

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

May 29, 2014

**CATALINA ISLAND TRAILS SIGNAGE PROGRAM**

Project No. 14-018-01

Project Manager: Kara Kemmler

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$45,000 to the Catalina Island Conservancy to implement a signage program along the public trail system on Santa Catalina Island, Los Angeles County.

**LOCATION:** Santa Catalina Island, Los Angeles County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Regional Location](#)

Exhibit 2: [Sign Locations](#)

Exhibit 3: [Site Photos](#)

Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)

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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 forty-five thousand dollars (\$45,000) to the Catalina Island Conservancy (“Island Conservancy”) for phase three of a signage program to enhance visitor access and recreation along the trail system on Santa Catalina Island. Prior to disbursement of Coastal Conservancy funds for the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Coastal Conservancy: a work program, including a schedule and budget; the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the work; and a signage plan to ensure acknowledgment of 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 project is consistent with the purposes and criteria of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (§ 31400 *et seq.*) regarding public access to and along the coast.
3. The proposed project serves greater-than-local needs.
4. The Island Conservancy is a public benefit nonprofit organization existing under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The proposed authorization will provide funds to the Catalina Island Conservancy (“Island Conservancy”) to implement phase three of a signage program to enhance visitor access and recreation along the existing trail system on Santa Catalina Island (Catalina/Catalina Island).

Previously the Island Conservancy conducted a detailed inventory of existing signage, mapped existing trails and sensitive habitat areas and created a four phase program for new and updated signage. The four phase program includes 1) wayfinding signage; 2) caution signs; 3) welcome and coastal signage; 4) wildlands signage. Phases one and two were completed in 2013. This authorization would provide funding for the third phase.

The purpose of the signage program is to update and replace older existing signs as well as design and install new signs. A primary objective of the program is to implement a unifying graphic identity consistent among the various signs along the trail. In this way visitors can easily connect, explore and relate stories and experiences along the trail. The signs also provide wayfinding and cautionary information to safely navigate visitors through the unfamiliar environment.

The third phase, welcome and coastal signage, includes six welcome signs located at the entry points to the island and trails system and coastal interpretive signs at six additional locations focusing on the plant and animal communities and natural resources unique to the Island (Exhibit 2). The work will include final design, production and installation of these signs. The public recreational experience will be greatly enhanced by the signage program and the third phase is a key phase to welcoming visitors and improving public understanding of coastal resources on the Island.

**Site Description:** Santa Catalina Island is part of the Channel Islands off of the Southern California coast. Catalina lies 22 miles southwest of Los Angeles within Los Angeles County (Exhibit 1). The Island is home to more than 60 plant, animal and insect species found nowhere else in the world. It is visited by more than one million people annually.

The Island Conservancy maintains 88 percent, approximately 42,100 acres, of the island as a wildlands refuge with a plethora of public recreation opportunities. Public access to the island is available via Avalon, Two Harbors, and Airport in the Sky (Exhibit 2). From any of these ports,

one can access the extensive trail system that draws in day hikers, backpackers and mountain bikers. Over 200,000 visitors access the trail system on the island each year, a number that is increasing every year. More than sixty thousand school children each year visit camps along the trail system.

There are over 200 miles of public trails on the island. The 37-mile Trans-Catalina Trail is the backbone of the island's trail system. It begins on the east end of the island, transects the island's interior and terminates at the west end (see Exhibit 2). There are many linkages along the trail where visitors can access special cultural, historical, and natural resource areas. Spur trails provide access to recreational areas such as picnic and camping facilities, entry from transportation hubs and access to beach areas. There are numerous places within the trail system where one can stop and take in a spectacular vista. At the top of an old 1800's stage coach road, a hiker can rest at the summit and look out across miles of the vast Pacific Ocean and see the mainland shores all the way from the coast of Malibu down to the Mexican border. On a clear day, the vista extends to the snow-covered San Gabriel Mountains and beyond. Other scenic perches along the trails offer vantages of beautiful cove beaches, rocky reefs, kelp forests and other islands in the chain (Exhibit 3). These scenic lookout areas are also opportune places to engage the visitor with interpretive signage about the converging ocean currents that enrich the waters surrounding the island resulting in the biologically diverse ecosystem below.

