

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
January 28, 2016

BAY AREA RIDGE TRAIL: MILAGRA-BATTERY RIDGE TRAIL CONSTRUCTION

Project No. 14-001-01
Project Manager: Kelly Malinowski

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$110,000 to the National Park Service (“NPS”) to improve a segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail adjacent to Milagra Ridge in the City of Pacifica.

LOCATION: Property adjacent to Milagra Ridge, inland of Highway 1 in Pacifica

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [Site Photographs](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31165 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred and ten thousand and dollars (\$110,000) to the National Park Service (“NPS”) for use at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) to improve a segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail adjacent to Milagra Ridge in the County of San Mateo, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to disbursement of any funds, NPS shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, including a budget and schedule, the names of any contractors to be hired, and a signing plan to acknowledge the Conservancy’s funding for this project.
2. Prior to initiating construction of the project, NPS shall provide written evidence to the Executive Officer of the Conservancy that it has obtained all permits and approvals necessary to implement and complete of the project under applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations.

3. Conservancy funding for the project shall be acknowledged by erecting and maintaining one or more signs on or near the project area, the design and location of which has been reviewed and approved by the Executive Officer.”

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 4.5 (Sections 31160-31165) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access improvements to and around the San Francisco Bay.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines last updated by the Conservancy on October 4, 2014.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

As described in the Conservancy’s Priority Conservation Area Grant Program (“PCA Grant Program”) presented at the March 27, 2014 Conservancy public meeting, the PCA Grant Program is a pilot program initiated by Metropolitan Transportation Commission (“MTC”) with \$10 million of federal transportation funding and \$2.5 million in state funding. Based on the goals of Plan Bay Area and related legislation, the Conservancy, MTC, and Association of Bay Area Governments (“ABAG”) selected 13 projects for potential funding through the PCA Grant Program. The projects function as a package implementing the goals of the Conservancy, MTC, and ABAG, with a mix of public access and trail improvements, open space and agricultural land protection, and natural resource enhancement. This staff recommendation is for one of the 13 projects, and of the 13 projects, this project is one of 6 projects recommended for only state funding.

Staff recommends that the Conservancy grant funds to the National Park Service (“NPS”) for use at its Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) unit, for the construction of an approximately 0.4-mile (roughly 2,000 foot) segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail through the Lower Milagra Site, connecting a public parking lot to the Milagra Ridge open space, which is part of NPS’s GGNRA.

The vision for the Bay Area Ridge Trail is a 500-mile multi-use (serving hikers, mountain bicyclists and equestrians), continuous trail that rings San Francisco Bay high on the ridgeline. The proposed project will improve an existing social trail that is very narrow and has significant erosion issues. The proposed project includes planning, design, and construction activities including erosion control features (checks, steps, waterbars, etc.), installation of NPS wayfinding and interpretive signage along three areas of the planned alignment, installation of post-and-cable fencing to restrict public access from sensitive habitat areas, and restoration of adjacent habitats (specifically the removal of invasive plants and restoration of native plant communities for special-status species). Additionally, the trail will be multi-use, accommodating the pedestrian, bike, and equestrian access that currently exists. The trail is along the preferred

alignment for the Bay Area Ridge Trail through Pacifica, and will allow a connection between coastal areas of Pacifica to open space at Milagra Ridge, in part via Ocean Boulevard and the proposed trail segment. NPS has held a conservation easement over the project site since 2008. The easement was dedicated as part of a permit condition required by the City of Pacifica for a housing development completed in 2007. NPS, City staff and the property owner have coordinated to produce a trail alignment suitable for public access and trail connectivity.

NPS has contributed matching funds for the proposed project through its NPS recreation fee park revenue program. In addition, NPS trail crews will construct the trail. The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (“GGNPC”), the non-profit partner of NPS, has also committed matching funds to the project and will carry out restoration plantings upon completion of trail construction. Together, NPS and the GGNPC have constructed 125 miles of trail and restored more than 1,000 acres of habitat within the GGNRA. NPS has a nearly 30-year history of managing land in the City of Pacifica and has a strong working relationship with Pacifica residents, as well as with City management and the recently created Open Space and Parkland Advisory Committee in Pacifica, a forum that allows for consistent communication between the City, stakeholders, citizens and NPS staff to ensure that projects like the proposed Milagra-Battery Trail are successful.

