

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 29, 2016

BAY AREA RIDGE TRAIL: VALLEJO BLUFFS DESIGN

File No. 16-031-01
Project Manager: Brenda Buxton

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorize the disbursement of up to \$125,000 to the City of Vallejo to complete planning for a 1.5-mile joint San Francisco Bay Trail/Bay Area Ridge Trail section along the Carquinez Straits in Solano County (Exhibit 1).

LOCATION: City of Vallejo, Solano County.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

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

Exhibit 2: [Carquinez Scenic Loop Trail Map](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31111 and 31160-31165 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 Vallejo (City) for project planning including the environmental review, landowner agreements, permit applications, and design for a 1.5-mile segment of the combined San Francisco Bay Trail/Bay Area Ridge Trail along the Carquinez Straits in the County of Solano. Prior to the disbursement of funds, the City shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program including budget and schedule and the names of any contractors and/or subcontractors to be employed on the project.”

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 Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.

2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access improvements to and around San Francisco Bay.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This authorization will conclude a 10-year effort to complete planning for a project that closes a 1.5-mile gap of the combined San Francisco Bay Trail/Bay Area Ridge Trail along the Vallejo Bluffs (See Exhibit 1).

The Vallejo Bluffs section of trail is particularly critical because it serves three trail systems: the San Francisco Bay Trail (Bay Trail), Bay Area Ridge Trail (Ridge Trail), and Great California Delta Trail. This is a unique location where the Bay and Ridge Trails combine to create a loop between the Carquinez and Benicia Bridges and adjacent shorelines that has been designated as the Carquinez Scenic Loop Trail (Exhibit 2). Completing planning for this gap will allow the City to construct a safe pedestrian and bicycle crossing under the Carquinez Bridge and I-80 and connect with completed segments of Ridge Trail to the east. Furthermore, this 1.5-mile segment will allow trail users to travel from the Carquinez Straits, through the City of Vallejo (City), to the Bay Trail alignments along the Mare Island Straits to the west.

For these reasons, staff recommends providing up to \$125,000 to the City for project planning including the environmental review, landowner agreements, permit applications, and final design and cost estimates. An additional \$125,000 will be provided by the Bay Trail Project from the up to \$1 million authorized on May 29, 2014 by the Conservancy to the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) as part of a planning "block grant" in order to support completion of this critical gap.

Previously, the City did not have the capacity to undertake this work even with additional funding. However, the City is now eager to move ahead and will be able to provide the required staff time to oversee the proposed project. The City seeks to complete this project because it will enhance mobility opportunities and active recreation, consistent with the City's General Plan Update (currently underway) as well as create a regional recreational resource. The City is the most appropriate grantee to implement this project since the trail is inside the City and connects two neighborhoods divided by I-80. Caltrans has responded favorably to an ongoing collaboration regarding this project because it aligns with Caltrans' commitment to multi-modal transportation opportunities that improve the environment, support a vibrant economy, and build communities, not sprawl.

Site Description: The 1.5-mile Vallejo Bluffs gap is between Maritime Academy Drive and the existing Bay Trail/Ridge Trail trailhead on Water View Terrace. This segment would cross city streets under I-80, cross open, undeveloped parcels, mostly owned by Caltrans and the City, up to the existing natural-surface Bay Trail/Ridge Trail alignment that runs along the bluffs overlooking the Carquinez Straits.

Project History: 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. Under the leadership of the Conservancy and the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (BARTC), and supported by a diverse group of project participants, the Ridge Trail creates an interconnected system of open space and trails that provides recreational opportunities and scenic

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views to the public. Begun almost 20 years ago, over 300 miles of trail are now dedicated and/or open to the public in all nine Bay Area counties. This authorization will further the Conservancy's statutory and strategic goal of improving access around San Francisco Bay, and is consistent with previous Conservancy authorizations to negotiate and acquire trail easements, prepare trail construction plans and designs, and construct and open trail segments to the public.

Due to its key location, the Vallejo Bluffs section of the Ridge Trail has long been regarded by the BARTC as a high priority for completion. The Conservancy funded a Vallejo Bay Trail/Ridge trail route study in 2008. Although the study concluded the trail was feasible, due to fiscal constraints the City was not able to proceed to complete planning at that time.

