

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

October 1, 2015

**REDWOOD NATIONAL AND STATE PARKS
BEACH WHEELCHAIRS**

Project No. 15-021-01

Project Manager: Peter Jarausch

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$22,000 to the Redwood Parks Association to purchase beach wheelchairs and small storage sheds for use at Redwood National and State Parks.

LOCATION: Redwood National and State Parks, Del Norte and Humboldt Counties.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Photo of Beach Wheelchair](#)

Exhibit 3: [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 an amount not to exceed twenty-two thousand dollars (\$22,000) to the Redwood Parks Association to provide at least six beach wheelchairs for visitors to Redwood National and State Parks (“RNSP”), as well as small storage sheds to house the wheelchairs. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the Executive Officer of the Conservancy shall approve in writing:

1. A work plan for acquisition, maintenance, and storage of the wheelchairs and for making them available for their useful lifetime or five years, whichever is longer.
2. A signing plan to include signs bearing the Conservancy’s logo.
3. An agreement or agreements between the Redwood Parks Association and Redwood National Park and/or the California Department of Parks and Recreation to provide for public use and storage of the wheelchairs and publicity regarding their availability.
4. Evidence that all necessary permits and approvals have been obtained.”

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 Public Access.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. Redwood Parks Association is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends authorization to disburse up to \$22,000 to the Redwood Parks Association (RPA) to purchase six beach wheelchairs to be used at Redwood National and State Parks. The wheelchairs will enable visitors to experience miles of open beaches, trails through the redwoods, and the beauty of the Smith River. Small storage sheds will also be purchased so that the chairs can be stored directly at the beach for easy access.

These specially designed wheelchairs feature large balloon tires to traverse the sand, so that chairs can be pushed by an adult, and they are made with a metal frame for durability. Redwood National and State Parks currently own two beach wheelchairs that have lasted over fifteen years and are used very frequently during the summer. In recent years requests for the wheelchairs have increased to the point where additional chairs are needed to meet the demand. Redwood National and State Parks will maintain the chairs and operate this service. Providing these chairs will give people with physical disabilities more opportunities to enjoy the outstanding coastal resources of RNSP.

Six locations for the chairs have been proposed: Stone Lagoon Visitor Center, Prairie Creek Visitor Center, Gold Bluffs Beach Ranger Station, Enderts Beach, Mill Creek, and the Crescent City Visitor Center (see Exhibit 1). This will double the number of chairs at the Crescent City Visitor Center and Gold Bluffs Beach, and provide a chair for the first time at four other sites. To reserve a chair, visitors contact the parks in advance. Currently, at Gold Bluffs Beach, visitors may take the chair directly to the beach while in Crescent City the chair has to be quickly disassembled and transported to the beach by vehicle. With the new storage sheds the beach wheelchairs will be placed directly at the beach and will not have to be transported by vehicle. The beach wheelchairs are intended to be used within Redwood National and State Parks; however, they would also be available for use on other public lands in the area, such as those managed by the County of Del Norte, or the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

RPA is a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering the understanding, enjoyment and stewardship of Redwood National and State Parks. RPA operates two state park visitor centers year-round and one seasonally. All of the profits from these visitor centers are returned to the parks for special events, exhibits, signs and publications that the public agencies would not be able to accomplish on their own. RPA also works closely with park staff on special fundraising projects for both education and protection of park resources. RPA was created in 2011, from a

merger of North Coast Redwoods Interpretive Association (established in 1976) and Redwood Park Association (established 1985).

Site Description: Redwood National and State Parks consist of Redwood National Park, Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park and Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park. Together the parks include 105,516 acres of federal and state lands in Del Norte and Humboldt counties, situated in northwestern California. The National Park Service and the California Department of Parks and Recreation manage all four parks as a single unit under a joint management plan. Together the parks contain the largest remaining contiguous section of ancient coast redwood forest and 37 miles of pristine coastline. They are recognized as a World Heritage Site and an International Biosphere Reserve.

All six of the proposed locations provide quick access to park resources. In Crescent City visitors can enjoy South Beach and Enderts Beach, a continuous three-mile-long beach. At Stone Lagoon it is possible to paddle across the lagoon to the beach, or take a short drive south to the beach at Dry Lagoon. Gold Bluffs Beach is directly on the coast and also offers stunning views of the Redwoods. And, from Prairie Creek one can either drive out to the beach, or explore the adjacent old growth Redwoods.

Project History: In the summer of 2015 the Conservancy was approached by Redwood National and State Parks regarding the purchase additional beach wheelchairs, as they did not have enough to keep up with the demand. The beach wheelchairs in Crescent City and Gold Bluffs Beach were being frequently used, as word had spread of their availability. A video posted by the Coastal Commission of a beach wheelchair user at Redwood National Park from the spring of 2015 also generated new interest.