Additionally, NPS and the GGNPC have completed numerous successful trail and infrastructure projects with funding from the Conservancy including: building the Coastal Trail and connecting trails at Mori Point, planning work for the Dias Ridge Connector Trail and Vista Point Trail in Marin County, installing new trail signs and kiosks along approximately 17 miles of Coastal Trail in Marin and San Francisco Counties, coastal trail improvements at Lands End in San Francisco, restoration of lower Redwood Creek, and design and construction of trail improvements to the San Francisco Bay trail at Fort Mason. Most recently, the Conservancy granted funds to the GGNPC for the Crissy Field Sea Level Rise Analysis, which was approved at the Conservancy’s June 2015 meeting using Climate Ready Round 3 funds. All of these achievements make NPS and GGNPC highly qualified to undertake the proposed project.

Site Description: The proposed project will be constructed on the Lower Milagra Site, an area of the GGNRA that is privately owned over which NPS holds a conservation easement. The Lower Milagra Site contains a housing development, 34 acres of open space, a public parking lot and social trail leading up to GGNRA’s adjacent 239-acre Milagra Ridge open space above the City of Pacifica. The social trail climbs a 15% grade via a narrow path on an unsustainable and eroding alignment. Though surrounded by development, Milagra Ridge hosts a number of threatened and endangered species such as the Mission Blue and San Bruno Elfin butterflies and California Red-Legged Frog, and provides spectacular views of the San Mateo Coast and the Farallon Islands. The proposed project will serve the purpose of both improving public access and also protecting natural resources by constructing a well-designed roughly 2,000-foot (a little less than a half mile) multi-use trail that will allow for both bike and equestrian access, removing non-native invasive plants in the project area, planting native plant communities, and installing post-and-cable fencing to restrict public access from sensitive habitat areas. Due to topography, the trail cannot be fully accessible as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); however, NPS has planned an ADA-accessible ramp at the end of the small parking lot leading to a scenic overlook for a subsequent phase of the project. In addition, wayfinding and regulatory

signage will be included by NPS to inform the public of the significance of the property’s natural and cultural resources and the importance of adherence to the designated trail.

Project History: The Milagra area was grazed and farmed as a part of Rancho San Pedro from the Spanish mission-era in the late 1700s up through the mid-1900s. The property served as a United States Army defense site from the late-1930s to the 1940s and became Nike Missile Site SF-51 in 1956. Soon after, the military installation was upgraded to become a part of the Nike-Hercules system of nuclear-capable missile sites. In subsequent decades, the military dismantled the site and the National Guard transferred the property to the City of Pacifica as an open space park in 1974. Milagra Ridge became a part of NPS in 1987. The Lower Milagra property has been preserved as an open space within a large housing development. The property developer constructed a parking lot located at the western end of the property with trail connections to Oceana Boulevard to the west and donated a conservation easement over the Lower Milagra property to NPS in 2008. The conservation easement allows NPS to manage the open space and implement a future trail from the parking lot and existing trail improvements in the housing development up the slope to connect with Milagra Ridge open space. The proposed project will construct an approximately 5-foot wide trail with planting, irrigation and maintenance to establish appropriate native habitat. While some restoration is included in the proposed project, ongoing restoration will continue apart from the proposed project through an already established GGNPC volunteer restoration and stewardship program operating at numerous Pacifica park locations including Milagra Ridge.

The Milagra-Battery Ridge Trail will complement other coastal access and regional trail projects in the area previously funded in part by the Conservancy, including the Mori Point acquisition and subsequent Coastal Trail planning and implementation roughly 2 miles south of the proposed Milagra-Battery Trail, as well as a wheelchair-accessible segment of the Coastal Trail from Rockaway Beach to Pacifica State Beach just south of Mori Point, and improvement to Pacifica Municipal Fishing Pier, among others.

