

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

June 25, 2015

SANTA CRUZ MONTEREY BAY SANCTUARY SCENIC TRAIL, NETWORK DESIGN OF SEGMENTS 5 AND 7

Project No. 09-004-02

Project Manager: Tom Gandesbery

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,000,000 to the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission towards design, engineering and environmental analysis of a portion of Segment 5 and all of Segment 7 of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail in Santa Cruz County.

LOCATION: Santa Cruz County from Wilder Ranch parking area north to Laguna Rd and in from Pacific Ave to Natural Bridges Drive the City of Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Map of Trail Alignment](#)

Exhibit 3: [Photos](#)

Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 - 31410 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to one million dollars (\$1,000,000) to the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) towards design, permitting documentation and environmental analysis for Segments 5 and 7 of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the commencement of work and the disbursement of funds, the RTC shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a detailed work program, schedule and budget, and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.
2. To the extent appropriate, the RTC shall ensure that the design is consistent with the Conservancy’s ‘Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and

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Development' and all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations and guidelines for 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 the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The proposed project will assist in the development of a segment of public use trail that will serve more than local needs”.

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The proposed project would provide a \$1,000,000 grant to the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) to plan two segments of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail (MBSST) in the County. In 2012, the RTC acquired the Union Pacific rail line from Davenport to Watsonville with the intention of developing the Santa Cruz portion of the MBSST along the rail right-of-way. In 2013, the RTC completed a Master Plan for the MBSST. The MBSST, a regional segment of the California Coastal Trail, is a cooperative effort by the counties of Santa Cruz and Monterey and their respective transportation agencies to provide bicycle and pedestrian access along the Monterey Bay shoreline.

The MBSST network in Santa Cruz County will include approximately 32 miles of trail along the rail line with 18 miles of additional trail spurs to coastal access and viewpoints and is anticipated to take over a decade to construct. In addition to a paved ADA-compliant trail, the project includes safety fencing to separate the trail from the railroad tracks and agricultural operations; vegetative buffers, emergency locators, directional and interpretative signage and standard trail amenities such as benches and bicycle racks. The proposed project would help fund preparation of detailed designs and documentation needed for permitting, including environmental documentation, for two areas of the rail trail project – a portion of Segment 5, in north county, and all of Segment 7, in the City of Santa Cruz.

Segment 5 of the rail trail extends from Wilder Ranch State Park staging and parking area to Davenport, and is divided into three sub-segments (Exhibit 2). The proposed project would develop detailed designs for segment 5.3 and part of segment 5.2, a total of 4.6 miles. This reach would extend from Wilder Ranch State Park parking area to Highway 1 at Laguna Road. This portion of the trail would provide a connection between the City of Santa Cruz and Coast Dairies (both State Park and BLM holdings) and eventually the San Vicente Redwoods. This stretch of Highway 1 is a popular bicycling route for local residents as well as tourists who want to experience the beauty of the coast, and it is designated as part of the Pacific Coast Bicycle Route. However, high traffic speeds, narrow shoulders, and limited sight distances can make cycling on Highway 1 challenging. The rail trail project will provide a safer alternative for cyclists who currently must ride on the shoulder of Highway 1. Completing the MBSST in this area will also fill significant gaps in regional trails network, including the California Coastal Trail; increase

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tourism; create construction jobs; and potentially reduce road congestion by reducing automobile vehicle trips. The RTC has already secured \$4.5 million in federal funding for constructing this reach and the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County has committed to raising an additional \$3 million for construction.

The remaining \$50,000 of the proposed authorization would be used for detailed design of segment 7 of the MBSST rail trail in the City of Santa Cruz. This 2.4 mile segment extends from Natural Bridges south past Depot Park and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Exploration Center, both of which the Conservancy helped fund, and terminates at Cowell's Beach. The segment will provide bicycle and pedestrian access to the beach from the urban center of the City of Santa Cruz (Exhibit 2). The Conservancy's funds will be used to match federal and state highway funding and local funding.

The RTC led the community planning process that resulted in the Santa Cruz County MBSST Master Plan and is well qualified to administer this grant in that it is the central transportation planning agency for the County. The RTC also successfully applied for the Federal Lands Access Program grant for the project and works cooperatively with the County and all of the cities located within the County.