The Conservancy has helped purchase beach wheelchairs for use at Crystal Cove Historic District, Imperial Beach, and Sonoma Coast State Park. Those wheelchairs are still in regular use.

The Conservancy has also supported a wide range of access improvements to the coast in Del Norte and Humboldt Counties including the construction of new sections of the California Coastal Trail, the acquisition of property for public access, as well as planning grants for future access. The most recent projects are a new beach access route in Crescent City (construction in 2016), and the recent completion of a section of California Coastal Trail at the Crescent City Harbor (construction in 2014).

PROJECT FINANCING

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Coastal Conservancy | \$22,000 |
| Project Total | \$22,000 |

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is the fiscal year 2013 appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Beach and Coastal Enhancement Account, created in the California Environmental License Plate Fund by Vehicle Code Section 5067(c). These funds may be used for coastal projects that are consistent with provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Acquisition of the beach

wheelchairs will enable more people to access the coast, and is thus consistent with the purposes of Division 21 and this funding source.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project would be implemented pursuant to Chapter 9 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31400 et seq. Section 31400 establishes the Conservancy’s role in implementing a system of public accessways to and along the State’s coastline.

Consistent with Section 31400.1 the Conservancy may award grants to nonprofit organizations to operate lands for public use. The proposed project would provide funding to RPA to assist RNSP with effectively providing all members of the public, including those requiring the use a beach wheelchair, access to the coast.

Also consistent with Section 31400.1, the proposed project would serve a need greater than the immediate local area. The beaches at RNSP serve residents of Humboldt and Del Norte Counties, visitors from throughout California, and many international tourists.

Consistent with Section 31400.3, the Conservancy may 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. Acquisition of beach wheelchairs will enhance the opportunity for people with physical disabilities to enjoy public access facilities at the coast, and is thus consistent with this section.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

Consistent with Standard No. 13, Barrier-Free Access, of the Conservancy’s Access Program Standards, the proposed project would improve access to the coast. Visitors are able to use the beach wheelchairs to explore this wild and scenic section of the coast.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CONSERVANCY’S 2013 STRATEGIC PLAN, AS REVISED JUNE 25, 2015

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective A** of the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan, the proposed project promotes use and awareness of the California Coastal Trail by providing new access to beach sections of the trail in Del Norte County.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective F** of the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan, the proposed project improves support facilities at existing coastal accessways to improve access for people with disabilities.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A** of the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan, the proposed project expands opportunities for barrier-free access to and along the coast by providing the beach wheelchairs at beach access points.

**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 helps implement Articles 2 and 3 of Chapter 3 of the California Coastal Act, which promote public access and recreation for all Californians. It also implements an RNSP management strategy to "Provide opportunities for public access to the full range of RNSP resources in a variety of locations"(Redwood National and State Parks General Management Plan 2000, page 55). Further the Redwood National Park Draft Accessibility Self Evaluation and Transition Plan (August 2015) identifies beach wheelchairs as one of the strategies for improving access to Crescent Beach (Page 30).
4. **Support of the public:** see Exhibit 3: Project Letters
5. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of Del Norte and Humboldt Counties, as well as Crescent City.
6. **Need:** The Conservancy shares the goal of improving access to coastal resources for all Californians. This project will help those who need a beach wheelchair.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** RNSP serves visitors from throughout California as well as many international visitors.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The beach wheelchairs are mobile and will be stored at higher elevations as needed. The beaches in RNSP are typically not constrained by human development and therefore can move and change along with any increase in sea level rise.

Additional Criteria

9. **Urgency:** The two existing beach wheelchairs do not meet demand and this reduces the public's ability to access the coast.
10. **Readiness:** RPA will immediately purchase the beach wheelchairs as soon as the grant is finalized.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** "See "Project History"
12. **Cooperation:** RPA is a nonprofit organization that cooperates closely with RNSP to provide a wide range of services for the public.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The project is consistent with the intent of Del Norte County Local Coastal Program's policies on Access and Recreation. Both emphasize the importance of providing "all people the benefits of recreation resources" (Del Norte County Local Coastal Program 1983 page 15). It also is consistent with the intent of North Coast Area Plan of the Humboldt County Local Coastal program as it seeks to implement the Coastal Act's policy to maximize public recreational opportunities in the coastal zone while protecting coastal resources (Section 2.20).

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The placement of small storage sheds containing beach access wheelchairs is exempt because it involves the construction of new small facilities that do not exceed the maximum allowable on any legal parcel (14 California Code of Regulations, Section 15303) and because it involves the placement of a minor structure accessory to an existing commercial, industrial, or institutional facility (14 California Code of Regulations, Section 15311). Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for this project.