The project has support from a wide variety of community interests, park constituents, and elected representatives.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$110,000
Matching Funds (various sources, see below)	\$355,000
Project Total	\$455,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is the FY 13/14 “Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006” (Proposition 84, Public Resources Code section 75001 *et seq.*). These funds are available for San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program projects under Public Resources Code, Division 21, Chapter 4.5 that promote access to and enjoyment of coastal resources (Public Resources Code section 75060(c)). The proposed project is an appropriate use of Proposition 84 funds because it will promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of San Francisco Bay

by extending a ridgetop trail providing recreational opportunities and scenic views, as discussed below.

MTC required a 3:1 minimum match for PCA funds, with Conservancy funds counting as part of the match. There is also a federal requirement that not less than 11.47 percent of total project costs come from non-federal sources. Both of these minimum match requirements have been met and have resulted in a highly-leveraged grant program. Matching funds for the project come from NPS Recreation Fee Park Revenue (\$300,000), Trail Improvement Funds from the developer of the land adjacent to the trail (\$25,000), and GGNPC, the non-profit partner of NPS (\$30,000)

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21, Sections 31160-31165 of the Public Resources Code regarding San Francisco Bay Area projects. The project is located in the County of San Mateo, one of the nine San Francisco Bay counties as required by Section 31162.

Under Section 31162(a), the Conservancy may award grants that will “improve public access to, within, and around the bay, coast, ridge tops, and urban open spaces, consistent with the rights of private property owners, and without having a significant adverse impact on agricultural operations and environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife, including wetlands and other wildlife habitats through completion . . . of regional trail systems . . . consistent with locally and regionally adopted master plans and general plans.” According to Bay Area Ridge Trail Council staff, the proposed trail is the preferred route of the San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail through Pacifica and will enable connection from the coast to the coastal ridgeline. The proposed project will improve public access to open space dedicated by conservation easement adjacent to a housing development between the coast and the existing regionally significant open space at Milagra Ridge. The project is consistent with adopted local and regional plans including the San Mateo County Trails Plan (2001) and the City of Pacifica’s Bicycle Plan (2000), as well as the NPS GGNRA Draft General Management Plan (2013). Specifically, the preferred alternative in the NPS GGNRA Draft General Management Plan for Milagra Ridge specifies “trail improvements that could include connections to Oceana Boulevard, the Pacific Coast, Skyline Boulevard, and Sweeney Ridge.” The proposed trail will provide a connection from the coastal areas of Pacifica via Ocean Boulevard up to the ridge, which currently does not exist. Construction of the trail, as it is being designed, will not adversely impact agricultural operations, environmentally sensitive areas or wildlife.

Under §31162(d), the Conservancy may “promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes.” The proposed project will provide the urban public with access to open space and natural areas for recreation via a new trail segment crossing a conservation easement to connect with existing open space at GGNRA’s Milagra Ridge and is therefore consistent with section 31162(d).

The proposed project also satisfies each of the five criteria for determining project priority under Section 31163(c) in the following respects: (1) the project is consistent with the NPS GGNRA Draft General Management Plan (2013), San Mateo County Trails Plan (2001), and the City of Pacifica’s Bicycle Plan (2000); (2) the project serves a regional constituency because it adds a segment to the Bay Area Ridge Trail and serves both local residents and Bay Area visitors; (3) the

project will be implemented in a timely manner upon approval; (4) the project provides opportunity for public access and habitat benefits that could be lost if the project is not quickly implemented; and (5) significant matching funds from the NPS, the proposed grantee, have been approved.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

Standard No. 1, Protect Public and Coastal Resources: The proposed project will improve the current social trail located in the project area, which climbs up a 15% grade via a narrow path on an unsustainable alignment that currently has erosion issues. In addition, post-and-cable fencing will discourage users from traveling off of the trail into sensitive habitat areas and private property.

