

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

October 2, 2014

CRESCENT CITY BEACHFRONT PARK COASTAL ACCESS PROJECT

Project No.14-021-01

Project Manager: Peter Jarausch

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$125,000 to the City of Crescent City to construct access improvements including a stairway and ramp to the beach at Beachfront Park, in Crescent City.

LOCATION: Crescent City, Del Norte County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Concept Level Site Plan](#)

Exhibit 3: [Beachfront Park Master Plan](#)

Exhibit 4: [Environmental Documents & Public Meeting Minutes](#)

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 up to one hundred twenty-five thousand dollars (\$125,000) to the City of Crescent City (City) to construct access improvements including but not limited to a stairway and accessible ramp to the beach at Beachfront Park, in Crescent City, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any funds the City will submit to the Executive Officer of the Conservancy for review and approval the following items:
 - a. A work program, schedule and budget and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the work.
 - b. Evidence that all necessary permits and approvals for the project have been obtained.

- c. A sign plan.
2. The City shall ensure that the access improvements are consistent with the Conservancy's 'Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development' and with all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations and guidelines governing 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 Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding a system of public accessways.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The Conservancy has reviewed the proposed Negative Declaration attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 4, and finds, based on the State Coastal Conservancy's independent judgment and analysis of the whole record before it, including the Initial Study, addendum, and comments received, that the project avoids, or reduces the possible significant environmental effects to a level of insignificance, and that there is no substantial evidence that the Crescent City Beachfront Park Coastal Access Project may have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 California Code Regulations Section 15382.
4. The proposed project serves greater than local needs."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$125,000 to the City of Crescent City to construct a new accessway to the beach at Beachfront Park along the Crescent City waterfront (See Exhibit 1: Project Location). Improvements will include an approximately 50 lineal foot long and 6 foot wide concrete accessible ramp at the western end of the beach, and an approximately 45 lineal foot concrete staircase near the end of Howe Drive. The staircase will traverse an area that is currently rock revetment and will allow residents and visitors access to the beach and the water. The ramp will improve an existing pathway and provide a beach access route for visitors with a wide range of abilities. Other improvements will include a paved picnic area, several accessible parking spots near the top of the stairs and interpretive signage (See Exhibit 2: Conceptual Plan).

Currently visitors who come to this section of Beachfront Park, also known as Howe Park East, have to climb down an eight foot high rock revetment to access the beaches in this location. The stairs will provide a safe route to the beach. At the western end of the beach, known as Howe Park West, the improved coastal access trail will be compliant with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act and state and other accessibility laws and will allow safe beach access for a much larger segment of the population. Creating a safe beach access will open up many new

recreational opportunities such as beach combing, playing in the sand, fishing, non-motorized boating, and wildlife viewing for a wide variety of visitors.

The access point will also provide water access for non-motorized boating including windsurfing, kayaking, and stand up paddle boarding. This portion of the Crescent City Harbor provides relatively calm waters in comparison with areas outside of the breakwater. It is also situated away from the commercial fishing fleet which should reduce conflicts between larger motorized boats and recreational kayakers.

Two recent tsunamis in 2006 and 2011 serve as a reminder that the proposed project must be designed to withstand impacts from tsunamis. To accommodate this potential, the ramp and stair will be anchored below the revetment, which itself has been recently strengthened by the Army Corps of Engineers. It will also be a solid concrete structure that will not be damaged if it is inundated. This new access route will increase public safety by providing a quick and safe way to exit near the northeast end of the beach in the event of a tsunami warning. Currently one has to either exit at the south end, or climb up the rock revetment which is hazardous to do and only possible by the most able.

The City of Crescent City has successfully completed previous California Coastal Trail projects with grants from the Conservancy (see Project History). City staff is highly motivated to complete this project and have demonstrated the ability to undertake these types of construction projects.

Site Description: Crescent City is located in Del Norte County, near the Oregon border, and the Crescent City harbor is California's northernmost harbor. Crescent City is the northern gateway to California's famous redwoods. Visitors from all over the world stay in local hotels and frequent local businesses on their way to explore Redwood National and State Parks, and stunning sections of California's coastline.

This access point will be located in the City's Beachfront Park, an approximately 35-acre waterfront park located between the Crescent City Harbor and downtown Crescent City (See Exhibit 3). An approximately half mile long signed section of the California Coastal Trail passes through this area. The park is Crescent City's most prominent park with a public pool, cultural center, large kids play area, and picnic area with fire pits at the southern end of the beach. It fronts onto the outer section of Crescent City Harbor, directly between the City owned RV Park on the east end and Battery Point Lighthouse to the west. As the only incorporated city in Del Norte County many county residents rely on the recreational facilities provided by the City.

