

# COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

January 29, 2015

## COAL OIL POINT RESERVE EDUCATION CENTER

Project No.14-032-01

Project Manager: Rachel Couch

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$300,000 to the Regents of the University of California, on behalf of UCSB, to construct an education and research center at Coal Oil Point Natural Reserve, in southern Santa Barbara County.

**LOCATION:** University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Integrated Coastal and Marine Resources Protection

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### EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Photos and Graphics](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

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### **RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Section 31220 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) to the Regents of the University of California, on behalf of the University of California, Santa Barbara, to construct an education and research center at Coal Oil Point Natural Reserve. Prior to disbursement of Conservancy funds, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Conservancy’s Executive Officer:

1. A detailed work program, including budget and schedule.
  2. The names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed on the project.
  3. A sign plan to acknowledge Conservancy funding for the project.
  4. A monitoring and evaluation component for the project.
  5. Evidence of land tenure adequate to construct the project.”
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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 Chapter 5.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the protection of coastal and marine resources.”

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy provide up to \$300,000 to the Regents of the University of California (UC) for construction of an education and research center (the Center) at Coal Oil Point Natural Reserve (the Reserve or COPR) adjacent to Devereux Slough and owned by UC, and managed by the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), whose campus is nearby. UC will renovate a 5,390 square foot building adjacent to the Reserve on the former Devereux School property that will serve as the new headquarters for COPR’s ongoing education, scientific research, and environmental stewardship programs.

COPR supports rare native coastal dune and wetland habitats that provide key opportunities for research and university-level teaching, and is broadly recognized for its conservation values, protecting and providing habitat for five endangered and threatened species and diverse bird populations. Currently about 20 research projects and UCSB classes use the Reserve annually. A large volunteer docent group assists with management of the threatened snowy plover, extensive restoration projects, and public environmental education programs. Currently the Reserve has minimal office space available for staff at the field station and no space for Reserve users. In addition, the Reserve’s only restroom facility is a porta-potty at the field station.

The proposed project will renovate an aged existing building that was purchased by UCSB in 2007 to expand its campus. UCSB has assigned the use of this building to the UC Natural Reserve System for at least 25 years. The renovated facility will meet a crucial need for basic infrastructure for administration, maintenance of the Reserve, research and monitoring, and education gatherings. The building will provide ample administrative space for Reserve personnel, student interns, and collaborating non-profit organizations (e.g. Gray Whale Count and Santa Barbara Audubon), as well as office space for faculty and graduate student researchers conducting projects on the Reserve. A meeting room will seat up to 54 visitors for classes, symposia, conferences, discussion groups, and public lectures. A classroom will be available for smaller groups including K-12 students, college classes, and other public users who will gather to view videos, work on projects, study the Reserve’s collection of local flora and fauna specimens, and participate in other Reserve related educational activities. The classroom will also be available to community user groups for small meetings. Lastly, the facility will include a wet/dry laboratory that will be used for processing samples from the Reserve’s monitoring and research programs. The lab will have microscopes and dissecting scopes for student use that will enhance programs for K-12 students.

The existing building does not meet current ADA and seismic standards and contains hazardous materials including asbestos and lead paint. Significant renovation will be needed to address these issues and develop the planned facilities. The proposed project will be more cost-effective

and have lower environmental impact than building a completely new center, which had previously been considered. Preliminary design, building evaluation, and permitting steps have been completed. Remaining steps in the renovation process include preparation of the construction drawings; and abatement of hazardous materials. Once these steps are completed, the bid process will be conducted, a contractor will be chosen, and construction will commence. This project includes the required upgrades to meet UCSB's safety standards and architectural modifications to improve the building's functions. The education center will include the following facilities: meeting room, classroom, office space, wet/dry laboratory, library, collections, and restrooms.

COPR is owned and managed by the University of California as part of its Natural Reserve System (NRS). The COPR Director will be responsible for overall supervision of the project, while construction will be supervised by staff in UCSB's Department of Facilities Management. In addition to habitat restoration, COPR has successfully implemented a number of construction projects on its property including replacement of the workshop and three sheds, construction of fences and signage around the Reserve, grading of the parking lot, installation of new electrical lines between Reserve buildings, and paving of the entrance road. COPR has developed the preliminary designs for the proposed project and is ready to oversee the renovation work.