Standard No. 2, Correct Hazards: The proposed trail will not create any new sources of erosion or fire, and will actually mitigate current erosion by directing users off of current social trails and away from eroded areas.

Standard No. 3, Access Easements: Construction and Location: The proposed trail will be approximately 5 feet wide, and the property is sufficient to accommodate and allow for the approximately 0.4 mile planned trail alignment.

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 planned alignment largely follows the existing social trail and involves minor trail relocation and will avoid any sensitive habitat areas.

Standard No. 8, Trails: As noted above, the trail will be built to replace the current existing social trail, will be approximately 5 feet wide, include signage and fencing, and will allow access to Milagra Ridge from an existing parking lot at the western edge of the Lower Milagra property, which will take pressure off access from Sharp Park Road.

Standard No. 9, Scenic Overlooks: A scenic overlook off of the ADA-accessible ramp is to be installed off of the existing parking lot at the western edge of the Lower Milagra property in a subsequent phase.

Standard No. 12, Support Facilities: The trail will include signage at three locations, the bottom, middle, and top of the trail, as well as fencing.

Standard No. 13, Barrier-Free Access: Due to topography, the trail itself cannot be ADA-accessible, though NPS plans to include an access ramp leading to a scenic overlook off of the existing parking lot at the western edge of the Lower Milagra property in a subsequent phase. NPS park accessibility coordinators determined that including the accessible ramp in a subsequent phase will meet the requirements of Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR), which are designed to comply with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other state statutes, 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), AS REVISED JUNE 25, 2015:**

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective F**, the project consists of constructing an approximately 0.4-mile segment of a regional trail that connects the coast in Pacifica with the protected ridgeline above the city;

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective H**, the project will remove non-native invasive plants in the project area and plant native plant communities; and

Consistent with **Goal 12, Objective G**, the project will construct roughly 0.4-miles of Bay Area Ridge Trail.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted October 4, 2014 in the following respects:

Required Criteria

- 1. Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** As discussed under "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section, above, the project is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code because it will improve public access from the coastline to the ridgeline and implement a segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, and provide natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational purposes.
- 2. Consistency with purposes of funding source:** See "Project Financing" section above.
- 3. Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** By funding improvements to the Milagra-Battery Ridge Trail, the proposed project will implement the following state plans:
 - a. *400 miles and Beyond: A Strategic Plan for Completing the Bay Area Ridge Trail.*** This report released by the Bay Area Ridge Trail in 2006 lays out priorities for the completion of the 500-plus mile multi-use trail encircling the ridgetops of the San Francisco Bay Area.
 - b. *California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report*** (Governor's Office of Planning and Research, Draft 2013): Goal 2, "Build Sustainable Regions that Support Healthy, Livable Communities," specific strategy to "support and invest in active transportation projects, such as walking and biking infrastructure."
 - c. *California Recreational Trails Plan*** (California State Parks, Phase I, June 2002): The Bay Area Ridge Trail is identified in the plan as a state trail corridor and meets the goal to "promote adequate design, construction, relocation, and maintenance of trails in order to optimize public access and resource

conservation,” since this proposed project involves construction of a trail from an existing social trail, as well as “encourage public use of and support for trails programs throughout California,” since the planned trail will include public outreach and signage.

- 4. Support from the public:** The project partners (NPS and GGNPC) have worked with the public and the project enjoys a wide range of support. The GGNRA unit was established by Congress in 1972 and operates under Department of the Interior and National Park Service policies and guidelines, in accordance with a General Management Plan (GMP) first published in 1980. The National Park Service has 409 units, of which the GGNRA is one. GGNPC is the primary partner of NPS’s GGNRA unit, a non-profit organization that supports the GGNRA Parks, and has been partnering with NPS since 1981. See Exhibit #3 for letters of support.
- 5. Location:** The project lies within the western edge of San Mateo County in the City of Pacifica, within the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program area.
- 6. Need:** Conservancy funding is needed for the proposed project. If the NPS does not obtain Conservancy matching funds, then it will not be able to complete the project.
- 7. Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed trail will enable a link inland from the coast via Ocean Boulevard and the new trail link to reach the ridge above Pacifica. As part of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, this new trail will serve local residents as well as visitors to the Bay Area region.
- 8. Sea level rise vulnerability:** Current sea-level rise predictions are that there will be a rise in average water surface elevations of 12-61 cm by year 2050 and a 42-167 cm rise by 2100, and the entire project is located at higher elevations.¹ Therefore the trail will not be subject to inundation by tidal waters due to sea level rise.