Site Description: The site consists of two portions of the former Union Pacific Santa Cruz Branch Line, a single track railroad right-of-way: portions of Segment 5 and all of Segment 7. Segment 5 runs from the unincorporated town of Davenport south to the Wilder Ranch State Park parking lot. and the segment runs adjacent to rural farm and undeveloped lands between Highway 1 and the Pacific Ocean. In many areas the route has stunning views of the ocean and the coastal bluffs as well as several well forested creeks and drainages that travel under the rail line and then under Highway 1 and up into the hills north of Santa Cruz. Much of the area east of the site is protected open space owned by State Parks or the Federal Bureau of Land Management. The remainder is privately owned agricultural and open space properties. Due to funding constraints, the RTC will only be implementing the southern portion of the segment from Wilder Ranch to Laguna Road (Exhibit 2). Wilder Ranch, which has a parking area and other visitor facilities, is the northern terminus of an existing multi-use path that connects the the City of Santa Cruz to Wilder Ranch. Laguna Road is a logical northern terminus for this interim project because there is an existing parking area with undeveloped beach access and is planned to be a trailhead for the Coast Dairies Property located on the hills east of Highway 1.

Segment 7 is situated within the town of Santa Cruz running downcoast from the Moore Creek Bridge where the route intersects with a planned multi-use trail leading to Natural Bridges State Beach. From there it then travels down the coast through industrial, commercial, and residential areas for the next several miles to Depot Park in downtown Santa Cruz near the Boardwalk. Segment 7 will link several important recreational facilities including: Antonelli Pond Park, Natural Bridges State Park, and Younger Lagoon Reserve. The segment connects with the existing staging area at Depot Park, connects with new Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Exploration Center and terminates at the Pacific Avenue and Beach Street intersection near the Santa Cruz pier and boardwalk and other downtown attractions.

Project History: In 2005, the Conservancy authorized up to \$10,000,000 as a reimbursable grant to the RTC to purchase 31.8 miles of railway right-of-way from Union Pacific in order to preserve the tracks for future passenger and freight use and for a coastal trail alignment. In 2012, the rail line was purchased primarily through Proposition 116 funds and the additional Conservancy funding was not needed. The entire 50-mile rail trail alignment runs through

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unincorporated rural lands, three small unincorporated communities (Davenport, Aptos and Freedom) and three cities (Santa Cruz, Capitola and Watsonville).

Following acquisition of the rail line, the RTC undertook a major planning effort and in 2012 completed the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network Master Plan (“Plan”) and associated programmatic Environmental Impact Report (“EIR”). The Plan was funded in part by a \$250,000 grant from the Coastal Conservancy. Since completion of the Plan, the RTC has been working with local jurisdictions, partner agencies, and community groups, to move forward with implementation of the Plan. Securing sufficient funding is one of the primary challenges.

In 2013 RTC and Coastal Conservancy staff began discussing the possibility of the Conservancy contributing to planning and/or implementation of specific trail segments. Conservancy staff expressed particular interest in developing the north county sections of the trail since there are not other good options for bicycle and pedestrian routes along the coast and because it would connect the more urban areas of the County with lands conserved lands to the north. The Land Trust of Santa Cruz County also expressed interest in focusing on the north county segments. In order to construct the rail trail project, RTC must first prepare detailed designs, evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the particular trail segment, as specifically designed and in light of the existing programmatic EIR, and prepare appropriate permitting documentation.

PROJECT FINANCING

Planning Phase

Coastal Conservancy (Segments 5 and 7)	\$1,000,000
City of Santa Cruz (Segment 7)	\$640,000
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County (Segment 5)	\$ 380,150
Project Total	\$2,020,150

Construction Phase – Anticipated Funding (Subject to Future Approval)

Federal Lands Access Program (Segment 5)	\$4,519,739
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County (Segment 5)	\$ 2,619,850
Regional Transportation Commission (Segment 7)	\$4,060,000
City of Santa Cruz local funds (Segment 7)	\$560,000
Anticipated Total for Construction	\$11,759,589

The expected source of Conservancy funds for this project is the Coastal Resource Development Fund (Proposition 12- Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000). Section 5096.352 of the Act directs the Conservancy to fund projects pursuant to its enabling legislation (Division 21 of the Public Resources Code) that result in the “enhancement of real property or an interest in real property in coastal areas and watersheds within its jurisdiction and the development of public use facilities”. Proposition 12 directs that a portion of funds appropriated to the Conservancy be used specifically for Central Coast projects,

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including projects in Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara Counties. The proposed project is consistent with the Act because it will help develop a portion of the California Coastal Trail and improve public access to the coast within Santa Cruz County.

In addition to the Conservancy funding, funding for the project (for design and permitting and environmental documentation) is being provided through a variety of other sources, as detailed above.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31409), relating to the provision of public accessways to and along the coast.