The section known as 'Howe Park East' is closest to the most frequented sections of the park, the pool, cultural center, and playground and it therefore a good location to provide access to the beach. The site currently consists of a large gravel parking lot with rock revetment on the south side leading down to the beach. The section known as 'Howe Park West' consists of a short ADA compliant trail which stops just short of the beach, as well as picnic tables and fire rings. The ramp will bring the connection to the beach up to current ADA standards for a beach access route. Both the ramp and stair will be mostly contained within the existing rock revetment and the trailhead improvements will be within the footprint of the existing parking lot.

Project History: In 2012, the City of Crescent City completed the Beachfront Park Master Plan which was funded by a Community Development Block Grant. The master plan is the synthesis of public and stakeholder input and provides a guide to improving Beachfront Park. The Master

Plan is a conceptual drawing with amenities designed to benefit both residents and visitors. If fully implemented, Beachfront Park will include a larger beach area, playing fields, and an amphitheater for summer events (See Exhibit 3). The master plan also includes the construction of 'Howe Park East' which is located in the southeastern portion of the park and is the subject of this proposed authorization. This section of park includes a coastal access & and trailhead.

The proposed project will construct the first accessible pathway to a sandy beach in the Crescent City area. Currently, all visitors can follow the Coastal Trail from the Battery Point Lighthouse, along Beachfront Park and to the City's RV park. They can continue on from there to the Crescent City Harbor. Along this walk are views of the Harbor, Whaler Island, Lighthouse, and local wildlife. However, there is no developed pathway to the beach itself. One existing ramp farther west provides access to a rocky shoreline and Battery Point Lighthouse. At the southern end of Beachfront Park itself visitors frequently climb over a short section of rock so that they can walk their dogs along the beach. The City of Crescent City has been very active in developing coastal access along their waterfront and the ramp and picnic area is would make the last portion of the Beachfront Park more accessible.

The Conservancy has undertaken a number of Coastal Trail projects within the City of Crescent City. Most recently in 2005, the Conservancy awarded the City a grant for the *Crescent City Coastal Trail: Harbor North Segment*. With that funding the City constructed a new bridge over Elk Creek as well as trailhead amenities. The bridge is an important link between downtown Crescent City and the Crescent City Harbor to the south. The Conservancy is also working with the Crescent City Harbor District to construct visitor improvements to the Harbor and a new section of Coastal Trail.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$125,000
City of Crescent City	\$20,000
Project Total	\$145,000

The source of Conservancy funds is expected to be from a fiscal year 2009 appropriation of the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, codified at 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 coastal access and is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21, as discussed below.

The City of Crescent City will contribute \$20,000 for final designs, permitting, and towards labor for project. In addition the City has already spent \$20,000 to develop the designs and for the environmental review.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 (Sections 31400-31409) of the Public Resources Code, as follows:

Pursuant to sections 31400.1 and 31400.2, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of the initial development of public accessways by any public agency or non-profit organization for public access purposes to and along the coast that serve greater than local needs. Consistent with this authority, the proposed project provides funds to the City to construct a public accessway at Beachfront Park. The proposed stairway and ramp would improve beach access for the residents and tourists who come to this region for its scenic beauty.

Pursuant to Section 31400.2, the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy shall be determined by the total amount of funding available for coastal public accessway projects, 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. The proposed contribution by the Conservancy was determined based on application of project selection criteria as discussed below and on consideration of other available resources and the contributions to the project by the City.

CONSISTENCY WITH ACCESSWAY STANDARDS

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s Accessway Standards as discussed below.

Standard No. 1, Protect the Public and Coastal Resources. The new ramp and stair will provide a safer pathway to the beach by eliminating the need to climb down an eight foot high rock revetment. The pathway will also provide non motorized boaters a launching point that minimizes conflict between the commercial fishing fleet and recreational use of the harbor.

There will be a continuing risk to visitors and residents of the Crescent City area from a potential tsunami. An active warning system of sirens exists and they were successfully used to evacuate low lying areas during the 2006 and 2011 events. Improvements to Beachfront Park will not increase the risk to the visiting public. The proposed stairway and ramp will provide a safer exit route for beach visitors in the event of a tsunami warning.

Standard No. 12, Support Facilities. Support facilities will be improved by installing a new parking area, interpretive signage, and picnic tables. The interpretive signage will help visitors gain a better appreciation of coastal resources.