PROJECT FINANCING:

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| Coastal Conservancy (Ridge Trail) | \$125,000 |
| Coastal Conservancy (Bay Trail -- authorized May 2014) | <u>\$125,000</u> |
| Total Project Cost | \$250,000 |

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is the FY 2015/16 "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. The matching \$125,000 in Bay Trail funds is from the May 29, 2014 authorization of a grant of up to \$1 million to ABAG as a fifth "block grant" for the Bay Trail. These funds are used by the Bay Trail Project, ABAG's associated nonprofit, to administer and manage individual grants with local government partners to design and implement various segments of the Bay Trail. The Bay Trail Project is providing \$125,000 from this previous authorization to facilitate the Vallejo Bluffs trail planning since it is a priority Bay Trail segment as well.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Pursuant to Section 31111, the Conservancy may fund plans and feasibility studies to implement Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 (San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program) and award a grant to the City, a public agency, for these purposes.

Pursuant to Section 31162(a) of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy may award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area that will help to improve public access to, within, and around the ridgetops, consistent with the rights of private property owners. Consistent with Section 31162(a), the proposed project will fund the City of Vallejo, in Contra Costa County, a Bay Area county, to complete a plan, design and the environmental documentation for construction of a critical Bay Trail/Ridge Trail gap. Consistent with Section 31162(a), this project planning includes consideration of the project's environmental factors, including agriculture and environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife.

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Consistent with Section 31163(a), the Conservancy cooperates with cities, in this case the City of Vallejo, to identify and adopt long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay Area, including the Ridge Trail that is identified in (1) *The San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program Regional Needs Briefing Book (Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, July 1999)* and (2) *400 Miles and Beyond: A Strategic Plan for Completing the Bay Area Ridge Trail (BARTC, Draft 2006)*.

Consistent with Section 31163(c), the proposed project meets the criteria specified and is a project priority because it: (1) is supported by adopted local and regional plans, including the proposed update of the City of Vallejo's General Plan (See also Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, below), and this alignment has been adopted by the BARTC; (2) is part of three trail networks serving the larger region; (3) can be implemented in a timely way; (4) provides opportunities for future trail construction that could be lost if this planning is not quickly implemented; and (5) includes matching contributions from the City in the form of staff time and administration.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2013 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S), AS REVISED JUNE 25, 2015:

Consistent with **Goal 12, Objective 12F** of the Conservancy's June 25, 2015 Strategic Plan Update, the proposed project will add to the Conservancy goal of planning additional segments of the Ridge Trail. This project will also contribute to **Goal 12, Objective 12D** to develop plans for completing segments of the San Francisco Bay Trail.

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 4, 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:** By funding the planning for completion of the Vallejo Bluffs Bay/Ridge Trail, the proposed project will implement the following state plans:

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.

California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report (Governor's

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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.” This project will support ridgetop trail recreation.

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”.

4. **Support of the public:** The project is supported by the City of Vallejo and the BARTC. (See project letters in Exhibit 3.)
5. **Location:** The project is located in the City of Vallejo, Solano County, which lies entirely within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy.
6. **Need:** Although the City now has capacity to provide staff support for the project, it does not have sufficient resources to complete the planning for the necessary technical work for this trail segment. This project will not occur without Conservancy support.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Vallejo Bluffs Bay Trail/Ridge Trail segment is a critical section of three regional trails which are recreational resources for the greater Bay Area.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** Located on the Vallejo Bluffs above the Carquinez Straits, the proposed project area will not be subject to projected sea level rise.

Additional Criteria

13. **Readiness:** Planning for this project began nearly 10 years ago but lack of resources has hindered completion. However, the project is now ready to go since the proposed grantee, the City of Vallejo, now has the staff capacity to successfully manage the project to completion and to obtain landowner agreements from the willing property owners.
14. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** Completion of the Ridge Trail is a specific objective of the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan. In addition, the proposed project is consistent with the BARTC’s adopted alignment and the report entitled *400 Miles and Beyond: A Strategic Plan for Completing the Bay Area Ridge Trail (Draft 2006)*. Finally, this project will help bring to fruition the *Vallejo Bay Trail/Ridge Trail Route Study* completed in 2008 with funding from the Conservancy’s grants to support multi-year planning activities for both the BARTC and the Bay Trail (authorized on December 2, 2004 and December 14, 2006 respectively).
16. **Cooperation:** This project can move forward because of the cooperative relationship that exists at the present time between the BARTC, Caltrans, and the City of Vallejo.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project to complete planning for a 1.5-mile joint San Francisco Bay Trail/Bay Area Ridge Trail section along the Carquinez Straits involves data gathering, planning, and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been authorized or approved by the Conservancy or another agency and is thus statutorily exempt from California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies). Planning carried out as part of the project includes an environmental review

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of the proposed project and thus will consider environmental factors, as required by Section 15262. The project is also categorically exempt under Section 15306 (Information Collection) because the proposed project includes basic data collection that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource and that is part of a planning study leading to an action which a public agency has not yet approved, adopted or funded.

Upon the Conservancy's approval of the project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.