Section 31400 directs the Conservancy to have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline and Section 31408(a) directs the Conservancy to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail. Consistent with these sections, the Conservancy would provide funds to the RTC to develop detailed designs and environmental and permitting documentation for implementation of two segments of the MBSST, a subsection of the California Coastal Trail, in Santa Cruz County.

Section 31400.1 allows the Conservancy to provide grants to public entities to develop, operate and manage lands for access to and along the coast, if the accessway is determined to serve more than local public needs. Consistent with this section, the proposed project will provide grant funds to the RTC to develop designs for two trail segments which will enhance coastal access in Santa Cruz County to be used by both local residents and visitors from throughout the state and beyond.

Section 31400.2 requires the Conservancy to consider a number of factors in determining the amount of funding for an access project. Consistent with this section, the proposed level of funding was evaluated relative to the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal access projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant, and the Conservancy's project selection criteria (see "Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines", below).

Section 31400.3 enables the Conservancy to assist public agencies in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The proposed project will further these goals by completing the design, permitting, and environmental analysis for the proposed trail segments.

Finally, Section 31408 directs the Conservancy to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail (CCT) and to cooperate with local public agencies with property interests in coastal areas with respect to planning and making lands available for completion of the trail, including constructing trail links, placing signs, and managing the trail. The proposed authorization will provide funding for planning and designing segments of the CCT, in cooperation with the RTC, a local public agency that holds lands on which the CCT will be developed.

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CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

Standard No. 1, Protect Public and Coastal Resources: The proposed project will help to create a safe alternative to traveling on the shoulder of Highway 1 for pedestrians and bicyclists while minimizing ground disturbance and impacts to sensitive coastal resources and landforms by limiting the project's footprint to the railroad right-of-way. Additionally the trail will include fencing that will discourage users from traveling off the trail onto private property, including several adjacent farms and a residential area.

Standard No. 2, Correct Hazards: The proposed trail will not create any new sources of erosion or fire, because it will be constructed within the existing footprint of the railroad right-of-way and will not include the construction of any major structures.

Standard No. 3, Access Easements: Construction and Location: The proposed trail will be designed as described in the MBSST Master Plan, which specifies an 8-foot-to 12-foot wide multi-use path that accommodates equestrians, cyclists and pedestrians and will be designed in compliance with the requirements of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other applicable state and local laws governing access for persons with disabilities.

Standard No. 4, Privacy: As noted above, the design of the trail will include fencing and signage intended to discourage users from traveling off trail onto private property.

Standard No. 5, Environmentally Sensitive Areas: The environmental impacts of the overall were analyzed in the 2013 Master Plan Environmental Impact Report. Because the trail follows the existing rail alignment, it will avoid major wetland and costal stream resources. In addition, the environmental impacts of the specific segments to be implemented will be reanalyzed under CEQA as part of the proposed authorization and any additional impacts not previously or adequately addressed will be disclosed and addressed prior to construction. The trail will be constructed using construction best management practices for erosion control.

Standard No. 8, Trails: The trail will be built within the existing railroad right-of-way which is at least 25 feet wide. The trail, as constructed within the right-of-way, will not be closer than 10 feet from residential structures, as feasible.

Standard No. 10, Coastal Bikeways: The proposed trail segment will be constructed consistent with the Class I Bike Route standard.

Standard No. 12, Support Facilities: The trail design will include signage, bike racks and trash receptacles at key locations. Although part of the larger plan, the trail segment which is the subject of this proposed authorization will not include construction of restrooms, showers, campgrounds and parking areas.

Standard No. 13, Barrier-Free Access: The trail will be designed to meet the requirements of Title 24 of the California Administrative Code, as well as the requirements of other federal, state and local laws governing access for persons with disabilities.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective C** of the Conservancy's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in the design of a new segment of the California Coastal Trail.

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Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will expand opportunities for barrier-free access along the coast.