Standard No. 13, Barrier-Free Access. The ramp, parking, and picnic areas have been designed to be wheelchair accessible.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective 2A** of the Conservancy’s 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will construct a project that provides barrier-free access to and along the coast.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective 2D** of the Conservancy's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will construct a new facility 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:** See "Exhibit 5: Project Letters."
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of Crescent City, CA.
5. **Need:** Without the Conservancy's participation the City of Crescent City will be unable to improve ADA access to the beach, a goal of the Conservancy, due to lack of funds. Crescent City is a small rural California community with unemployment above the statewide average and a significant portion of the population earning less than the California median income.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Crescent City receives hundreds of thousands of visitors every year who come to enjoy the areas stunning natural coastline and visit Redwood National and State Parks. This project will be one of the few locations at which visitors with a range of abilities will be able to safely experience the coastline.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed access ramp and stairway will go from the current high tide line up to a parking lot at 8 feet in elevation. If constructed, this parking area will remain more than 7 feet above the statewide projected sea level rise of 16 inches by 2050. The stair and ramp will be constructed out of concrete and firmly anchored below the toe of the existing revetment to withstand high tides and any potential increase in sea level rise.

Unlike much of California sea level in Crescent City currently has an annual decrease of 0.65mm a year (average for 1930's to present). This is due to an annual seismic uplift that is greater than sea level rise in the region. This seismic uplift will somewhat mitigate the predicted sea level rise and allow the public to continue to enjoy the beach.

Additional Criteria

8. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
9. **Readiness:** The City of Crescent City is ready to undertake this project.

10. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** Should there be an increase in storm event frequency of severity as a result of climate change, the area can anticipate heavy wind and wave action. The public access improvements in the proposed projects will be engineered to withstand these types of impacts.
11. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The proposed projects will cause a short term increase in GHG emissions due to construction and a minor long term increase from an anticipated increase in number of vehicles travelling to Beachfront Park. This area is already connected to the California Coastal Trail which allows visitors to travel between the nearby RV Park and the popular Battery Point Lighthouse by foot or bicycle. This non-motorized access will somewhat offset the minor increase in long term GHG emissions.
- GHG emissions during construction will be reduced by sourcing materials locally whenever possible and by reducing vehicle idling.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The project is within the California Coastal Zone and within the coastal development permit jurisdictional area of the Coastal Commission and therefore consistency will be determined based on Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act. The Crescent City's Local Coastal Program (LCP) will only apply as non-binding guidance.

The project is consistent with public access uses already identified by the City of Crescent City in their 2011 LCP for Beachfront Park/Howe Drive Table 5-2 lists the current uses at Beachfront Park as "improved access points, beachcombing, scenic viewing..."

Section 5.D.17 of the LCP further spells out the City's public access goals including a requirement that the City actively work towards the attainment of maximum coastal access for the public where it is consistent with the protection of fragile coastal resources. The stairway will be constructed through an existing rock revetment and outside of any known biologically important areas. This Section also requires that the City seek funding for improved access points for use by the physically limited.

The proposed project would also help implement the California Coastal Act's goal of promoting public access (Section 30001.5c). The project is consistent with Sections 30210-30214 of the Coastal Act which promote public access for all people provided safety of the public and resources can also be met. The project is the only fully accessible access point in the area and will be constructed through an existing rock revetment limiting impact to resources. Safety will be improved as visitors will no longer have to climb over rocks to access the beach.

Section 30224 encourages recreational boating use and the proposed project will provide a new launching point for non-motorized boating.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

As the lead agency for the proposed project, the City of Crescent City prepared and circulated for public comment the Initial Study and Negative Declaration (ND) for the *Beachfront Park Coastal & Non Motorized Boating Trail*, and approved the document on January 30, 2014 (Exhibit 4). The initial study indicated that there is no substantial evidence that the project may

have a significant effect on the environment. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife were directly consulted and each declined to comment on the project. No areas of potentially significant impacts were identified.

The City of Crescent City received public comments expressing concern that the project would impact birds that frequent the harbor area and the mouth of Elk Creek. Conservancy and City of Crescent City staff further consulted with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife which continues to maintain that there will be no significant impacts to birds and wildlife. This area is adjacent to the center of Crescent City and is already a developed area. Concentrating use in the Harbor, and away from undeveloped sections of coastline will be beneficial to wildlife.

To address the public concerns about the interactions between visitors and wildlife, the City of Crescent City will install regulatory and interpretive signage at the top of the ramp. The regulatory signage will remind the public of the existing laws and ordinances (e.g. dogs on leash, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act). The interpretive panel will educate the public as to the importance of respecting wildlife and provide guidance as to the correct distance to stay away from birds. (See Addendum, Exhibit 4). The negative declaration also assessed cumulative impacts from fine particulate matter that may be raised during construction. The City determined that this impact will not be on a large enough scale to violate any Federal air quality standards or result in considerable cumulative net increase of criteria pollutants. (Exhibit 4, p. 21).

Staff has reviewed the Negative Declaration attached as Exhibit 4, and concurs that there is no evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment. Staff will file a notice of determination upon Conservancy approval.