restore and enhance the identified valuable coastal habitat.

CONSISTENCY WITH OTHER LOCAL PLANS:

The restoration project supports the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Plan (2008) goals which list the following aims to protect the watershed: 1) restoring habitat, to increase the health and ecological function of the watershed; 2) develop and implement an invasive species eradication programs; and 3) educate the public about invasive species to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive plant species.

The restoration supports the City of Rancho Palos Verdes’ Natural Communities Conservation Plan. The goal of the conservation plan is to protect and restore habitat, especially rare coastal sage scrub and cactus scrub, for the coastal California gnatcatcher, the cactus wren (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*), and several rare coastal plants (island green dudleya, wooly seablite).

The restoration is listed as a potential project in the Greater Los Angeles County Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (2006).

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

On May 8, 2013, the City of Rancho Palos Verdes, as the permittee for the City of Rancho Palos Verdes’ Natural Communities Conservation Plan, filed a California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) Notice of Exemption for the proposed project, restoration and enhancement of five acres of scrub habitat. The city found the project to be exempt under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15301, as a minor alteration to existing facilities, under Section 15304, as a minor alteration of land, water and/or vegetation not involving the removal of mature, scenic trees, under Section 15307, as an action taken by a regulatory agency for the protection of natural resources, and under Section 15308, as an action taken by a regulatory agency for the protection of the environment.

Staff believes that the project is exempt under Sections 15301 and 15304, and also concludes that the project is exempt under Section 15333, as a project not exceeding five acres in size to assure restoration, enhancement, and protection of habitat. Consistent with that exemption, there would be no significant adverse impacts on endangered, rare, or threatened species or their habitat; there are no known hazardous materials at or near the project site; and the project will not cause cumulative impacts. Since the Conservancy’s proposed grantee for this project is a nonprofit organization, staff are not invoking Sections 15307 or 15308, which pertain to regulatory agencies. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption following the Conservancy’s action.