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, as follows:

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** By developing the MBSST as a public facility located at Santa Cruz County, the proposed project would serve to promote and implement the goals of several state plans including:
 - a. This project is consistent with *Completing the California Coastal Trail*, the strategic plan prepared by the Coastal Conservancy, in consultation with the California Coastal Commission, the California Conservation Corps and State Parks, pursuant to Senate Bill 908 of 2001.
 - b. *Coastal Act (1976)*, Public Resources Code Section 30210 on public access and recreation calls for "maximum access, which shall be conspicuously posted, and recreational opportunities shall be provided for all the people consistent with public safety needs and the need to protect public rights, rights of private property owners, and natural resource areas from overuse."
 - c. *California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report* (Governor's Office of Planning and Research, 2013 Draft) Chapter 4 – Goals for California's Future, which states that "investments in . . . safe, walkable communities are needed to provide viable alternatives to driving" in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (page 15).
4. **Support of the public:** The MBSST enjoys support from a wide range of the persons and organizations, ranging from coastal trail advocates and cycling groups, to federal and state agencies. The project is also supported by State Senator William Monning and Congresswomen Anna Eshoo, as well as numerous local and state agencies (Exhibit 4)
5. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of Santa Cruz County and City of Santa Cruz.
6. **Need:** Currently, there is no public trail along much of this coastline and the designated California Coastal Trail ("CCT") alignment is along the shoulder of Highway 1. This project is necessary to provide a safe route for the CCT. Without the Conservancy's funding contribution, the project will not proceed as planned and within the established timeframe.

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7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The project will serve both local residents of Santa Cruz and Davenport as well as visitors and tourists. Segment 5 of the MBSST is in an area that is very popular with tourists who come to this area from all over the world to enjoy the stunning ocean vistas and dramatic beaches. The project is expected to significantly increase visitation and tourism to Wilder Ranch State Park and Davenport.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The main alignment of the trail project is located atop coastal bluff that is 75 to 100 feet above mean sea level and therefore is not threatened by predicted rising sea levels within the next 100 years. .

Additional Criteria

9. **Urgency:** The Conservancy's funding is needed in order to provide non-federal match to the \$4.5 million federal FLAP commitment as well as to complement the \$3 million in private funding being raised by the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County. Without the Conservancy's contribution, the project will not proceed as planned and within the established timeframe, which would put the other funding in jeopardy.
10. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
11. **Readiness:** Immediately after securing funding from the Conservancy and other funders, the SRTC will enter into an agreement with the County of Santa Cruz to begin design of Segment 5. The City of Santa Cruz has already started on portions of the Segment 7 design and permitting; the proposed Conservancy funding will support additional needed work.
12. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See "Project History" above.
13. **Return to Conservancy:** See the "Project Financing" section above.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The 1994 General Plan/Local Coastal Program for the County of Santa Cruz is the adopted Local Coastal Program (County LCP) for Segment 5 of the proposed project. The County LCP contains a number of policies that support the proposed project. Objective 7.6 directs the County to "establish a countywide system of hiking, bicycling and equestrian trails which provides access to and connects the various parks, recreation areas, beaches and urban areas." Objective 7.6 also directs the County to "link the County trail system with the proposed state trail system between the state parks, adjoining counties, and cities within the County." Objective 7.7a directs the County "to maximize public use and enjoyment of coastal recreation resources for all people, including those with disabilities, while protecting those resources from the adverse impacts of overuse." Objective 7.7.5 directs the County "to provide for safe bicycle travel along the coastal corridor by developing a coordinated, continuous bicycle route parallel to the shoreline." Objective 7.7.6 directs the County to "establish a system of hiking and bicycle trails and bridges which provides access to and connects the various parks, recreation areas, beaches, and urban areas." The proposed project is consistent with these objectives because it will link an existing bike and pedestrian path that terminates at Wilder Ranch, to Laguna Road at BLM's Coast Dairies property thereby creating an additional 4.6 miles of safe and picturesque trail, and an alternative to traveling along the shoulder of Highway 1.

The March 16, 1995 City of Santa Cruz Local Coastal Program (City LCP) is the adopted LCP for Segment 7 of the proposed project. Environmental Quality Goal EQ states that the City will

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“implement, to the greatest degree possible transportation strategies that reduce the consumption of fossil fuels”. Circulation Goal C2 states that the City will “develop and promote pedestrian travel as a viable transportation mode by developing and maintaining a safe, comprehensive, convenient accessible and aesthetically pleasing pedestrian system.” Furthermore, the project is consistent with Parks and Recreation Goal PR4 in that it will assist the City to “establish a City-wide system of pedestrian, bicycle and hiking trails to enhance opportunities for recreational enjoyment.”

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed authorization is statutorily exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262, because it involves only design and other planning studies, including environmental assessment, for possible future actions, which the Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted, or agreed to fund. Likewise, the proposed authorization is categorically exempt from the provisions of CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306, to the extent that it involves basic data collection and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource to be done as part of a study leading to an action which has not yet approved, adopted, or funded.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon Conservancy approval.