**Site Description:** The proposed project site consists of a building and grounds located on the former Devereux School property, now owned by UCSB. The building is located on the West Campus of UCSB (Exhibit 1) and is adjacent to COPR to the north and west. The building has a view of the Devereux Slough to the west and north, the most significant habitat in the Reserve.

COPR consists of 166 acres of protected coastal habitats in the lower drainage area of the Devereux Creek Watershed. The diversity of habitats and wildlife at the Reserve is striking and some of these are now rare along the coast. For example, the beach is breeding habitat for the Pacific coastal population of the threatened Western Snowy Plover and the endangered California Least Tern. Rare invertebrates such as the Globose Dune Beetle, the Dune Spider, and the Sand Tiger Beetle share the beach and dunes with the snowy plovers. The salt marsh provides breeding habitat for the endangered Belding's Savanna Sparrow. The Coastal Dune Scrub is one of the most pristine remnants in Santa Barbara County, and contains a number of rare plant species. Several types of wetlands such as vernal pool, dune swale, salt flat and salt marsh are present at the site. In a short walk, visitors can observe all these habitats and learn why it is important to preserve them. Devereux Slough has been designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by the National Audubon Society because of the species richness and abundance of birds.

East of the project site is faculty housing owned by UCSB, and northeast of the project site is a daycare center, horse boarding facility, elementary school, and open space owned the Isla Vista Recreation and Park District.

South and southeast of the project site is open space area known as West Campus Bluffs that is owned by UCSB. This area is a popular route for Isla Vista residents to reach Coal Oil Point, Ellwood Mesa, and surrounding beaches.

**Project History:** In 2011 the Conservancy approved a \$250,000 grant for habitat restoration and coastal access improvements on the Reserve, which will be completed in 2015. In January 2014, the Reserve manager contacted Conservancy staff about the proposed project, a cost-effective

opportunity to meet the demonstrated need for an adequate research and education space at the Reserve. The proposed project compliments the previous grant by allowing Reserve staff, students and volunteers to conduct activities from a modern, well-equipped and appropriate facility, in contrast to the current substandard facilities used by Reserve staff and users.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>
Wildlife Conservation Board	\$505,000
UC Natural Reserve System	\$138,500
Private Sources	\$126,500
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$1,070,000</b>

The expected source for the Conservancy funds for this project is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000 (Proposition 12, Public Resources Code Section 5096.352). Proposition 12 funds may be used pursuant to Division 21 of the Public Resources Code for the development of public use facilities, as proposed here. Proposition 12 directs that a portion of funds appropriated to the Conservancy be used specifically for Central Coast projects, including projects in Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara Counties. The proposed project will renovate a building in Santa Barbara County that will be used for research and education about coastal resources.

In addition to the Conservancy funding, the bulk of the funding for the project is being provided through a variety of other sources, as detailed above.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (PRC); in particular Chapter 5.5, PRC Section 31220, regarding integrated coastal and marine resources protection.

PRC Section 31220(a) authorizes the Conservancy to award grants for coastal watershed and living marine resources protection and restoration projects that meet one or more criteria of Section 31220(b). As set forth in Section 31220(b)(9), this includes projects for the construction or expansion of nature centers or research facilities that emphasize conservation education or research activities focusing on the marine portion of the coastal zone or the land and ocean interface. Consistent with this section, COPR is developing the education facility as a regional center to educate students, researchers, and visitors about the Reserve habitats and the interface of the coastal and marine environment. The programs of the Center will focus on coastal habitat education, scientific research, and environmental stewardship.

As Section 31220(c) requires, the proposed project is consistent with local and state watershed plans. This is discussed in detail below under “Consistency with Local Watershed Management Plan/State Water Quality Control Plan.” Section 31220(c) also requires that projects include a

monitoring and evaluation component. For the proposed project this will be the contractor's quality control process and UCSB's quality assurance process to ensure that the project is constructed consistent with the approved designs.

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

Consistent with **Goal 9, Objective C**, the proposed project will construct a regional environmental education center to educate the public about environmental issues affecting the coast and inland watersheds.