Interpretive opportunities abound along the trail system. At Little Harbor the trail leads to rare sand dunes, dynamic tide pools and a salina where fresh and saltwater mix to create another unique micro-environment. This is also a favorite spot for the island's bison to gather. Following the trail to Two Harbors, visitors will enter an area of rich Civil War and sailing history. The trails on the hills of the north facing slopes provide a canvas for learning about the native Tongva people that inhabited the island thousands of years ago.

The proposed signage program will provide an enhanced experience for visitors, guiding them safely along the trails and providing a valuable foray into the natural, cultural and historical resources on and surrounding the island.

**Project History:** There is a long history of conservation and recreation efforts on Catalina Island. The Island Conservancy was founded by the Wrigley Family in 1972 as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with the aim of making most of the island a permanent nature preserve for the benefit of future generations. It protects 88 percent of Catalina Island, including more than 62 miles of unspoiled beaches and secluded coves—the longest publicly accessible stretch of undeveloped coastline left in Southern California.

The Island Conservancy is a leader in conservation programs that protect and restore endangered species and threatened habitats. It conducts educational outreach through two nature centers, its Wrigley Memorial & Botanic Garden, guided experiences in the Island's rugged interior, and its award winning radio series *Isla Earth*.

This project is part of the 'Island Ways Interpretive Master Plan' which was completed by the Island Conservancy in cooperation with key stakeholders on the island – the Catalina Island Museum, the Catalina Island Chamber of Commerce, the City of Avalon, the Santa Catalina Island Company, and individual Island residents. The Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service also provided assistance in the development of

the plan. The signage program enjoys support by a range of stakeholders including agencies, organizations, local businesses, and individuals.

### PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$45,000
Catalina Island Conservancy	\$34,300
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$79,300</b>

The expected source of Conservancy funds for the proposed project is an appropriation to the Conservancy in fiscal year 2009-10 from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84, codified at Public Resources Code (PRC) §§ 75001-75130). Proposition 84 authorizes the use of bond funds for projects that promote access to and enjoyment of coastal resources and that are consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. (See PRC §75060(b)).

As discussed in the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section below, the project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21. The proposed signage program will enhance public access along the trails to the coast and through the wildlands and will provide new signage to engage and educate the visitor about the coastal resources on and surrounding Catalina Island.

The Island Conservancy funded the first two phases of the program with a mix of private donations and an endowment. The Island Conservancy will provide \$34,300 matching for this phase of the signage program and Coastal Conservancy funds would provide the \$45,000 needed to close the funding gap for the third phase.

### CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (PRC), Sections 31400 *et seq.*, and Chapter 9 public coastal access.

Public Resources Code Section 31400 directs the Conservancy to have a principal role in the implementation of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. Funding this coastal access project is consistent with §31400.1, which authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to a public agency to operate, or manage lands for public access purposes to and along the coast, when the subject accessways serve greater than local needs. Catalina Island hosts over a million visitors from around the world each year. PRC §31400.3 authorizes the Conservancy to "provide such assistance as is required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division." The proposed signage program is an integral part of the island's trail system and the public's enjoyment of it.

Consistent with Section 31400.2, staff recommends approval of this project after evaluating the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy in light of the total amount of available funds for public accessway projects, the fiscal resources of the grantee, the urgency of the project

relative to other eligible projects, and the application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority. Consistency with the last requirement is discussed in greater detail in the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines” below.

The proposed trails signage program will provide enhanced access and recreational opportunities for the public and is therefore, consistent with Chapter 9 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation.

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

Consistent with the Conservancy’s 2013-2018 Strategic Plan **Goal 2, Objectives 2C and 2D**, the signage program will increase and enhance coastal recreational opportunities by designing and installing new and replacing existing dilapidated signs to help guide and inform the public, enhancing their enjoyment of the Island trail system.

This signage program is consistent with **Goal 9, Objectives 9A and 9B**, which seek to expand environmental education efforts to improve public understanding, use and stewardship of coastal resources. The proposed program includes interpretive signage to improve the public’s understanding of the sensitive and unique coastal resources on Catalina Island, including coast and ocean natural resources and cultural and maritime history.