The project also satisfies the following additional non-mandatory criteria.

Additional Criteria

- 9. Resolution of more than one issue:** The proposed trail will improve access to Milagra Ridge from an existing parking lot at the western edge of the Lower Milagra property, taking pressure off access from Sharp Park Road and taking advantage of the potential to add an approximately 0.4-mile segment to the Bay Area Ridge Trail over the conservation easement on the Lower Milagra property.
- 10. Conflict resolution:** The project will address environmental concerns posed by the social trail currently causing erosion on the project site and will enhance native habitat through installation of signage, cable and bollard fencing around sensitive areas and an improved trail alignment with native plantings and sustainable drainage.
- 11. Readiness:** Upon approval, NPS plans to move forward with the project immediately. The project partners (NPS and the GGNPC) have experience in carrying out trail improvement projects and anticipate the timely and effective completion of the project.

¹ State of California Sea Level Rise Guidance Document, March 2013 Update:
http://www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/pdf/docs/2013_SLR_Guidance_Update_FINAL1.pdf

12. Realization of prior conservancy goals: This area of the San Francisco Bay region has been a priority for Conservancy funding over the last few decades (as discussed in the “Project History” section, above). This project will further the vision of the Bay Area Ridge Trail and complement other regional efforts to link the California coastline to coastal mountain ridges.

13. Cooperation: As mentioned above in the “Project Summary” section, NPS has a strong working relationship with Pacifica residents as well as City management, and will utilize the recently created City of Pacifica Open Space and Parkland Advisory Committee, which allows for consistent communication between the City, stakeholders, citizens, and NPS staff to ensure that projects like this one are successful.

14. Minimization of Greenhouse Gas Emissions: The project will enhance an alternative route to Milagra Ridge for a local and regional population otherwise reaching the open space by car off Sharp Park Road. Further, the project will improve this recreational trail with less than significant, minimal construction GHG impacts. Construction methods will include hand tools, a mini-excavator, a small off-road vehicle and a tracked skid-steer.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

Conservancy staff has determined that the proposed project is categorically exempt from CEQA under 14 California Code of Regulations, Section 15301, which exempts the operation, repair, maintenance, and minor alteration of existing public topographical features involving negligible or no expansion of use beyond that existing at the time of the determination. The existing topographical feature is the informal trail that NPS allows the public to use for pedestrian and bicycle access across the Lower Milagra Site. This trail feature will be altered by expansion to 5 feet, rerouting in some areas, addition of erosion control features, installation of signage, and installation of fencing to keep the public out of resource areas. These alterations constitute repair, maintenance and minor alterations that will not expand use of the existing trail. Although the project may result in increased use of the trail due to enhancement of the trail and ability for equestrian use, the increase is expected to be negligible. The proposed project is also categorically exempt from CEQA under Section 15303 (construction of new small structures) because the fencing and signage that will be installed as part of the project are small structures that are appurtenant to the trail. The proposed project is also categorically exempt under Section 15304 (minor alterations in the condition of land, water and vegetation), because the removal of invasive plants and planting of native vegetation constitute minor alterations of land that do not involve the removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees. The proposed project is not subject to any of the exceptions to categorical exemptions (See Section 15300.2). Staff’s analysis on whether the proposed project is subject to an exception to the exemptions is informed by staff’s review of the initial study prepared by the City of Pacifica, the local permitting agency.

Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the project.