**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 October 2, 2014, 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. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** The proposed project is identified in UCSB's 2010 Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) as an "Academic and Support" use. The LRDP, approved by UC in September 2010, and certified by the Coastal Commission with modifications in November 2014, states that "[a]cademic and support uses will generally be concentrated to the east, on the Main Campus, and to the south on the Devereux property grounds. The development program includes space for instruction, research and support, organized research and activities, most academic support and student services, and public service functions such as arts and lectures. These functions are accommodated in a variety of spaces including: classrooms, instructional research laboratories, professional schools and programs, ancillary support facilities such as administrative facilities, libraries, performance and cultural facilities, research institutes, conference facilities, and services supporting academic operations" (p. 51). The Center will also help further the Environmental Principles and Concepts (EP&C) developed by California Environmental Protection Agency and the California Integrated Waste Management Board, in cooperation with the Resources Agency, State Department of Education, State Board of Education, and Secretary for Education as required by the State's Education and the Environment Initiative (EEI). (Pavley AB1548, Chapter 665, Statutes of 2003 and Pavley AB1721, Chapter 581 Statutes of 2005). The Principles examine the interactions and interdependence of human societies and natural systems and serve as the foundation for the Model Curriculum for California's K-12 mandated under the EEI. Relevant EB&C principles that will be addressed through the Center's education programs

include: Principle II – People Influence Natural Systems: the Reserve is a protected habitat area, yet due to its location near UCSB and dense residential areas accommodates significant public access; Principle III – Natural Systems Change in Ways that People Benefit from and can Influence: the Reserve’s education research and stewardship programs both educate and inform people and improve the Reserve; and Principle IV - There are no Permanent or Impermeable Boundaries that Prevent Matter from Flowing Between Systems: the Reserve provides a system that demonstrates the impact of human and natural activities on a watershed and surrounding areas.

4. **Support of the public:** The project has the strong support of the public, local organizations and local elected officials, including State Assemblymember Das Williams and the Santa Barbara Audubon Society. See Exhibit 3. The facility will enhance the experiences of the Reserve’s 7,000 annual visitors by providing a more welcoming point of contact.
5. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of Santa Barbara County.
6. **Need:** UCSB has secured funding commitments from private donors and the Wildlife Conservation Board for the project but is still short of funds needed to complete construction. Approval of this funding request would fill the majority of that funding gap and leverage additional funding from private sources. Conservancy funds are critical for implementing the project.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The new center, located next to a major university with a diverse student population composed of people from around the world, is intended to host a wide variety of Reserve users engaged in science education, scientific research, and environmental stewardship. Program participants include students, community members, and volunteers from underserved communities of the Central Coast region. As an Audubon California designated Important Bird Area, the Reserve also draws birders from around the world.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project is not expected to be vulnerable to sea level rise because the project site is located on a bluff 25 feet above Devereux Slough.

#### **Additional Criteria**

9. **Urgency:** In recent years, the Reserve has operated and delivered its programs in substandard spaces that do not meet current codes. UCSB has agreed to donate the building to the Reserve to carry out its mission in a more efficient and appropriate manner.
10. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
11. **Readiness:** UC has secured property for the project, secured local and regional support for the project, developed preliminary design drawings, secured permits for the project, and raised the majority of the project funds. The Reserve is ready to begin renovation work immediately.
12. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The project will incorporate project design elements, construction techniques, and maintenance practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. For example, the Center will utilize natural daylight and ventilation by adding two large French doors in the main room; as additional funds become available, solar panels will be added to power the building; and drought tolerant native plants requiring minimal water

will be used for landscaping. In addition, the project will use local labor during construction and materials in the project are standard construction materials that can be purchased from local suppliers. The project will minimize car trips to the site as it is located near a densely populated community, within walking distance of UCSB, Isla Vista Elementary School, several daycare centers, and accessible by public transportation.

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN/  
STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN:**

Projects undertaken pursuant to Chapter 5.5 of Public Resources Code Division 21 (Section 31220) must be consistent with the following, if available and relevant: Integrated Watershed Management Programs; local watershed management plans, and water quality control plans, adopted by the state and regional water boards. The Integrated Watershed Management and water quality plans are not applicable to the proposed project because the project would renovate an existing facility. The proposed project is consistent with the Coal Oil Point Reserve Management Plan in that “[t]he management plan will identify the optimum allowable facilities for resident staff, researchers, classes, and public outreach programs. In general, existing and new infrastructure will be minimal, consolidated, and adjacent to the Reserve at Coal Oil Point.” The new center will provide a consolidated space of optimum size to conduct the Reserve’s education, research and stewardship activities, through renovation of an existing building located adjacent to the Reserve.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from the provisions of CEQA under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15302 in that it involves reconstruction of existing structures and facilities where the new structure will be located on the same site as the structure replaced and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structure replaced.