**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 has the support of elected officials including Congressman Alan Lowenthal and LA County Supervisor Don Knabe; public agencies, including the National Park Service, LA County Parks and Recreation and the City of Avalon; organizations such as, the Boy Scouts of America, the Catalina Island Marine Institute and others (See Exhibit 4, Project Letters).
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located on Santa Catalina Island within the coastal zone of Los Angeles County.
5. **Need:** The grantee has endowment funds to fund a portion of the project but the requested Conservancy funds are needed to fill the funding gap to implement phase three.

6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Over a million people from all over the world visit Catalina Island each year. The Island Conservancy trails system hosts about 20% of those visitors and beckons more every year.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** Most of the sign locations' vulnerability to sea level rise is very low because of its distance from the shoreline and elevation. Those that are closer to the shoreline may be vulnerable to some damage in severe storms but given the nature of the improvements, repair costs are not expected to be significant and the grantee would repair or replace signage if needed.

### **Additional Criteria**

10. **Leverage:** The Island Conservancy has funded the first two phases of the program with a mix of private donations and an endowment. For the third phase, the subject of this authorization, the Island Conservancy is using an endowment to fund almost half of the project with the Conservancy's funds filling the funding gap. This phase will be used as leverage to fund the fourth phase which will complete the signage program.
13. **Readiness:** The first two phases of the program are complete. The Island Conservancy is ready to implement this phase immediately upon approval of this authorization.
16. **Cooperation:** This project is part of the 'Island Ways Interpretive Master Plan' which was completed by the Island Conservancy in cooperation with key stakeholders on the island, including the Catalina Island Museum, the Catalina Island Chamber of Commerce, the City of Avalon, the Santa Catalina Island Company, and individual Island residents.
18. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The proposed project is located in an area that is easily reached public transportation providing opportunities for visitors to access the site without the need for vehicles. During installation of signs, the Island Conservancy will endeavor to utilize hand equipment for sign installation.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH THE LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM**

The proposed project is located within the coastal zone. Santa Catalina Island has a certified LCP, which is part of Los Angeles County's General Plan Coastal Element. Thus, the project will be evaluated for consistency with the LCP policies.

The signage program is consistent with the Recreation and Visitor-Serving Facilities policies in the LCP, which provide for a full range of recreational, educational and scientific activities combined with conservation of the Island. Specifically, Policy 1 states that "opportunities for coastal recreation consistent with protection of natural resources" shall be increased. The signage program will enhance the visitor's recreational experience and increase interpretive learning opportunities while protecting the natural resources adjacent to the trails.

Policy 3 provides that "recreational development shall be permitted and encourage provided that such development is sited and designed to protect views and minimizes alterations to topography, native vegetation and the natural character of the shoreline." The installation of the signage involves very minimal ground disturbance and no landform alterations or vegetation removal. The signs are also being sited and designed to fit with the character and views of each site so that they do not have a visual impact.

Additionally, Policy 5 encourages “visitor-serving facilities that allow for the enjoyment and use of the educational opportunities of the Island.” The signage program will serve to enhance the enjoyment and use of the trail system and provide additional educational opportunities for visitors using the trails to learn about the Island’s resources and history.

The Catalina Island trails signage program provides an enhanced recreational experience and increased learning opportunities for the public as the LCP policies intended with no impacts to the environment and, therefore, is consistent with the Santa Catalina Island LCP.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

These signs will be placed on existing sign posts or at existing facilities along existing trails and, as such, the signage is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act under Title 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 15301 which exempts minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities or topographical features. Placement of the signs are part of the continued operation of the trail with "negligible or no expansion of an existing use." Section 15301 provides as an example alterations to existing sidewalks, bicycle and pedestrian trails (*Id.* subsection (c)).

The project is also categorically exempt under Section 15311, which exempts placement of minor structures accessory to existing facilities, such as on-premise signs. The interpretive signs will be small, minor structures that are accessory to the existing trail system and recreational facilities.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.